

**LITERATURE AND LEFT MOVEMENTS IN KERALAM:
THE PROBLEM OF IDEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION
(1937- 1957)**

Thesis

*Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of*
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
HISTORY**

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled **LITERATURE AND LEFT MOVEMENTS IN KERALAM: THE PROBLEM OF IDEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION (1937- 1957)** is a bonafide record of research work done by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. K. Gopalankutty, Professor (Retd.), Department of History, University of Calicut and it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma or any other similar title or recognition.

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Dr. P. SIVADASAN
(Co-guide)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

For the completion of this work, I am very much indebted to a number of Individuals and institutions, who have rendered valuable assistance to me. Even though it is difficult to include all names here, it would be a really an ingratitude if I do not mention some of the names.

First of all I extend my sincere gratitude to my supervising teacher Dr. K. Gopalankutty (Retd. Professor and Head of the Department of History, University of Calicut) whose encouragement, guidance, affectionate compulsion and huge generosity helped me in the completion of this work. The second person I am immensely indebted is my Co-Guide Dr. P. Sivadasan (Professor of History, University of Calicut) who provided valuable assistance to me in removing the technical hurdles and difficulties. This valuable assistance enabled me for the successful submission of the thesis.

I am very much thankful to Dr. V.V. Haridas, Head of the Department of History and other faculty members in the department of History, University of Calicut for helping me to submit the thesis. I am also thankful to all the staff members in the department of History and C.H.M.K Library , University of Calicut.

I have great pleasure to thank University grant Commission whose Junior research fellowship provided me the financial assistance in the beginning years of my research. I acknowledge the service rendered to me the institutions and its staffs like Mathrubhumi archives especially Sandeep and his father late Sudhakaran, Sri chithra library, Thiruvananthapuram, Appan Thampuran Library Thrissur, Kerala Sahithya Academy library Thrissur .

I express my sincere gratitude to Swarnakumari Retd professor of English, Govt. Arts & Science College, Kozhikode and Obed Ebenezer, Research scholar, Department of English, who helped me in the translation process during the period of writing the thesis and solved grammatical mistakes in the completion of the work.

I am very much thankful to Sreejith E. Assistant professor of History SARBTM Govt. College, Koyilandy for providing important books related to my

research area . and I express my thanks to Dr. Noufal K. Assistant Professor of English, CKGM Govt. College Perambra, Dr. Haneesh P., Associate Professor of Commerce Kodancherry Govt. College, Fasal C., Assistant Professor of History CKGM Govt. College Perambra, Dr. Priya P., Associate Professor of History Govt. Arts and Science College, Dr. Sreevidya K., Asst. Professor of History, Christ College, Irinjalakkuda who provided valuable inspiration to me and insisted me to complete the work.

I Express my affectionate acknowledgment to all the former colleagues of Govt. Arts & Science College Calicut whose informal deliberations related to my topic helped me to find out new insight on the topic.

I express my gratitude to Balraj, Bina DTP & Photostat near University of Calicut for the neat execution of the work .

Last but least I owe very much to my family members especially to my wife, my mother and my kids and my nearest and dearest without whose support I would not be able to complete the work.

Sreejith K.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|------------|---|--|
| AICC | - | All India Congress Committee |
| AIPWA | - | All Indian Progressive Writers Association |
| AITUC | - | All Indian Trade Union Congress |
| CDM | - | Civil Disobedience Movement |
| CMS | - | Church Mission Society |
| CPI | - | Communist Party of India |
| CSP | - | Congress Socialist Party |
| DMRT | - | Devadar Malabar Reconstruction Trust |
| INA | - | Indian National Army |
| INC | - | Indian National Congress |
| IPTA | - | Indian People Theatres Association |
| KPAC | - | Kerala People's Arts Club |
| KPCC | - | Kerala Provincial Congress Committee |
| LMS | - | London Mission Society |
| NSS | - | Nair Service Society |
| SNDP YOGAM | - | Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam |
| SPSS | - | Sahitya Pravarthana Sahakarana Sangam |
| USSR | - | Union of Soviet Socialist Republic |

INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous definitions of literature. A sweeping, all-inclusive definition of literature is impossible. Scholars have remarked upon the multifaceted nature of literature. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines literature as a “body of written works related by subject matter by the language of the place of origin or prevailing cultural standard of merit”.¹ The well-known English poet and critic Mathew Arnold stated that “literature is the best that has been known and said in this world”.² He also characterised literature as a criticism of life.³

Understanding how the left-oriented thinkers interpreted literature is a part of the analysis of the research problem. The early Marxist thinkers often viewed literature as being a part of the Superstructure. Friedrich Engels, the famous communist philosopher opined that “literature is part of the superstructure, but it is not merely the passive reflection of the economic base”.⁴ Karl Marx considered the relationship between the base and the superstructure; he selected art as an instance of the complexity and the indirectness of the relationship. He identified unequal relationships of the development of material production.⁵

¹ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, OUP: New York, 2001, p. 141.

² Peter Widdowson, *Literature*, Routledge, London, 2005, p. 14.

³ Wayne Shumaker, Matthew Arnold’s Humanism: Literature as a Criticism of Life, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 2, No. 4.
<http://jstor.org/stable/449519>, pp. 85-386.

⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Routledge, 2002, p. 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

As the field/discipline of literary criticism developed and expanded, numerous writers and thinkers began to contribute to this field. Marxist thinkers have viewed literature as being linked to ideology. However, there has also been no universally accepted definition for the term, “ideology”. To state it in general terms, Ideology is simply a worldview. According to Friedrich Engels, ‘art has a more complex relationship to ideology than law and politics which rather more transparently embody the interests of a ruling class. The relationship between ideology and literature can be identified in two ways. One is that literature is nothing but ideology in a certain art form and two, that works of literature are just expression of ideologies of their time’.⁶

After Marx and Engels, it was the Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukacs who explained ideology in detail. In his work, *History and Class Consciousness* (1922), he explained ideology as, “Ideology forms a critical category of the ideological phenomenon of ‘reification’”. He sought to explain the defeat of the Socialist revolution in the West after the Second World War as a consequence of ‘reification’. To formulate this theory, Lukacs used the idea of Marxian Fetishism analysis and Max Weber’s concept of Formal rationalism.⁷ As per the theory of reification, Lukacs identified two sides of Commodity Fetishism, which he calls subjective and objective. The core idea of reification is related to the treatment of people as things. More clearly, when a man’s activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity that is subject to the

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁷ Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Power of Alienation and Subjection*, Brill:New York, 2013, pp. 78-79.

non-human objectivity or the national laws of the society and must go on its way independently of man, just like a consumer article.⁸

Though many scholars interpreted ideology from a Marxist perspective after Lukacs, it is the French thinker Louis Althusser's ideas that are important, and worthy of attention here. According to him, "art cannot be reduced to ideology. It has rather a peculiar relationship to it. Ideology signifies the imaginary ways in which men experienced the real world".⁹

However, art is not just the reflection of real-world experience, it does more than that. It is held within ideology but also manages to distance itself from it to the point where it permits us to feel and perceive the ideology from which it springs.¹⁰

When political ideology is mingled with literature, it turns into propaganda literature. This phenomenon has been investigated by numerous scholars. *All Art is Propaganda* is a book by the famous English writer George Orwell. In this volume, he stated that "all art is to some extent propaganda". However, those like Hitler held the view that "art has nothing to do with propaganda".¹¹

It was from the Soviet Union that the concept of propaganda literature obtained an official interpretation. After the 1930s, during Stalin's reign, the role of writers and intellectuals in a changing society was extensively discussed. In

⁸ Tom Bottomore, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, Blackwell: Oxford, Reprint 2001, p. 464.

⁹ Terry Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

¹¹ A. P. Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda*, Routledge, 2013, p. 276.

1934, from 17 August to 1 September, a conference of Soviet writers has held in which the prominent Russian writer Maxim Gorky delivered the keynote address. In this conference, issues such as the place of the writer in society, and what should be ‘ideal literature’ were discussed, and the concept of “Socialist Realism” came out as the result.¹²

The primary ideas that were focused upon by “Socialist Realism” were: “art is not for art’s sake, but social progress”, and that “Art is social and art belongs to people”. Thus art should have a purpose Maxim Gorky opined that “the creative energies of writers had to be subordinated to the aims of society”. Art or literature is the result of a produced society. An artist cannot escape tendencies that work in that society in that particular period.¹³ Socialist Realism highlighted the importance of truthful representation of life. Maxim Gorky is considered as the exponent of the idea of socialist realism. The writers of the soviet union came forward with the idea of socialist realism in 1934. They found equal importance for literature and politics in socialist realism. Socialist realism is a novel product of Soviet literature.¹⁴ According to Ann Lowry Weir socialist realism is the most important progression of realism. Vaughan James considered socialist realism as a product of contradictory factors of the capitalistic society of the 19th and 20thC. The crisis in the bourgeoisie culture of the capitalist society

¹² Talat Ahmed, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism: The Progressive Episode in South Asia: 1932-56*, Routledge, London, 2019, p. 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁴ Ann Lowry Weir, “Socialist realism and South Asian Literature”, *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Vol-27, No. 2,1992, p. 35.

and the social awareness of proletarian organisations led to the formation of these ideas.¹⁵

The concept called ‘Socialist Realism’ was the basic principle behind the propaganda literature contributed by leftists in the 1940’s and 50’s. Propaganda literature can be classified into two types: Blatant propaganda and Camouflage propaganda. If a short passage was written to reach people with ideological concepts, or if a volume of ideology was composed, it becomes a work of direct propaganda. When ideology is dispersed through novels or works of fiction where the authors' imaginative proclivities colour imagination it becomes camouflage propaganda. However, even within camouflage propaganda, the boundary lines between open propaganda and concealed propaganda are rather blurred.

Numerous studies have been published at the international level linking Marxism and literature. Among these, a major work is *Marxism and Literature* (1977) by the British Cultural Theorist Raymond Williams. ‘Cultural Materialism’ was a concept formed by Williams linking literature with Marxism. According to him, Culture itself is considered material.¹⁶ Until then, Marxist philosophy had considered Culture as a part of the superstructure.

In his analysis, Culture in all its aspects is a social and material process of production, and art is the social use of material means of production. Williams was using language normally reserved by Marxism for the economic base to describe what Marxists normally regarded as superstructure. The means of

¹⁵ Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*, Palgrave Macmillian, London, 1971, p. 85.

¹⁶ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1977.

literary production, language, the technologies of writing and mechanical and electronic communication- were all therefore just as material and their uses just as social, as the means of industrial and agricultural production. Hence, he argues that culture is material production, not as superstructural activities.¹⁷ Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson were other important thinkers who contributed to Marxist literary criticism along with Raymond Williams.

These theoretical considerations should be borne in mind when we take up Malayalam literature for discussion. The assumption of power by the communists in Kerala in 1957, has attracted worldwide attention. Many explanations, primarily of a political kind, have been provided for the leftists' assumption of power. However, sociologists have emphasised socio-economic conditions in their explanations. There were also been numerous cultural aspects that played a definitive role in the left assumption of power. Against this backdrop, this thesis attempts to investigate how the left movement in Kerala used literary forms for the propagation of their ideology, and through them, achieved an ideological transformation in the society. This ideological transformation is explained by examining the history of the progressive literature movement.

Writers who had been influenced by Socialist-Communist concepts were able to create literature that would enable a change in the traditional servile mindset that had produced feudalism and casteism within the common people of Kerala, and thereby, create the ground for ideological transformation in the society. An excellent example of literary production of this kind is the play

¹⁷ Michael Ryan, *The Encyclopaedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*, Wiley Blackwell: Oxford, 2011, p. 1338.

Pattabaki written by K. Damodaran in 1937. In one scene in this play, the conversation between Kunjimaalu, the sister of Kittuni with their mother goes like this: The mother tells Kunjimaalu, “After my death, you must go to Manakkal and beg the landlord for some assistance. The landlord will not fail to provide some sort of help.” However, Kunjimaalu replies, “I will take care of my Balan (younger brother) by taking up some job. But I will not go and beg before the landlord in Manakkal”¹⁸ (*My Trans.*). Feudal ideology imbibed by the mother who belongs to the older generation conceives of the landlord as the provider, who comes to help you in the hour of your need. However, the younger daughter, who has imbibed the ideology of socialism, regards the landlord as the exploiter. Damodaran thus paints the picture of a new society that rebels against the bonds of a traditional feudal society.

The years between 1937 and 1957 has been chosen as the period for this research study. The first organization of the Progressive Writers in India took place during a conference at Lucknow in 1936. It was called the All-India Progressive Writers Association. Following in the footsteps of this organization, under the aegis of the Congress Socialist Party, in a conference of writers at Thrissur, the Jeeval Literary Movement was formed. This organization was able to make foundational changes in the area of literary composition in Kerala. In January 1944, at a conclave of writers at Shornur, this organization was renamed the Progressive Literary Movement. As a result of the influence of this organization, the works that came out in Malayalam after the 1940s narrated the stories of the peasants, the labourers, and the destitute, of exploitation under feudalism and of casteism. The Kerala society, which grew reading this

¹⁸ K. Damodharan, *K. Damaodharan: Sampoorana Krithikal* (Mal.), Prabhath Book House: Thuvananthapuram, 2011, pp. 302-303.

literature which came out in the form of plays, short stories and novels, developed an affinity towards leftist thought. This enabled the Communist Party to gain cultural dominion over the minds of the people of Kerala, and also created the necessary cultural background for the communists coming to power in 1957.

Historiography

In this section, various studies that have been conducted in this area are briefly described and analysed. It should be added that there has been until now no comprehensive study of the research problem under discussion. The works cited pertain to some of the issues that have been discussed here.

There have been numerous studies about the growth and development of the Left-Movement in Kerala. Both scholars in India and abroad have studied this phenomenon. However, there has not been any significant study based on a historical perspective about the relationship between literature and the Left Movement in Kerala.

Studies linking Marxism and literature, and Marxist aesthetics in the backdrop of India were also made. Most of these examined the history of the Progressive Literature Movement along with analysis of the literary works produced at that time. One of the first volumes that included such studies was *Marxian Influence and South Asian Literature* (1974), edited by Carlo Coppola.¹⁹

The essays in this collection discussed the Progressive Literature Movement in South Asia, the literary works that contained Marxist ideology, and

¹⁹ Carlo Coppola, *Marxist Influence and South Asian Literature*, Michigan University Press: Michigan, 1974.

how the influence of these literary texts resulted in the rise of political movements. The essays have also attempted to explain the phenomenon of Socialist Realism in a very detailed manner. Also, the status of the Progressive Literature Movement in countries such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, after the Independence, is described in this book.

Marxist Cultural Movements in India: Chronicles and Documents, 1936-1947, Vol 1 (1960) edited by Sudhi Pradhan, in three volumes that have examined in detail, the Marxist Cultural Movement in India.²⁰ However, for this present research, only the first volume has been used as a work of reference. Articles by prominent Left-thinkers and other writers have been included in this collection. There are also essays describing the formation of some of the major Left Cultural organizations. The history of the formation of the IPTA (Indian People Theatre's Association), and the AIPWA (All India Progressive Writers Association) are described in this collection.

Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism: The Progressive Episode in South Asia, 1932-56 (2009) by Talat Ahmed critiques the Indian Progressive Writers Association between 1932 and 1956.²¹ In this book, Talat Ahmed attempts to present a historical analysis of the Progressive Writers Movement, along with the political activities undertaken by this organisation. The influence exerted by Socialist Realism on India, Pakistan and Bangladesh after Independence is also examined in this book.

²⁰ Sudhi Pradhan (ed.), *Marxist Cultural Movements in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-1947)*, Vol-1, Santi Pradhan, Calcutta, 1960.

²¹ Talat Ahmed, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism: The Progressive Episode in South Asia, 1932-56*, Routledge, 2009.

So far, studies having an All-India perspective on the Progressive Movements have been discussed. In the case of Malayalam Language and Literature, there have been many studies on the history and growth of the Progressive Literature Movement in Kerala. However, there has not been any substantial study on the Progressive Literature Movement from the perspective of History. Dilip M. Menon is a Historian who has studied the evolution of Communism in Kerala and its relationship to the socio-cultural aspects. In his work, *Caste, Nationalism, and Communism in Colonial South India: Malabar 1900-1948* (1992), Dilip Menon provides a social history of Communism in Kerala.²² He examines how the Communist Movement in Kerala used the Cultural arena for the propagation of their ideology. Communism influenced castes and communities by putting forward their idea of Caste Equality. He points this out as the primary cause for the growth of Communism in Kerala. With the formation of the Congress Socialist Party, an 'Alternative Culture' in the form of Reading Rooms, Plays and Newspaper Magazines was created in Malabar. The Congress Socialist Party later became the Communist Party.

K. K. N. Kurup's *Nationalism and Social Change: The Role of Malayalam Literature* (1998) focused on literary works to examine how Nationalist Movements and literature brought about a holistic social change.²³ In this work, he attempts to analyse the role of literary forms such as poems, novels, plays, short stories, and folklore containing nationalist and socialist ideals in the development of the Nationalist Movements.

²² Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism, and Communism in Colonial South India: Malabar 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

²³ K. K. N. Kurup, *Nationalism and Social Change: The Role of Malayalam Literature*, Kerala Sahitya Akademy: Thrissur, 1998.

E. M. S. Namboothirippad and K. Damodaran, who formulated the doctrinal approach of the party, and who played pivotal roles in the formation of the Progressive Literature Movement, have written numerous articles about the Jeeval Literary Movement, Marxism, Literature and Socialist Realism. A collection of articles written by E. M. S. Namboothirippad about literary topics is available as *Thiranjedutha Prabandangal* (1990) (Selected Essays).²⁴ Prominent literary works in Malayalam, the Progressive Literature Movement, ideological tendencies, are discussed in this collection along with a history of the Progressive Literature Movement and the factors that led to its split.

The *K. Damodharan: Sampoorana Krithikal* (2011) (The Complete Works of K. Damodharan), is a collection of the writings of K. Damodharan who was a writer, Marxist philosopher, and an active worker of the Progressive Movement.²⁵ He had written at various points of time upon topics such as literature, art and Marxism. As a very active political work in his early life, and as a leader who changed his stance on many issues in his later days, his observations are valuable. Along with narrating the history of the Progressive Literature Movement, Damodaran also criticizes many of the policies adopted by the party.

In Malayalam Literature, there have been some books that describe the growth of the Progressive Literature Movement, its ideology, and its contributions. One of the first studies about the Progressive Literature Movement was E. K. Nayanar's *Purogamana Sahitya Chintakal* (1974)

²⁴ E. M. S. Namboothirippad, *Thiranjedutha Prabandangal* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademy, Thrissur, 1990.

²⁵ K. Damodharan, *K. Damaodharan: Sampoorana Krithikal* (Mal.), Prabhath Book House: Thuvananthapuram, 2011.

(Progressive Literary Thoughts). However, this book was subjected to criticism for taking a communist party-based perspective. An objective and factual description of the rise and fall of the Progressive Literature Movement is found in K. Sardar Kutty's "*Purogamana Sahitya Niroopanam*" (1985).²⁶ This book greatly influenced further studies on the Progressive Literature Movement.

P. K. Gopalakrishnan's *Purogamana Sahitya Prastanam: Nizhalum Velichavum* (1987)²⁷ (Progressive Literature Movement: Shadow and Light) contains an objective and largely unbiased description of the nature of the Progressive Literature Movement, a brief history of the movement, its contributions, and finally, its split. Varying from this pattern is M. R. Chandrasekaran's *Keralathile Purogamana Sahitya Prasthanathinte Charithram* (1998) (The History of the Progressive Literature Movement in Kerala), that subjected to criticism the Left-movement and the Left-Wing literature that played active roles in the functioning of the Progressive Literature Movement.²⁸ This work in turn has been subjected to heavy criticism.

An excellent work that studied how literature spread across the Kerala society during the time of the Freedom struggle and linked Malayalam Literature to the Nationalist Movement, is *Swathantra Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum* (1994) (Freedom Struggle and Malayalam Literature) by M. Achutan.²⁹ Starting from the first half of the 19th Century, and proceeding up to 1948, this work

²⁶ K. Sardar Kutty, *Purogamana Sahitya Niroopanam* (Mal.), Kerala Bhasha Insitute, 1985.

²⁷ P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *Purogamana Sahitya Prastanam: Nizhalum Velichavum* (Mal.), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, 2000.

²⁸ M. R. Chandrasekaran, *Keralathile Purogamana Sahitya Prasthanathinte Charithram* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademy, Thrissur, 1998.

²⁹ M. Achutan, *Swathantra Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademy, Thrissur, 1994.

examines the numerous literary compositions, writers, and literary movements that gave rise to national unity and renaissance, which in turn, inspired the freedom struggle and fuelled the activities of the nationalist movement.

The plays were the most effective tool used by the Left-writers and political activists for the propagation of their ideology amongst the labourers and the farmers. It was the formation of the KPAC (Kerala People's Arts Club) that enabled the staging of most of the political plays that spread the ideals of the Left-movement. The history of KPAC is narrated in Vallikkavu Mohandas' *KPAC yude Charithram* (2002) (The History of KPAC)³⁰. The observations of the writer as a person who had been closely allied with KPAC right from its formation, and through its various phases of its growth, are quite valuable.

A recent publication that studied the Progressive Literature Movement was K. E. N. Kunjahmed's *Purogamana Sahitya Prasthanam: Charithravum Varthamanavum* (2013) (The Progressive Literature Movement: Past and Present).³¹ These works have little to draw as precedence to historiography

This present study has taken both primary and secondary sources as research material. This is also an empirical study. The primary sources mostly include the newspapers printed between 1937 and 1957, especially the *Mathrubhumi* and the *Prabatham*, and magazines such as the *Mathrubhumi Azchappathippu* (weekly) and *Navayugam*. Minutes and Reports of the Progressive Literature Movement have also been utilized for this study. The autobiographies and biographies of writers, critics, and others who were actively

³⁰ Vallikkavu Mohandas., *KPAC yude Charithram* (Mal.), SPCS, Kottayam, 2002.

³¹ K.E.N.Kunjahmed, *Purogamana Sahitya Prasthanam: Charithravum Varthamanavum* (Mal.), Progress Publications: Kozhikode, 2013.

involved in the Progressive Literary Movement have also been amply used.

Novels, Plays, Short-stories, poems and other prose works which were published from 1930 to 1957, and which were a part of the Progressive Literature Movement have been subjected to analysis in this study.

Books about the Progressive Literature Movement and PhD theses based on this subject presented at various universities have been used as secondary sources. Many journals in which related articles have been published have also been used as online sources.

Some interviews had been conducted for this study. However, since the information gathered from them did not add anything substantial from what is available in books, and since a lot of personal details were provided, they have not been cited in this study. The methodology followed in this work is descriptive, analytical and interpretative.

This study, excluding the Introduction and Conclusion, has been categorized into four chapters. The first chapter studies the backdrop that led to the formation of the Progressive Literature Movement. The social, economic, political and cultural environment that existed in Kerala before the birth of the Progressive Literature Movement is described. The formation of the Progressive Literature Movement at the international level, the establishment of its branch in India, and later, the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in Malabar led to the formation of the Jeeval Literary Movement which later became the Progressive Literature Movement are discussed in this chapter.

In the second chapter, the formation of the literacy culture in Kerala and the growth of literacy resulted in the publication of newspapers and magazines,

which in turn led to the establishment of Reading-rooms setting the stage for the plays, is described. The history of the reading-rooms which functioned as the centres for the dissemination of leftist ideals is also given in this chapter.

The third chapter mainly looks at how plays were used for the propagation of leftist concepts. The history of the Play as an art form in Kerala, how they reflected the ideals of the Nationalist Movement in Kerala, and how the reformations within the Namboodiri community enriched playwriting, is examined. The influence of the Congress Socialist Party, and later the Communist Party, on the formation of the K. P. A. C, and the influence that the plays of Thoppil Bhasi exerted on the common-folk of Kerala is also analysed in this chapter.

The novels, poems, and the major writers who reflected the Left-ideology in their works as a result of the influence of the Progressive Literature Movement are discussed in Chapter Four. Along with examining the ideological split in this organisation after 1948, the chapter also looks at the various contributions of this organisation towards the social fabric of Kerala. Fourth chapter is followed by conclusion.

This present project has been undertaken within the framework of a PhD Thesis to be submitted to Calicut University. It has to be admitted that it is silent on several questions. Certain points could not be elaborated upon for want of sufficient time and space. The researcher hopes to address this issue when the thesis is published, at a later date. Another point to be noted is the use of question marks in certain places. This is to demarcate certain classification of problematic concepts

CHAPTER 1

FORMATION OF PROGRESSIVE LITERATURE MOVEMENT IN KERALAM: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the British rule, Kerala was comprised of three different political regions namely Travancore, Cochin and Malabar these Travancore and Cochin were princely states. Malabar was under the direct control of the British government. Earlier Malabar region was under the control of the Samuthiri and other local chieftains. After the siege of the Mysore Sultans, this area was completely under their domain. As per the 1792 Seringapattanam Treaty following the Third Anglo Mysore war. The British got complete control over the Malabar region. At the beginning of the British rule this region was under the control of the Bombay Presidency later in 1800 it was annexed to Madras Presidency.¹

Resistance to alien notions of property and tenurial rights came to be called ‘Moplah outrages’ in British documents. These produced a kind of popular literature in the form of ballads and songs.² It was under the rule of the British government that Kerala went through drastic changes. The major change in this period was in the local revenue system. During the British regime, the

¹ C. A. Innes, *Malabar District Gazetteer*, Vol-I & II, Reprint Kerala Gazetteers Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, p. 2.

² The implementation of British land revenue policy created deep discontent among the Mappila peasantry of Malabar. Mappilas were able to translate the discontent into organised action strongly underlines the religious context. Not in the religious content of the uprisings. This religious ideology further strengthened by popular culture, socialisation and through preaching’s of the Muslim intellectuals. see K. N Panikkar, *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant uprising in Malabar(1836-1921)* Oxford University Press, 1989.

Indian economy was closely associated with the world economy and Kerala also became a part of the world economy.

Organised political movements, in the form of national movements, came to Malabar, relatively late. It was only in 1910 that the first district congress committee was formed.³ In 1913 under the leadership of C. Vijaya Raghavachary a provincial district Congress Committee was held at Calicut.⁴ After this, there was a short lull in political upheaval in Malabar. From 1915 onwards political conferences began to be held annually. The congress and tenancy movement grew together. Later the khilafat movement also began to take roots, especially in the rural areas. The Khilafat and non-cooperation movement shook Malabar politically and socially. To intensify the political surge, the Congress Party sent their prominent leaders like Mahatma Gandhi Shaukat Ali and Maulana Azad to Malabar. The British government resorted to oppressive measures to destroy the political awareness which was gathering hold on the local people in 1920 – 21. As a part of this oppressive policy all the prominent leaders were arrested, assembling in public places were banned and the khilafat offices were raided. On 18th February 1921 leaders like Yakub Hasan, C. Gopala Menon, P. Moideen Koya, K. Madhavan Nair were arrested.⁵

The raid of the Muslim mosque at Mamburam near Tirurangadi was a turning point. This incident hurt the religious feelings of the Muslims and the revolt was intensified. Following this incident, the Muslims of the Eranad and Valluvanad regions revolted against the British government and the local

³ M. Gangadharan, *Malabar rebellion*, D. C. Books, Kottayam, (Reprint) 2008, p. 57.

⁴ P. K. K Menon, *History of freedom Movement in Kerala Vol-II*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2001, p. 85.

⁵ *Ibid.*

landlords. This made the Congress party withdraw its support to the Khilafat movement. According to the historian, Roland Miller Malabar Revolt affected about 200 villages in South Malabar 48 soldiers 3000 revolutionaries and civilians were killed in the revolt at various places. This number includes those who died in the Wagon massacre of 1921.⁶

After the Malabar revolt, the political movement in Malabar came to a standstill. This condition changed only with the anti-Simon agitations of 1927. In Malabar, the protest against the Simon Commission was mainly conducted in urban centres. A new awakening in the political arena of Malabar could be seen after the conference at Payyanur in 1928 which was presided by Jawaharlal Nehru.⁷

The civil disobedience movement of 1930 had its reverberations in the political arena of Malabar. The Salt Sathyagraha movement also had its impact in Malabar. Under the leadership of K. Kelappan prominent congress leader of Malabar, a Salt Satyagraha was beginning on 23rd April 1930 at Cannannore beach. A similar movement was held in Kozhikode beach under the leadership of Muhammad Abdul Rahman. Kunjimangalam and Karivellur were the other venues of Salt Satyagraha. P Krishna Pillai, T V Subramanian Thirumumbu, K Kesavan Nair, Achuta Kurup, K Narayanan Nair, T. Madhavan Nair, M. N Pisharody etc., were the prominent leaders who took part in these Satyagrahas. The majority of the Congress workers who participated in the disobedience

⁶ Rolland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Malabar*, Madras, 1972, pp. 137-138. For a study of wagon tragedy see P. Sivadasan, *Wagon Tragedy: Kanalvazhiyile Koottakuruthi* (Mal.), Kottayam, 2015.

⁷ N. E. Balram, *Keralathile Communit Prasthanam* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1973, p. 43. and also see the study V. R. Menon, *Mathrubhumiye Charithram: 1923-1935* (Mal.), Vol-1, Mathrubhumi publications, Kozhikode, 1998.

movement were arrested and jailed by the British government. The prominent Congress leaders of Malabar were arrested and jailed by the government and declared KPCC as an illegal organisation.⁸ This civil disobedience movement a new impetus to the national movement in Malabar.

The constructive programs like Harijan upliftment and removal of untouchability and the temple entry movement were started as a part of the Civil Disobedience. KPCC passed a declaration on the Temple entry agitation and also boosted it as one of the major issues.⁹

The political situation in Cochin and Travancore was different from that of Malabar. The political analysis of the situation in Travancore brings out the fact that as it was a princely state under the indirect control of the British government. The national movements in Travancore were started very late compared to Malabar.

The early political movements in Travancore were mostly for government jobs. On 27th November 1937, a political conference was held at Travancore under the initiatives of the Travancore Provincial congress committee. This meeting was a notable event in the political movement of Travancore which demanded 'Responsible government' in Travancore. The Travancore state

⁸ V. M. Vishnu Bharatheeyan, *Adimakalengane udamakalayi* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1980, p. 33. and also see the study. K. Gopalankutty, *Malabar Padanangal* (Mal), Kottayam, 2008.

⁹ P. K. K Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

congress was formed on 23rd February 1938 in a meeting held under the presidentship of Kunjiraman at Thiruvananthapuram.¹⁰

The political conditions of Cochin also reveal that there were all the regulations and restrictions of a princely state like Travancore. This put down the growth of the national movements there. Unlike Travancore, the communal forces were not powerful in Cochin. This also slowed down the social reform movements there. There were no strong political parties but minor parties under the domination of princely states existed in cochin.

They were

1. Cochin Congress
2. Cochin State Congress
3. The Progressive party

Until the formation of the Praja Mandal Cochin Congress, it was the branch of the Indian National Congress. The Cochin state Praja Mandal was formed on February 9th 1941 with S. Nilakantan Iyer as its President. After this political mobilisation took place in Cochin the national movements. Cochin Praja Mandal followed constitutional methods to attain political demands. This organisation took up issues like agrarian reforms and tenancy rights.¹¹

The above in brief sums up the political developments which provides the background for our study; committed literature grew as part of the larger political movements.

¹⁰ S. Raimon (ed.), *The History of Freedom Movement in Travancore*, Vol-III (1938-1948), Kerala State Archives Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2006, pp. 2-3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211.

Rise of Leftist Tendencies

The major events which happened in the international scenario in 1935 in connection with the rise of fascism and the threat of a world war influenced the Indian national movement and the working direction of CSP in Kerala. Many of the incidents which led to the outbreak of the Second World War started with the impact of the great depression in 1929. The economic depression affected Europe as a whole Germany was hit hard and this helped the Nazi party to become powerful in Germany. Due to the internal conflict in Germany, many refugees fled to London and Paris. The news about the persecution of Communists and freethinkers by the fascist government of Germany spread all over the world.¹² France also was under the threat of fascist attacks with criminal groups roaming around many parts of France. The workers of France formed a Trade union named *United Front* against the fascist movements. Opposition against fascism developed in many European countries during this period.¹³

On June 2nd, 1935 a meeting of writers, thinkers and political leaders was held in Paris. This meeting was known as International Congress for Defense of Culture. In this meeting many including Maxim Gorkey, Romain Rolland, Andre Marceaux, E. M. Foster, Julian, Henri Barbusse participated. The part played by the Soviet Union in organising the meeting is a matter of dispute among historians. This was the first occasion on which writers from different parts of the world were assembled for a common cause. Many of these writers believed in different ideals. But all of them were determined to retain freedom of

¹² Sajjad Zaheer, "Reminiscences" In Sudhi Pradhan (ed.), *Marxist Cultural Movements in India*, National Book Agency, Culcutta, 1979, p. 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

thought and freedom of expression at any cost.¹⁴ This Congress lasted for six days. According to Sajjad Zaheer the Indian who participated in this meeting, ‘the fascinating aspect of this meeting was the gathering of labours and writers in a common platform’.¹⁵

A Parsi writer named Sophia Wadia was the official member representing India. Mulk Raj Anand and Sajjad Zaheer were two ‘unofficial’ Indians who participated in this meeting.¹⁶ The important message of this meeting was to promote anti-fascist ideals among the common people and to ward off the threat of an imminent imperialist war. This meeting called upon the world writers to fight against imperialism and political Independence, peace and democracy.¹⁷ This meeting inspired the writers to fight with their pen against imperialism and fascism.

Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand were students when they participated in the 1935 Paris Congress. The idea of progressive literature had taken roots among the Indian students in London even before 1935. Sajjad Saheer and his friends had written books against social evils and religious fanaticism before going to London. A collection of 10 stories entitled *Angare* (Ember) was one such work. It was published in 1932 at Lucknow. Sajjad Saheer, Rashid Khan, Ahmmed Ali, and Mohammed Safar contributed to this work. It criticized the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁷ E.Sardarkutty, *Purogamana Sahithya Niroopanam* (Mal.), Bhasha Institute Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 1985, p. 42.

influence of religion and politics in modern literature. This work exuberated the spirit of youth.¹⁸ As it was working against the existing social system a lot of criticism was raised against this work. Religious centres and civil officials were the major critics. In 1933 an article was published in Hindustan Times criticising this book. “*Urdu pamphlet denounced: Shias gravely upset*” was the title of the article. The major contention of this article was that there was a humiliating reference to god and the prophet in *Angare*. This was not acceptable to the entire Muslim community in India. When the matters got worse the religious leaders pronounced a fatwah against this book. As a result, the book was prohibited in the United province in 1933. Sajj ad Saheer left India for London when there was a threat of legal action against the writers.¹⁹

In Sajjad Saheer’s memories, after the 1930’s the young Indians who reached England in the 1930s had a socialist affinity and frequent discussions related to progressive literature were common among them. An association called Progressive Writers Association was formed in 1935 among the Indians in England. Many English writers and thinkers played an eminent role in the formation of this organisation. Ralph Fox, the famous English writer was one among them. Priyamvada Gopal, a scholar of post-colonial literature opined that the acquaintance of Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand with European scholars was based on the Bloomsbury circle where they worked and studied in London.

¹⁸ Shabana Mahmud, “Angare and the Founding of Progressive Writers Association”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1996, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/313015>, p. 447.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

²⁰ A Chinese restaurant named Nanking in Denmark street provided the meeting place for the get-together. Sajjad Zaheer, Mulk Raj Anand, Jyotirmayi Ghosh etc. participated in the meeting in which a manifesto of this association was drafted. The manifesto raised issues like poverty, social backwardness and Colonialism and wanted these issues to be discussed in the books published in India thereafter. Some other points discussed related to what is progressivism, is the aim of the progressive writers is, how should they work? Etc.²¹

International Association of writers held its second conference on 19th June 1936 in London. Mulk Raj Anand participated in this conference.²² In this time Sajjad Saheer left England and reached India via Paris. The time was ripe in India for Sajjad Saheer to spread the new ideologies among the writers. A first world war had given Indians a new insight into the conditions and way of life in other countries. Many world-famous books came to be circulated in India and they were received with great enthusiasm.²³ Indians got an idea about the Russian Revolution from the major works of the period, especially Premchand's Premashramam. The protagonist of this novel, Balraj, a young farmer addresses his peasants thus "you believe as if the cultivator is nobody and that he has been created only to provide forced labour to the zamindar, I read in the newspaper that the cultivator constitutes the ruling class in Russia. They do what they want. In that country, the cultivators have overthrown the king and they are now being

²⁰ Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the transition to Independence*, Routledge New York, 2005, p. 23.

²¹ Sajjad Saheer, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²² Mulk Raj Anand, "On the Progressive Writers Movement", In Sudhi Pradhan (ed.), *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1979, p. 33.

²³ Sajjad Saheer, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

ruled by panchayaths of peasants and workers.”²⁴ This speech expresses how some Indians responded to world issues. Undoubtedly this was a departure from the prevailing worldview held by Gandhian nationalists.

The formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 created a congenial atmosphere for the spread of the ideas of progressive literature.²⁵ Sajjad Saheer who returned from England to India worked for the propagation of progressive ideas. A committee was formed in 1936 for the formation of the progressive literature movement. Prem Chand, Abdul Haq, Daya Narain Nigam, Abid Hussain etc., signed the manifesto of the committee. This committee had sub-committees established in Lahore, Delhi, Allahabad, Aligarh etc. These sub-committees were engaged in the formation of the movement. Every week there were discussions on the stories and poems which expounded progressive ideas.

On April 10th 1936 the official meeting of the All-Indian Progressive Writers Association was convened in the same venue used for the meeting All Indian Congress Party in 1936. Sajjad Saheer took the initiative to conduct the meeting. Munshi Premchand was invited to preside in the meeting. Premchand was well known as the leading writer in Urdu and Hindi and he was also interested in socialist ideas. The stories which he wrote in the 1930s expressed the exploitation of the British government. Many copies of his work were confiscated by the British collector and were set on fire before him. Fayiz Ahmed, Mulk Raj Anand, Hiren Mukherjee and Hasrath Mohani were the other dignitaries who attended this meeting. The presidential address of Premchand

²⁴ Madan Gopal, *Munshi Premchand: A Literary Biography*, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1943, p. 166.

²⁵ Sardarkutty, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

marked a new chapter in the history of this movement.²⁶ In his address, Premchand highlighted the aesthetic sense of the progressive literature movement. He extolled “we have to change the criteria of our aesthetic sense; art is narrow as it does not have any connection with life. Literature assumes a sense when it represents reality”.²⁷

In the Lucknow meeting, there were lengthy discussions on many issues and the aims of the organisation were met. The manifesto was unanimously approved. The following were the important decisions taken by the organisation.

1. Revolutionary changes were taking place in Indian society. The old ideas and beliefs are being replaced by a new social order. Indian writers have to express these changes through their works and help Indian society to progress. One of the main issues of Indian literature was that it never represented reality but gave importance to spiritualism and mysticism. The new literature should be different from this. It should strive to retain the noble virtues of Indian culture and criticise the old-fashioned views of society.
2. To unite the progressive writers of different Indian languages and form organisations
3. To spread the ideas of progressive literature through the publications of books.
4. To fight against retrogressive forces and ideas.
5. Bring out books encouraging Indians in their freedom movement.

²⁶ P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *Purogamana Sahithya Prasthanam; Nizhalum Velichavum* (Mal.), Kerala Sahithya Academy Thrissur, 1987, p. 61.

²⁷ Prem Chand, “The Nature and Purpose of Literature”, In Sudhi Pradhan (ed.) *Marrxist Cultural Movements in India*, National Book Agency, Culcutta, 1979, p. 53.

6. To help the progressive writers emotionally and economically
7. Protect the rights of expression and ideas²⁸

Such developments at the national level had their impact in Kerala. But the impact was not the same everywhere. The national movement was very active in Malabar, unlike Travancore and Cochin. Volunteers from these regions had, however, participated in the struggles in Malabar.

The formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 was a turning point of the National Movement in Malabar the formation this party led to the popularization of communist and socialist ideas in Malabar. The formation of the Congress Socialist Party reveals the changes in Indian politics after the Civil Disobedience Movement. The withdrawal of the Civil disobedience movement in 1933 created displeasure among young congress leaders against Gandhiji. Leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose, Nehru, Jaya Prakash Narayan strongly criticised the leadership of Gandhiji. These leaders were strongly influenced by socialist ideals. The new Soviet Union formed after the 1917 October revolution became a new model to the world. The influence of socialism was very much visible in the political ideals of Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. Nehru took part in the 1927 international conference held at Brussels against colonial oppression and imperialism.²⁹

The Great Depression of 1929 greatly affected the people. This economic depression was a major challenge to the capitalistic economic system after the first world war. As a result of the Great Depression, many workers lost their jobs

²⁸ K. Damodaran, *Sampoorna Krithikal* (Mal.), Vol. 7, Prabhat Books, Thiruvananthapuram, 2011, p. 216.

²⁹ Bipan Chandra, *India's struggle for Independence*, OUP India, New Delhi, 2001, p. 298.

and prices of agricultural commodities went down This in turn badly affected the farmers. All these problems affected India too which was one of the colonies of the British Empire. Some of the young leaders in the Congress Party had the opinion that a revolution based on socialist ideas is the only solution to these problems. This led to the formation of a Congress Socialist group in the Congress party.³⁰

The influence of the USSR was reflected on India especially on Malabar. Many writers philosophers and social activists were influenced by the ideas of the Russian Revolution. Among them were K. P Kesava Menon, A. K Pillai, Balakrishnapillai, T. K Madhavan, Mohammed Abdul Rahman Sahib, M. P Paul, M. C Joseph and others. Some of them were fascinated by the economic unity of the Soviet Union; some others welcomed the anti-colonial attitude of the USSR.³¹

The economic crisis of the 1930s strongly influenced Malabar. The price of coconut and Pepper went down and peasants were forced into the cultivation of food cultivation into food crops and cereals. In the same period, the changes introduced in the matrilineal system led to the decline of old Nair *taravadu* and the cessation of the supremacy of the Karanavars. Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930 bestowed certain securities and allowances to the tenants. These changes later

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

³¹ N. E. Balram., op. cit., p. 37. and also see Dr. K. Gopalankutty, “The Task of Transforming Congress in Malabar: 1934-1940”, *Studies in History*, vol. 5, no. 2, Aug 1989. doi:10.1177/025764308900500202.

assumed the form of protest against feudalism and colonialism.³² This paved the way for the spreading of socialist ideas in society.

The Communist Party was formed in India before the establishment of the Congress Socialist Party. Indian Communist Party under the leadership of M. N Roy at Kanpur led to the publication of communist literature.³³ The books and Pamphlets written by M. N Roy led to the establishment of many communist oriented organisations in India.

As a result of the influence of Communist ideas in India an organisation known as the *Communist League* was formed in 1931 at Trivandrum. This organisation did not have any direct relationship with the Indian Communist Party. Its headquarters was situated at Thycaud in Thiruvananthapuram. Ponnara G Sreedharan, N. G Kurrikkal, Thiruvattoor Thanu Pillai, Sivan Sankaran Pillai, R. G Ayyar, Thaikkattu Bhaskaran, N. C Sekhar etc., were some of the leaders of the organisation Sekhar in his autobiography *Agniveedhikal* has noted about the *Communist League* 'we firmly believed that the liberation of the working class can be achieved only through a socialist revolution and not through the strikes or satyagraha of the Congress Party'.³⁴

One of the important works done by the communist league was to translate and circulate the pamphlets drafted by the leaders who were sentenced in the Meerut conspiracy case. But *Communist League* could last long. Later youth *League* was formed by young people attracted to Communist League.

³² Dilip. M. Menon., *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar (1900-1948)*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 121.

³³ Bipan Chandra., *op. cit.*, p. 300.

³⁴ N. C Sekhar., *Agniveedhikal* (Mal.), Kannur, 1987, p. 193.

Youth League was one of the organisations which struggled for the establishment of a responsible government in Travancore. It also played a decisive role in the Aikya Kerala Movement.³⁵

Right from the 1920s interest in socialist ideals was rampant among the young leaders of the Congress Party. Leaders like Jaya Prakash Narayanan, Acharya Narendra Dev, Achyuth Patwardhan, Yusuf Meharali were serving a term in Nasik jail for participating in the 1933 Civil Disobedience Movement, showed affinity to the socialist ideals and formed a party known as Congress Socialist Party (CSP). This party was officially formed in Oct. 1934. In the beginning, this party had decided to remain in the congress and strengthen the party by making radical changes in the congress party.³⁶

Following the establishment of the All Indian Congress Socialist Party, the Malabar branch of this party was formed. Many factors favoured such a development. In the 1930s leaders like P. Krishna Pillai, E. M. S, A. K. Gopalan etc., who were in the Kannur jail and Bellary jail happened to meet there the leaders of the Gaddar party, Anushilan Samiti and Hindustan Socialist Army? The leaders of these organisations were able to kindle the spark of revolution in the minds of Kerala activists.³⁷ E. M. S Namboothiripad in his memories recalls the meeting of the north Indian revolutionary leader Tiwary in Kannur jail. He had inculcated the socialist ideals in E. M. S.³⁸

³⁵ E. Balakrishnan, *History of Communist Movement in Kerala*, Kurukshetra Prakashan, Ernakulam, 1998, p. 37.

³⁶ Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-304.

³⁷ N. C. Sekhar, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

³⁸ E. M. S Namboothiripad, *How I Became a Communist*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1976, p. 133.

According to A. K Gopalan, a prominent communist leader of Kerala, “we came to understand a lot during the period in jail. Our national problems were understood as entwined with global issues. A group was established to read and smuggle revolutionary books into the jail.”³⁹

The series of articles written by Nehru entitled *Whither India* were translated and published in the *Mathrubhumi* daily during 1933. This inspired the youth of Malabar and as a result of these various incidents the Malabar unit of congress socialist party was established.⁴⁰ Congress socialist party was formed in Malabar on 2nd May 1934 at Kozhikode Town Hall. The famous youth leaders of Congress party like C. K Govindan Nair, P. Krishna Pillai A K Gopalan, E. M. S etc., participated in this meeting. C. K Govindan Nair was elected as the president and P. Krishna Pillai as the secretary. The main aim of this party was to bring the peasants and labours into the Congress Party and intensify the protest against the British government.⁴¹

There were two types of membership in Congress Socialist Party, one was ordinary type membership and the second one is working membership. Everybody who paid one ana subscription was an ordinary member. But the working numbers were those who worked in collaboration with the Indian national congress, Karshaka Sangham, Thozhilali Union, Youth League, Women's groups and students associations etc.⁴²

³⁹ A. K. Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1974, p. 34.

⁴⁰ E. Balakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁴¹ Andalatt(ed.), *Saghakkale Munnottu* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1978, p. 509.

⁴² *Mathrubhumi Daily*, 1935, June. 22.

The formation of the Congress Socialist Party led to the development of two groups in the Congress party of Kerala. This division was unofficially known as the right wing congress party and left-wing Congress party. The right-wing congress party included the personalities like K. Kelappan, Madhavan Nair, Kozhippurath Madhava Menon, Govindan Nair etc. The left-wing Congress party consisted of all the young CSP members. Generally, it was argued that the formation of CSP led to the decline of the Congress party in Kerala. But According to Manali Desai, the Congress party was very weak in its inception in Kerala compared to the other parts of India. The main cause of the weakness was casteism. All the earlier important leaders in Congress Party in Malabar were feudal Lords and they did not take any interest in the welfare of the peasants and labours of the society. CSP made use of this opportunity and worked among the workers and peasants and this gave them an advantage over the right-wing congressman.⁴³

The formation of the Congress Socialist Party was followed by the propagation of its ideals. The CSP propagated its ideas through newspapers, books and pamphlets among the common man. The *Mathrubhumi*, *Al Ameen*, *Mitavadi*, and *Prabatham* published articles on Communism and the Soviet Union. Through them, the people of Malabar were able to have an overall view of world politics at that time.⁴⁴ Apart from printed media CSP widely used peasant organisations and labour associations to mobilise the common man.

The important aim of CSP which was formed in 1934 in Malabar to form a party of agricultural workers. The economic depression of 1929 and the

⁴³ Manali Desai, *State Formation and Radical Democracy in India*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 68.

⁴⁴ Dilip M. Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

instability it brought upon in the agricultural field attracted a large group of peasants to peasant movements. It was at this juncture that peasant groups were formed in Malabar.⁴⁵ The first peasant group was formed at Kolenchery under the leadership of Vishnu Bharatheeyan and Keraleeyan, who were active members of the Congress Socialist Party. During 1936, the number of peasant associations mushroomed throughout Malabar. In the year 1937 provincial congress ministry came to power in Madras presidency, during this period under the influence of CSP, peasant groups were extensively formed. Kasargod taluk peasant union was formed under the leadership of the poet Sri. Subrahmanyam Thirumumbu.⁴⁶ To create political awareness among the peasants, the CSP organised night classes and a group *Bala Bharata Samajam* was also found. It was a student organisation formed under CSP. A District level peasant meeting of the peasant group was organised in Malabar at Kozhikode held on Oct. 25th 1938. In this meeting, all the peasant groups in Malabar have participated.⁴⁷

On the exhortation of all India progressive writers conference, writers started forming units of progressive literature movement in different parts of India. As a part of this, a unit of this movement was formed in Kerala also. Kerala had a conducive atmosphere for the growth of this movement. The socio-religious reform during the British rule coupled with missionary work and printing culture led to the development of literature.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Dilip. M. Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁴⁶ Dr. K. Gopankutty, "Peasant movements in Malabar", 1936-1939, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol-37, 1976, p. 380.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 381.

⁴⁸ K. E. N. Kunhahmed, *Purogamana sahithya prasthanam charithravum varthamanavum* (Mal.), Progress publications, Kozhikode, 2013, pp. 120-122.

Before the establishment of the progressive literature association in Kerala, there existed literary associations of various types existed in Kerala. Some of them were; the *Kochin Sahithya Samajam* started under the auspicious of Appan Thamburan in 1913. Samastha Kerala Sahithya Samajam was started by the *Vaikom Sanmargaposhini Sabha* and *Edappalli Sahithya Samajam* formed by Edappally Krishna raja. This Samajam was later renamed as *Samastha Kerala Sahithya Parishad*.⁴⁹ This association was established in 1927 and officially registered in 1933 and this was the earliest literary association that encompassed all the literary figures in Kerala at that time. It was one of the noted achievements of Samastha Kerala Sahithya Parishad that even when Kerala existed as different political regions a pan Kerala idea was formed through literature. Samastha Kerala Parishad had tri-monthly publications named *Parishad*, later it became a bi-monthly publication.⁵⁰

The major criticism against Samastha Kerala Sahithya Parishad was that it was an elite organisation. This may be because the early members of this association were members of royal families or from higher strata of society. S. K. Vasanthan who recorded the history of this association stated that in the second meeting of Samastha Kerala Sahithya Parishad held at Thrissur, food was served based on caste hierarchy. In the meeting at Tellichery also there was a similar incident that was opposed by Moorkoth Kumaran who spoke against this in the meeting.⁵¹ Such ‘elitist bias’ was to change with the advent of the socialists.

⁴⁹ S. K. Vasanthan, *Samastha Kerala Sahithya parishad Charithram* (Mal.), Current Books, Kottayam, 2005, p. 25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

The change as we shall see was not confined to political ideals but included social and cultural realms as part of an overall ideological transformation

Formation of the Jeeval Sahithya Sangham

On 20th April 1937 some left-oriented socialist thinkers, politicians and writers jointly formed a literacy association called *Jeeval Sahithya Sangham*. This was the humble beginning of progressive writers' association in Kerala. E. M. S Namboothiripad, K. Damodaran, K. A Damodara Menon, K. P. Kesava Dev, N. P. Damodaran, C. Narayana Pillai, K. K. Varrier, P. Narayanan Nair, A. Madhavan, C. K. Narayana Swamy and others participated in this meeting⁵². According to E. M. S. Namboothiripad Jeeval Sahithya Sangham was formed by the CSP workers who were involved in agricultural and trade union movements and who strived to foster their ideas in literature.⁵³

After the 1930's different workers units were gaining strength in Kerala. New writers like Kesava Dev, Thkazhi Sivasankara Pillai etc gained recognition during this period. This period also witnessed the emergence of works like *Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku* (From kitchen to Stage) by V. T Bhattathiripad and *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* (The Hell under the Veil Umbrella) M. R Bhattathiripad.⁵⁴

Analysing the development of Jeeval Sahithya Sangham, E. M. S Namboothiripad made this comment "Progressive literature in Kerala developed as party literature. A group of young politicians who were till then not known as

⁵² P. K. Goplakarishan, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁵³ Sardar Kutty, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁵⁴ K. Damodaran, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

writers formed Jeeval Sahithya Sangham in 1937.⁵⁵ But K. Damodaran does not agree. According to him, it is not fair to consider Jeeval Sahithya movement as party literature and the progressive literature was not initiated by the communist as many of the people who participated in the meeting of this movement were not Communist or trade unions workers. This meeting was presided by left-wing Congress leader and editor of Bombay chronicle C. K Narayana Swamy. This meeting intended to found Kerala unit of all India progressive literature movement as per the decision of Lucknow meeting.⁵⁶

There was a controversy regarding the translation of the name of progressive writers' association into Malayalam to avoid the grammatical error of the joining the two words progress and literature a new term The Jeeval Sahithya was adopted.⁵⁷ The Jeeval Sahithya Movement had to face a lot of criticism. It was said that a group of about forty hooligans who had no connection with literature had started this organisation. Kesava Dev who was an important member of the Jeeval Sahithya Sanhgam was considered as a "literary pariah" who could remain only in the outskirts of the sanctum sanctorum of literature.⁵⁸ Issues of grammar were not accorded much importance by the young radicals. For them, life as lived was more important. The criticism of 'traditional' writers also reflects their 'elitist' bias. But the criticism had to be met on 12th June 1937 a meeting of Jeeval Sahithya Sangham had convened in Malabar in which K. Damodaran made a speech "unfortunately some people are considering the Jeeval Sahitya Prasthanam with anger and spite. The Jeeval

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Sahithya writers are not considering the literature of the past as worthless literature. This is an argument meant only to misguide the public. The Jeeval Sahithya is not socialist literature. Socialist literature can be Jeeval Sahithya but Jeeval Sahithya is not socialist literature”.⁵⁹ In this meeting, the subunit of this association named Malabar Jeeval Sahithya Sangham was formed.

According to E. M. S, another criticism against the progressive literature movement was that it was unnecessarily involving political issues in literature. He countered this criticism by stating that many famous literary works either directly or indirectly discuss state issues. Without mentioning the State affairs no literary work will be possible. Another criticism against Jeeval Sahithya was it was ignoring classical literature.⁶⁰

Sanjayan and Kuttikrishna Marar satirical writers and literary critiques in the Malayalam language strongly criticised the progressive literature movement. Sanjayan rebuked Jeeval Sahithya by denoting it as ‘Wanka Sahithyam’ (Stupid literature). Kuttikrishna Marar opposed it as a movement that did not have an artistic sense.⁶¹

The important slogan of progressive writers’ association was ‘art is not for art's sake but social progress’. This idea was based on socialist realism. The union of congress writers who met in the Soviet Union in 1934 considered the idea of socialist realism as the depiction of realism historically and honestly. Art

⁵⁹ *Mathrubhumi Daily*, 1937, June 13.

⁶⁰ *Mathrubhumi Daily*, 1937, June 15.

⁶¹ P. K Gopalakrishnan. *op. cit.*, p. 73.

was used as the medium of propagation of Socialist ideas.⁶² Discussion held on socialist realism in Kerala also.

The second meeting of Jeeval Sahithya Sangham was held at Trichur in 1938. This meeting was presided over by A. D. Harisharma.⁶³ In 1939, the third meeting of the Jeeval Sahithya movement took place in the congress meeting held at Bakkalam in Kannur. In this meeting, K. Damodaran was elected as president K. P. C Namboothiri as secretary. When the second world war started the workers of the Jeeval Sahithya Sangham were arrested and some were compelled to go underground.⁶⁴

Congress Socialist Party and Communist party played a leading role in propagating the works and popularising the writers of the Jeeval Sahithya Movement. The peasant movement, Trade unions and the teacher's movement which flourished under the CSP and later under the Communist party helped very much to popularise the works written by the members of the Jeeval Sahithya Sangham and helped to spread the left ideology among the masses.

The formation of CSP and the organisation of different sections of the society gave a new orientation to the literature. New themes and methods began to be explored. The content of literary work was no longer love or lost love but life's struggle.

The Progressive writers' movement brought out Dramas and rally songs based on the perils of the oppressed farmers. Dramas and songs were written on political ideas. Many works depicting the problems and issues of the peasants

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁶³ P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

⁶⁴ K. Damodaran, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

were written during this period. Progressive writers brought out many works connected with the life of the peasants.⁶⁵

Songs of Invocation

From 1935 onwards poems and stories dealing with the farmers' issues started appearing in *Prabhatham*, the official newspaper of CSP. The *kollakkola vayal pattu* published by Keraleeyan in 1937 in the *Prabhatham* helped to propagate class consciousness and the idea of class struggle among the peasants. The important lines in the *Vayalpattu* were

“O women we have to Join in the sangha
To lament together to overcome our difficulties
To Put an end to the plunder of the white man
And the destruction of the feudalism”⁶⁶

This was meant to be sung as part of agrarian work. Such Vayal Pattukal (lit. songs of the agricultural field) were sung traditionally, especially by women but now the content underwent a revolutionary change.

The flag songs of the peasants' groups and poems of T. S. Thirumbu inspired the farmers. The important lines are given below

“O farmers and labourers

⁶⁵ Prakash Karat, “Organised Struggles of Malabar peasantry”, *Social Scientist*, Vol-5, No. 8, 1977, p. 13.

⁶⁶ K. K. N. “Kurup, Karshaka Samarangalum Malayala Sahithyavum”, In M. N Vijayan (ed.), *Nammude Sahithyam Nammude Samooham* (Mal.), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, 2002, p. 36. and also see Dr. K. Gopalankutty, Songs of Propaganda In E K G Nambiar (ed.) *Agrarian India: Problems and Perspectives: Felicitations Volume in Honour of Dr. K. K. N. Kurup*, University of Calicut, 1999.

The exploited and poor assemble beneath-

This red flag to start our movement”.⁶⁷

These lines from the poem *vikasam* written by Thirumubu depicts the perils of labourers. 'Lal Salam' is another poem written by the same author glorifying the martyrs of Kayyur Riot, who were hanged in 1943 in Kannur Central Jail. This poem exuberates the emotions of this moment.⁶⁸

The influence of peasant movements is reflected in Malayalam poetry especially after independence. Changampuzha Krishna Pillai's famous poem *Vazhakkula* express the enmity towards the landlord and empathy to the Pulayas who were literal slaves. Edasseri Govidan Nair, a famous Malayalam writer in his poem *Puthan Kalavum Arivalum* (New Pot and Sickle) brings out the state of non-possession of farmers of their agricultural lands

“who sowed the seeds in the field

who reaped the crops which Koman produced”

This is the question that the poet raises to society. He answers;

“First we must reap power

then we can reap our crops”⁶⁹

The problems of the peasants were discussed in novels and dramas as well as poems. K. Damodaran an active member of Jeeval Sahithya Sangham, wrote several plays based on the problems faced by the farmers. He was also a noted exponent of CSP. Pattabakki (Rent Arrear) and Rakthapanam (Drinking of

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70. (*My. Tran.*)

Blood) were his two famous plays. Pattabakki dealt with the perils of farmers and Rakthapanam troubles of the labourers. The play Pattabakki has staged all the important meetings of the peasants' unions.⁷⁰ This will be discussed in detail in the next chapters.

The state of the industrial field was also similar to that of the agricultural field. It was the Basel Evangelical Mission that initiated the industrialisation of modern Malabar. Tile factories were started in Kozhikode, Tirur and Olavakode. Beedi works was another industry started in Malabar.⁷¹ However, there were not many such enterprises and the number of industrial workers was lesser than that of the agricultural workers. The economic depression. 1929 led to the retrenchment of labourers. In 1931 the workers of the Common Wealth tile factory went on strike. In December 1934 P. Krishna Pillai, K. P. Gopalan, Chandroth Kunjiraman formed a committee.⁷² The first all Kerala labourers meeting held at Kozhikode instilled a new spirit of revolution and a sense of unity in the workers.⁷³

The organisation of workers followed a pattern: at first, unions were formed with great difficulty which was followed by a strike. Literature played an important role in mobilisation. Songs like the following invigorated labourers

“Praise to nabi
who preached that

⁷⁰ Prakash karat, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁷¹ K. N. Ganesh (*et. al.*), *Keralathile Commusite Partiyude Charithram; upto 1940*, vol-1 (Mal.), Chinta Publication, Thiruvananthapuram, 2018, p. 244.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁷³ Azad, “Thozhilalivarga samarangalum Malayala Sahithyavum” In M. N Vijayan (ed.), *Nammude Sahithyam Nammude Samooham* (Mal.), (1901-2000), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, 2000, p. 202.

wages should be paid
before the sweat of labour dried “

This song written and sung by Aziz a trade union activist of Ponnani touched the hearts of all true believers⁷⁴. Several literary works were produced in connection with the labour movement. Most of this literature was written by writers who were closely associated with the Jeeval Sahithya Sangham. One such work was the poem written by Edasseri Govindan Nair titled Panimudakkam (strike). The poem depicted the atrocious working condition faced by the labours in textile factories.

the workers fought for justice
cover all your pain in a ditch
let's rush for strength and glory”⁷⁵

The agricultural workers' movements in Travancore and Cochin were different from those in Malabar. The political movements in Travancore were led by the upper-class Hindus and were centred on religious and caste ideas. The unified opposition of Christians, Ezhavas and Muslims were against the supremacy of the Nairs in Travancore.⁷⁶

The Pandarapatta Proclamation and Janmi Kudiyan Proclamation of Travancore destroyed feudalism and contributed to the rise of a group of peasant proprietors. The biggest problem in Thiru-Kochi was the tax collection by the

⁷⁴ K. N. Ganesh, *et. al., op. cit.*, p. 253.

⁷⁵ Azad. *op. cit.*, p. 209.

⁷⁶ Nissim Mannathunkaren, *Communism and Appropriation of Modernity, Kerala, India: A critique of Subaltern Studies*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Queens University, Kingston, 2006, p. 76. <https://bac-lac.on.worldcat.org/oclc/267075242>

feudal lords. The rich middle-class agriculturist of Travancore were Christians and Nairs. Coconut farming was the sole occupation of the Ezhavas.⁷⁷

Compared to Travancore and Cochin national movement had gained momentum in Malabar. In the former mobilisation tended to be armed social and caste issues. But in the 1930s leftist ideas began to be spread in Travancore and Cochin.

The trade union affinity was the major reason for the spread of communist ideology in Travancore. When CSP expanded its political activities in Travancore it concentrated political activities among the different labour unions like Coir Workers union, Cashew workers union, sweepers union, Toddy tappers union, boatmen Association etc. By doing so, the CSP mobilised a large number of common men towards leftist ideology and was able to challenge the domination of the Travancore State Congress.⁷⁸ The new surge in the growth of the cashew and coir industry was an example of the growth of class politics in Travancore. Travancore labour Association was the first labour union formed in Travancore. This association was formed in 1921 in the empire coir factory in Alappuzha. This association later became the centre of the Trade union movement in Alappuzha.⁷⁹ This association started a newspaper called *Thozhilali*, (*lit.* Worker) which was in circulation till 1938. The first plantation labours association was formed in the 1930s and it was known as

⁷⁷ Manali Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁷⁹ T. Jamal Muhammed, "The Travancore Labour Association: The earliest Trade union in Kerala", *Proceedings of Indian History Congress, Vol – 41*, New Delhi, 1980, p. 72.

Sanmargodhayam Koolivela Samajam.⁸⁰ The numerous strikes and protest movements helped CSP to have an upper hand on the Travancore State Congress.

An important aspect of trade union activity is that collective action, in the form of strike, may 'fail' or achieve only limited success but its real significance lies in the growth of class consciousness through such experiences. Apart from such 'direct knowledge' learned through everyday experiences, political propaganda plays a seminal role in shaping a person's consciousness. Specific class demands are transformed into political and general demands. A new form of rationality emerged from collectivism and labours began to look at the world with fresh eyes.

The teachers' movement was another movement that started in Kerala like the peasant movement and trade union movement based on socialist and communist ideals. Many leaders of the teachers' movements were members of Jeeval Sahithya Sangham. The elementary schools played an important role in modernising the villages of Kerala. In many places, they played a major role in organising peasant unions and labour unions. They took the initiative to bring about change in society. These teachers did not have fixed pay or security of tenure. They were terminated from service without proper reason.⁸¹

TEACHERS MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT

The Teachers' movement started in Malabar in the 1930s. An association of teachers was formed in Koothuparambu under the leadership of Krishnan

⁸⁰ Dr. T. Anitha, "Genesis and Growth of Trade Union Movements in Kanyakumari District", *International Journal of Social Science & Humanities*, vol-III, Issue-1, July 2016, p. 111.

⁸¹ K. N. Ganesh, *et. al., op. cit.*, p. 273.

Nambiar. After that, another teacher union came into being in Calicut under the initiative of A. K. Gopalan on 17th February 1935. Soon several unions were at different schools and an all Kerala Malabar aided Elementary School teachers meeting was held at Tellicherry. As a part of expanding the teachers' movement, the teachers union started libraries and night classes in Malabar.⁸²

The first agitation of the teachers was held in 1937 at higher elementary school Kannadiparamb in Chirakkal Taluk. When the Congress government came to rule in Madras the teachers' movement were intensified. The teachers' organisations challenged the management and established a rival school.⁸³ The teachers' movement in Cochin was different from that in Malabar. In Malabar, the teachers' union gathered momentum by confronting the education department and management. But in Cochin, the teachers' movement was under the auspicious of the education department. In Cochin aided school teachers and government school teachers received the same salary which was a unique factor. The first teachers' union was formed in Cochin in 1925.⁸⁴ T. G. Esho, headmaster of Thiruvalla school took the initiative of the teachers' movement in Travancore.⁸⁵ The progressive writers brought out plays, novels, short stories depicting the problems of teachers.

Adima a mono act play written by Cherukad Govinda Pisharodi portrays the problem faced by the teachers. *Muthassi* a novel written by the same author solely connected with the teachers' movement. The important character in this

⁸² M. N Padmanabhan, *Political agitation and the Teachers Movement : The case of Malabar (1920-1956)*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Calicut, 2009, p. 78.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ K. N. Ganesh, *et. al., op. cit.*, p. 273

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

novel called Nani was a teacher. In this novel, the headmaster Krishnan Kutty Ezhuthachan tells the union workers. I am the only person to speak about this school and the staff. This is our school and we pay salaries to them. Let me ask you what would be your feeling if I come and distract the Harijan workers whom you have employed". Does it mean that teachers and coolies are alike? "There is no difference the coolies are given their daily wages and the teachers are given their wage when I get the yearly grant". Through this speech detailed in the novel, Muthassi written by Cherukad, who himself was a teacher sought to illustrate the condition of the teachers of that period.⁸⁶

In 1939, government recognition was granted to Aided elementary school teachers' union in Malabar but this was stopped by a disgraceful government order, V. T. Kumaran has written a poem about this

“Politics is a taboo for the teachers
Who helped to fly the flags of freedom
Sacrificing their lives
They are the ones who enlightened the ignorant villagers
They converted them to valiant lions
And fought against foreign rule
They are the ones who sharpened the weapons of Gandhiji”⁸⁷

At the beginning of the teachers, movement exerted its influence in literature in two ways. One in which the pitiable condition of teachers as a result

⁸⁶ Cherukad, *Muthassi* (Mal.), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, Reprint 1989, p. 142.

⁸⁷ P. K. “Mohanam, Adhyapaka Prasthanavum Malayala Sahithya Charithravum” In M. N. Vijayan (ed.) *Nammude Sahithyam Nammude Samooham* (Mal.), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, 2000, p. 176.

of poverty and injustice was depicted. The other was in the form of teachers' resistance. Karur's *Pothichoru*, *Sir vandananm*, *Sirinum Pattikkum*, *Kudumba Budget*, *Absent*, *Shishya Sambath*, *Melkkoyamayude Mudramothiram* etc. portrays the two sides of problems faced by the teachers.⁸⁸

Teachers' movement found expression in work of literature in two ways: One depicted the miserable condition of the teachers, their inadequate salary and the various instances of injustice done to them. The other show how the teachers resisted the oppression and challenged the injustice meted out to them. Some works portrayed both. A notable point is that the teachers integrated their union movement with the broad movement against British imperialism. In the process they wanted to end the privatisation of education, which they demanded, should be nationalised. This was a break from the existing views on education

FORMATION OF CPI

Right from 1935 itself, the CSP leaders had close contact with the communist party leaders. The prominent CSP leaders like Batiwala, Mirajkar, Z. A. Ahmed, Sundarayya, etc., often visited Kerala. Communist Party formed its first-party cell in Kerala in September 1937 at Palayam. Leaders like P. Krishna Pillai, E. M. S, K. P. R Gopalan, K. Damodaran, N. C. Sekhar etc., participated in this meeting⁸⁹.

On 14th February 1939, the tenth conference of the Congress Party took place in Bakkalam. In this meeting, the left and right-wing congress workers

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁸⁹ N. C. Sekhar, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

divide came out in the open and the right-wing Congress workers under the leadership of K. Kelappan left the meeting⁹⁰.

In the same year on 8th April, a summer school was conducted by The Congress Socialist Party at Pallippuram in Mankada. Many students attended this Summer School. People from peasant unions, workers unions and other youth movements took part in this. Classes were conducted on World History, Indian History, Communism, Political Science etc. Summer school helped in popularising the communist ideas. Those who attended this summer school later became active members of the communist party and they later delivered talks in libraries and youth movements regarding left ideology.⁹¹

The final conversion of Kerala CSP into the Communist Party took place in the meeting held at Pinarayi in December 1939. The leaders who came to Kerala after the AICC meeting assembled in the residence of Manjunatha Rao. In this meeting, it was agreed to hold the meeting at Parappurath in Pinarayi. It was planned that the participants should meet at the Vivekananda Library but the meeting was held at the residence of the Appukkutty Karanavar at Pinarayi. This meeting lasted till 2oclock at night⁹² Ninety-two representatives participated in this meeting, the noted ones being. E.M.S, A.K.G, Krishna Pillai, P. Narayanan Nair, Subrahmanya Sharma, E. P. Gopalan P. S. Namboothriri, C. H. Kanaran, Keraleeyan, N. E. Balram and Manjunath Rao.

⁹⁰ V. V. Kunhikrishnan, *Keraleeyanu Karshaka Prasthanavum* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1996, p. 80.

⁹¹ Andalatt, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

⁹² N. E. Balram, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

The important issue discussed in the Pinarayi meeting was the inefficiency of the congress party and the affirmation of the power of the communist party to fight against colonialism. CSP was converted into Communist Party in this meeting. Somebody suggested that the immediate change need not be made public as the CPI was a banned organisation. On January 26th 1940 the formation of the party was made public through writing on the wall⁹³

The Communist Party was formed in Kerala during the outbreak of the Second World War. It started when Nazi Germany attacked Poland on 1st September 1939. Later Britain also participated in this War. When Britain participated in this war, all the colonies under Britain throughout the world became participants.

The Second World War affected India economically, socially and politically. India experienced poverty, famine, unemployment and infectious diseases. In this period the war was the theme of many new literary works. Progressive literature writers of Kerala brought out works on war and poverty. As famine and infectious diseases spread the different parts of Kerala provided an opportunity for political leaders to work among the common people.⁹⁴ P. Narayanan Nair an ardent left activist in Kerala in his autobiographical work *Aranootandiloode* portrays the issues faced by the people in Malabar during the Second World War. According to him famine during the war was at its height. The prices of rice and other essential commodities rose as the major portion of

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Robin Jefery, *Politics Women and Well being: How Kerala Became a Model*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cambridge, 1992, p. 79.

essential commodities were set apart for military use.⁹⁵ The Shornur Nilambur railway line was disrupted and the rails and other iron materials were taken for war purposes. The British used all the resources of India in the war. This caused great anger and protest among the people.⁹⁶

The provincial ministries under the Congress government formed in 1937 resigned in 1939 as a protest against the British, announcement making India a partner in the War. This was done without the consensus of the Indians. The Congress party did not take a direct opposition to the War. As soon as the war started anti-war movements were staged by the CSP. As part of the propaganda 1940 September, 15 was declared as protest day. There was a collision between police and the public at Kannur, Koothuparamba, Mattannur and Morazha. The workers namely Abu and Chathukkutty died in the police firing at Tellicherry. In Morazha, a policeman and sub-inspector were killed in the conflict between police and the public.⁹⁷

Kayyur was another place where the farmers and police clashed. In March 1941 during the protest march from Kayyur there were clashes between the police and the public. On March 28th a protest march against police lathi charge culminated in the unfortunate death of a police officer. Five communist supporters convicted in this incident were sentenced to death. They were Madathil Appu, Kunjambu Nair, Chirukandan, Aboobucker, Choorikkaden

⁹⁵ P. Naranayan Nair, *Aranoottandiloode* (Mal.), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, 1973, p. 1149.

⁹⁶ Cherukad, *Jeevithappadha* (Mal.), Current Books Kottayam, Reprint 2014, p. 451.

⁹⁷ Priya Peelicode, *Yudhakalathe Malabar: Prathya Sasthravum Prathirodhavum* (Mal.), SPCS, Kottayam, 2016, p. 92.

Krishnan Nair.⁹⁸ Niranjana wrote the novel *Chrasmarana* based on this incident.⁹⁹

When anti-war movements and protests were rising in India certain international development changed the character of war for a group of people in India. On 22nd June 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union was attacked which was the sole socialist nation in the world, the nature of World war completely changed. This created a lot of ideological confusion among the communist leaders of Kerala.¹⁰⁰ Most of the leaders were in jail during this period. After a lot of discussions, the party took the stand that the only socialist nation was engaged in a war of survival. The result of the war will influence the countries fighting for freedom including India. In this context, the party secretary P. C Joshi published the book *People's War till Independence*.¹⁰¹ Thus, the Communist party began to characterise war as a Peoples war.

Prominent leader K. Damodaran's memoirs refer to this change of policy. When Germany attacked Soviet Union K. Damodaran who was in jail along with other comrades led a lot of discussions, Prof. K. B. Krishna, another inmate in the prison wrote a thesis from the jail supporting "peoples war". He argued that Communist Party should abandon its Anti-imperialist activity and anti-war mentality and support the war. Opposing this K. Damodaran brought out a counter-thesis stating that even though the existence of the Soviet Union was crucial for a party the best way to support the Russian comrades was to

⁹⁸ Choorikkadan Krishnan Nair, *Tejaswini Nee Sakshi* (Mal.), Calicut, 2002, p. 47.

⁹⁹ Niranjana, *Chirasmarana* (Mal.), Navakarnataka, Bangalore, 1955.

¹⁰⁰ Priya Peelicode, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

strengthen the anti-colonial mentality and the greatest enemy was the British Empire.¹⁰²

Many people in the jail supported K. Damodaran and some of them supported the people war thesis. British intelligence knew about this decision and so Damodaran had to undergo imprisonment till the end of the war while many of the leaders who supported peoples war policy were set free.

This shift from imperialist war to peoples' war confused many leaders and workers. Cherukad in his Autobiography titled *Jeevitha Padhayil* observes "the circular to support War was unexpected to us who were engaged in speeches and writings against war. The circular to support the British and the war pained me.' Many leaders left the Communist Party and joined Congress Party.¹⁰³

When the communist supported the People's War the British government lifted the ban imposed on Communist Party and it started functioning legally.¹⁰⁴ At this juncture, the party put forward many new movements like Soviet friendly Sangh, Anti-Japanese committee, Price restriction committee was noteworthy.¹⁰⁵

Many anti-Japanese committees were formed in Malabar, it was intending to oppose Japan that these committees were formed. In the second World War Japan was one of the Axis nations opposing the Soviet Union. Moreover, Japan had taken possession of many British colonies in Asia. INA formed by Subash Chandra Bose joined the Japanese Army and moved towards Burma. The British

¹⁰² Tariq Ali, "A memoir of an Indian Communist", *The New Left Review*, 1/93, Sept/Oct, 1975, p.39.

¹⁰³ Cherukad, *Jeevithapadha*, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

¹⁰⁴ File No. 251-P(s) Dated- 1941, political Department -Political Branch, Government of India, National Archives, New Delhi . For more details see the Appendix – 1.

¹⁰⁵ Priya, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

government in India feared an attack from Japan at any moment. It was in these circumstances that Communist Party organised many anti-Japanese meetings in Malabar. The Anti-Japanese meetings led to the publication of a lot of literary works. M. P. Bhattathiripad wrote *Vallatha Kalam* exposing the condition of Kerala during the years of war. In 1942 many anti-Japanese pamphlets were in circulation ¹⁰⁶. Cherukad wrote one poem to be sung among the beedi workers

Japan from the east and Germany from west

Are threatening to attack India

What a frightening situation; what a difficult period. ¹⁰⁷

E.M.S. Namboothiriad opined that in the Anti-Jap agitations the communist Party conducted folk art and popular art forms were used. Various art forms like Ottanthullal, Padakam, Chakyarkoothu etc., and folk forms like *Poorakkali* were performed in the meetings. ¹⁰⁸

Cherukad was in charge of the anti-Jap meetings in Vallivanad taluk. Cherukad writes “The main activities in those days were to print anti-japanese songs, perform *Kummi* and *Kolattam* with anti -Japanese themes, dance dramas, *Kolkkali*, *Kaikottikali*, *Ottam Thullal*, *Padakam* plays etc. were staged in different parts of Malabar.” Cherukad himself performed Anti Japanese *Padakam* in different parts of Kerala. ¹⁰⁹ Japan Padakam was based on the

¹⁰⁶ Cherukad, Jeevithapadha, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

Another leader who disagreed with peoples war policy was K. Madhavan. Disciplinary action was taken against him for his open dissent. See his *Oru Gandhian Communistinte Ormakal*, 1988.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

¹⁰⁸ E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *Communist Party Keralathil* (Mal.), Chintha Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, Reprint 2009, p. 157.

¹⁰⁹ Cherukad, Jeevithapadha, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

conversation between Japan, Britain and India. This programme attracted a lot of public attention.

One anti -Jap meeting was held at Parassinikadavu in the Kannur region organised by the district committee of the party. In this meeting, a *Padakam* was staged in which a sly remark was made on Subhas Chandra Bose which pained Cherukad. “Our leader was a dirty Japanese slave” this was originally written in the script by Cherukad as only “wicked person” somebody else changed it¹¹⁰. Another programme in the Anti Jap agitation was to make an effigy called Japan savage monster and set fire to it.

The *Kanjikalam* (pot of rice gruel) a play depicting the financial crisis faced by the people during the Second World War was written by Cherukad and Arya Pallam. In this play, Cherukad presents the tragedy of a grandmother who stole a pot of gruel from the neighbours’ kitchen to feed the hungry grandchildren but finds them dead when he brings the pot. This play got a lot of reception in all the Anti Jap meetings.¹¹¹

When Cholera and other epidemics broke out in Kerala in 1943. The youth under the leadership of the Communist Party, the Red Guards visited houses and engaged in other relief activities. When famine broke out during World War they formed volunteer groups to help in public rationing. According to Manali Desai, it was these activities that helped the party in saving its face

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

from the shameful image created by the people's war. It also helped to party to have a lot of influence on the common people.¹¹²

Another major change that helped the Communist Party to hold on to the cultural movement of Kerala was its influence upon the Jeeval Sahithya Sangham. We have noted that this organisation was formed in 1937 and attracted to its fold many noted writers who were not members of the communist party. This transformation was not a sudden one. From 1937 onwards the steps taken by the CSP, the growth of the peasants' movement, the Workers movement, the Teachers movement, Student movement and the anti-Japanese meetings led to an intimacy between the left-wing leaders and writers of Kerala and the popularisation of literature and writers among the common people.

When the communist party's ideological influence was at its height in and out of this organisation a meeting of the Jeeval Sahithya Sangham was held in 1944 at Shornur. This meeting was convened by the communists and their sympathisers. There was a lot of changes after this meeting. Many noted writers like Vallathol, Changanpuzha, G. Sankara Kurup etc became part of this association. This meeting was organised by the communists of Malabar. The communist workers from Travancore and cochin did not participate. But noted writers from the Thiru-Kochi region like P. Kesava Dev, Ponkunnam Varkey, Thakazhi, Joesph Mundassery, M. P. Paul etc., participated. The main organisers of the Shornur meeting were C. Achutha Kurup and M. S. Devadas.¹¹³

In the Shornur meeting of 1944 Jeeval Sahithya Sangham changed its name and became to be known as Purogamana Sahithya Prasthanam (Progressive

¹¹² Manali Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹¹³ Sardar Kutty, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

Literary Movement). In this meeting, a manifesto of the association was released. This was drafted by P. Kesava Dev. He stressed two aspects in the manifesto. One was the social commitment of writers and the other was the importance of the artistic regulations. According to Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, the most boring part of this meeting was the overflow of anti -Japanese literature. The theme of the one-act plays and stories were all anti -Japanese. A group of writers interpreted it as a part of Communist propaganda. M. P Paul presided over the meeting. He was elected as the president of this organisation and C. Achutha Kurup and P. Kesava Dev as Secretaries of Kerala Progressive Writers Association.¹¹⁴

Purogamana Sahithya Sangham drafted a constitution. The aims of the constitution were:

1. To write Literature in Progressive mode
2. To fight against the conservative and anti-progressive elements in the field and encourage independence and progressive aspects in literature
3. To bring literature and art forms closer to the common man
4. To encourage criticism based on the resistance of anti-progressive elements and encourage progressive tendencies in literature.
5. To protect the interest of the progressive writers and ensure their free speech and opinion.

As a result of this meeting, the writers were incorporated into the progressive movement. Thakazhi, Kesava Dev, Ponkunnam Varkey brought out

¹¹⁴ P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

some works. Thakazhi's *Thottiyude Makan* (Scavengers Son) *Randidangazhi* (Two measures), Kesava Dev's *Odayil Ninnu* (From the Gutter), Basheer's *Balya Kala Saghi* (Childhood friend), *Etuppuppakkoranendarnnu* (my Granddad had an Elephant) etc were some of the important works of the period.¹¹⁵

After the 1944 meeting of Purogamana Sahithya Prasthanam, it can be assumed that leftist ideological influence greatly increased in the organisation. Earlier, the thrust was equally on anti-imperialist mobilisation. After the War, the feelings that freedom was soon to be achieved become widespread and so the leftists began to concentrate on the cultural scene than on politics. However, this was to lead to a split in the organisation in 1948. One of the achievements of the organisation was the widespread support it got among the common people. many of whom imbibed the leftist ideology, leading to a transformation of one's worldview.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

CHAPTER II

GROWTH OF LITERACY, ESTABLISHMENT OF READING ROOMS AND THE DISSEMINATION OF SOCIALIST IDEAS

The growth of the Reading Room/ Library Movement in Kerala has its roots in the Literacy Community of Kerala. According to the 2011 Census Reports in India, the state with the highest literacy is considered to be Kerala, with a literacy rate of 93. 91%. The male literacy is 96. 11% and the female literacy is 92. 7%.¹ It is as a result of multiple historical processes that Kerala has achieved the high rates seen today. Numerous agencies have played their part in these historical processes. The history of literate Kerala began with the arrival of Western missionaries and the printing presses that they established. The advent of the printing machines in Kerala was in a unexpected manner. It was the Portuguese Jesuit priests who first transported these machines to India. The King of Portugal had gifted the Jesuit priests with a printing machine. Those monks reached Goa, and in 1586, using this press, the first printed book was released in India. The volume was *Doctrina Christiana*, a theological treatise by Francis Xavier in the Portuguese language².

It was the Protestant missionary groups who reached here in the 19th C who played a decisive role in the printing domain in Kerala. The London

¹ A Sathiya Susuman, Siaka Lougue, Madhusudana Battala; “Female Literacy, Fertility Decline and Life Expectancy in Kerala, India: An Analysis from Census of India 2011”, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 51, July 2014, p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0021909614541087>

² M. Jayaraj, *Achchadi Madhyamam Bhuthavum Varthamanavum*(Mal.), Mathrubhumi Publication, Kozhikode, 2013. p. 19.

Missionary Society and the Church Mission Society were among the first missionary groups to reach Kerala. L. M. S was established in 1795 in England. C. M. S, established in 1799 was also an Evangelical group under the aegis of the Church of England. The spread of printing in Malabar was greatly influenced by the Basal Evangelical Mission. These missionaries established educational institutions in Kerala, and also set up printing presses to aid in the various Mission ventures³.

In 1821, Rev. Benjamin Bailey established the CMS press at Kottayam for the printing of Malayalam, and books began to be printed in the new/improved Malayalam alphabetical script in Kerala. In Malabar, the history of printing began with The “*Rajyasamachar*” newspaper that took birth in 1847 on the veranda of the Basal Mission at Nettoor Illikunnu in Thalassery. It started as a magazine and was printed in the *kallachu*. The printing started under the supervision of Gundert, who was a priest at the Basal Mission. *Paschimodayam* was another newspaper that was later published by the Basal Mission⁴.

Spurred by the activities of the missionaries, the local Kings and other prominent individuals established printing presses in the region. The Government Press at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala Vilasam, Kerala Udayam are examples. In 1861, the printing of the “*Kerala Patrika*” Newspaper by Chengulath Kunhuraman Menon was done at the Vidya Vilasam press in Kozhikode. The St Thomas Press at Kochi in 1861, Kerala Mitram Press in 1881, Vidyaratna Achukoodam by Parayil Itoop at Kunnamkulam.

³ E. T. Mathew, “Growth of Literacy in Kerala: State Interventions, Missionary Initiatives, and Social Movements”, *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol34, No. 39., p. 2811, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i398768>.

⁴ C. Achuthan, *Swathanthrasamaravum Malayala Sahityam* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2003, pp. 64-65.

Mangalodayam Press at Thrissur, Vidyavinodini Press at Thrissur in 1887- along with the books, magazines and other publications that came out in the early part of the 19th C, had a major influence on the social and cultural renaissance. Through the publications of the missionaries, prose became a medium, and topics such as Religion, History, Science, Philosophy, Political visions, Social reforms, began to be discussed in the newspapers⁴.

The level of literacy required to read typeset newspapers and magazines had not yet been achieved in the society of Kerala in the 19th Century. It was the schools that had been established before this time that enabled the people of Kerala to read printed prose. The beginning of this was at Travancore. As a result of the Travancore Kingdom entering into a Military Agreement with the British Government, the British began to interfere and take interest in the administration of home affairs, and with the patronage of the British, a conducive environment was created for the Protestant missionaries to freely work and function in the Travancore region. Consequently, many missionary-run schools were established in Travancore. It was the LMS that commenced such initiatives. Ringletaube, a Prussian, who was an important work of the LMS established many schools in this region. The first school was established in 1806 at Mylady. By 1816, he had already established 7 single-teacher schools, and around 188 students were studying there⁵.

The functioning of the educational system, and the printing technology that was established by the missionaries, were later taken over by the British government and the local Kings. By the end of the 19th C and in the early decades of the 20th C, active social reform movements had tried to wipe out caste

⁵ *Ibid.*

evils and began to give importance to the concept of bringing about a social transformation through education.

Travancore was the regional kingdom that kick-started educational activities. It had begun practising and implementing modern educational methods even as early as 1834. In 1836, the Travancore State Government established the Rajah's Free School in Thiruvananthapuram, which was also the first public school. In the same year, district schools were established in different parts of Travancore, and 22 major schools began functioning⁶.

It was in 1865-66 that regional-language schools were established in Travancore. 29 vernacular schools known as Central Schools were also established in this period. Following this, in 1868, the provision of Grant-in-aid was implemented in Travancore, and this measure prompted and encouraged private individuals to enter into the field of education⁷.

After the Travancore government put an end to slavery and related practices, it became possible for children from lower-castes to gain an education. Earlier, they had not been permitted to have schooling. In 1895-96, 15 government schools were established for children from backward castes. In the conference constituted by the Travancore government in 1940, it was declared that the complete responsibility for ensuring primary education would henceforth be taken up and carried out by the government.

The Social reform movements that took place in the 19th C were spearheaded by Sree Narayana Guru and Palpu. This resulted in the setting up of

⁶ E. J. Mathew, *op. cit.*, p. 2816.

⁷ *Ibid.*

two special schools for children from the Ezhava community in Travancore, and later in 1907, the government issued an order permitting these children to attend the government schools⁸.

The “Sadhujana Paripalana Sangam”, formed under the leadership of Ayyankali, who was a prominent reformer of the caste system, indulged in protests to enable modern education in their community. The statement of Ayyankali concerning education deserves special attention here. “None of us will work in the fields until the children of the Pulaya community are enrolled in the public schools”.⁹ This statement led to a conflict between the feudal landlords and the serf *pulayar*, and compelled the government to formulate a new law in 1910. Subsequently, in the same year, the Pulaya children were also permitted entry in the schools for the Ezhava students.

In Kerala, it was in Cochin and Travancore that most of the advances concerning education took place. It was only later that educational activities began in Malabar. It was with the Local Board Act of the Madras government in 1834 that the British commenced their educational programmes in Malabar.¹⁰ In the earlier stages, the British government did not take much interest in education in the Malabar region.

It was again the missionaries who were responsible for starting modern education in Malabar as well. However, later, schools that functioned with the help of

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 2817.

⁹ *Ibid.* P. 2818.

¹⁰ Thayatt Sankaran, Bharathiya Vidhyabhyasavum Charithravum, Varthamana kala Prasnangalum qtd in P. Sudheer Kumar, *Education and Political Consciousness in Kerala*, Unpublished Ph. D Thesis, University of Calicut 2005, pp. 71-72.

government grants began to be established in the region. The salary of the teachers was paid using the grant from the government.

As the National Movements started growing stronger in Malabar, the National Education Commission, modelled after the nationwide vision of the Indian National Congress, was created and exerted a strong influence on the British government to implement compulsory primary education¹¹.

In 1920, a District Board was established in Malabar, and subsequently, the responsibility of education in the region rested fully upon this Board. The same year, the Elementary Act was passed, making primary education compulsory. It was also in the same period that the ‘Servants of India Society’ was formed under the leadership of Gopala Krishna Gokhale, and as a result of its activities, the “Devadhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust” was established in 1928. Consequently, a large number of schools and adult education centres were established in the Malabar region¹².

As far as Malabar was concerned, the period from 1921 to 1939 was one of intense educational innovation. However, if British Malabar were to be compared to Travancore concerning the development of education, it can be seen that Travancore was much ahead. The reason generally cited for this is that, in Travancore, there were active Social reform movements under the leadership of Sree Narayana Guru. Consequently, this sparked off interest among the Ezhava community to gain modern education. However, such reform movements were

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹² Memorandum submitted by Devadhara Malabar Reconstruction Trust to the Director of Public Instruction, Madras. 1928, p. 205.

not very widespread in the Malabar region. Due to this reason, Malabar could not achieve as much progress in the field of education as did Travancore.¹³

There were also other reasons for the backwardness of the state of education in Malabar. The Muslims in Malabar were prejudiced against modern education, and the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 resulted in a great blow to the progress of education in that region. Many schools in Southern Malabar remained closed much after the Rebellion¹⁴.

The requirements of the literate society shaped by Colonial Modernism that was created through Modern education were responsible for the publication of newspapers, magazines and other literary publications in various parts of Kerala. There was a reading public that subscribed to these publications. Most of these were secular publications and did not cater to the interests of any particular caste or religious group. This had an important bearing on the issue under discussion-propagation of socialist ideas.

It was the print media and the magazines that played a decisive role in the growth of the colonial reading culture and of literacy. Each of the newspapers published during the British rule had its interest and ideology. Most of the newspapers founded by the missionaries, which also heralded the beginnings of the newspaper published in Kerala, were printed to propagate their religious ideas. While some newspapers were printed keeping business interests foremost, a few others tried to convey the ideals of Social reforms and modernisation of the Society through publication. However, the majority of the newspapers served to instil and strengthen the ideals of freedom and nationalism amongst the people.

¹³ Sudheer Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

At the same time, they also debated and criticized the misrule of the local government and the tyranny of the administrative officials.

It can be seen that most of the early newspapers that were published in Kerala started as magazines and weekly publications and that it was only much later that they began to be published as daily newspapers.

The history of the newspaper published in Kerala commenced in 1847 with Hermann Gundert of the Basel Evangelical Mission at Thalassery printing the *Rajyasamacharam* newspaper. Another newspaper printed by Gundert after the *Rajyasamacharam* was *Paschimodayam*.¹⁵ These newspapers were published till 1851. Later, in many parts of Kerala, newspapers were printed by missionaries. The first newspaper in Kerala that was printed in the English language was the *Western Star*. This paper was published in Cochin in 1860, and its editor was Sir Charles Lawson. Later, in 1864, a Malayalam edition of the *Western Star* was published as *Paschimatharaka*". In 1870, another newspaper, the *Kerala Pataka* was published by Cochin. However, these newspapers were short-lived.¹⁶ In the following years, *Paschimatharaka* and *Kerala Pataka* were amalgamated and began to come out as *Paschimatharaka Kerala Pataka*.¹⁷

The *Travancore Herald* was another newspaper published by W. H. Moore in 1867. As a supplement to this newspaper, the *Sandishtavadhi* was published. The *Kerala Deepika* was the first newspaper in Kerala printed for the

¹⁵ M. Jayaraj, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁶ C. L. Antony, *Bashagadya Sahithya Charithram Prasthanangaliloode*, Quoted in Vasu Thilleri, *Political Journalism and National Movement*, Unpublished Ph. D Thesis, University of Calicut, 2008, p. 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Muslim community. This paper was printed in 1878 from Cochin by Kathru Shaji Bappu.¹⁸

The *Kerala Mithram* was a newspaper printed from Cochin in 1881, under the patronage of Devji Bheemji, a Gujarati trader. Kandathil Vargheese Mappila was the first editor of this paper. This paper adopted an unbiased approach towards Social issues. People across all religions and communities subscribed to this newspaper. Later, with Kandathil Vargheese Mappila resigning as the editor, and with the subsequent demise of Devji Bheemji, the *Kerala Mithram* newspaper struggled to stay afloat¹⁹.

Most of the newspapers printed from the British Malabar region strongly criticized the misrule and unfair administrative practices of the British government. Such newspapers that were critical of the British government were declared outlawed, and forced to be shut down. The *Kerala Patrika* which was started in 1884, was the first newspaper in the Malabar region to incur the wrath and displeasure of the British government. Chengulath Kunhuraman Menon was the editor of this newspaper. The paper was fined the sum of Rs. 50 for criticising the British government, and was later forced to shut down.

The *Deepika* was another newspaper that came out in 1887, and it was printed at Kottayam. This is one newspaper that continues to remain in circulation. It was originally titled *Nasrani Deepika* and was initially established to promote the socio-political and cultural advancement of the Christian community. The “*Nasrani Deepika*” played a crucial role in bringing the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

problems, denial of rights, and discrimination faced by the Christians, people of other religions, and the backward castes²⁰.

The *Nasrani Deepika*, and the *Malayala Manorama* that was started in 1890 from Kottayam, were primarily known as the Social newspapers of the Syrian Christian community. It was as a Joint-stock company that Kandathil Vargheese Mappila founded the *Malayala Manorama* newspaper. It was in 1937 that the *Malayala Manorama* began functioning as a daily newspaper. The Calicut edition of the *Malayala Manorama* was known as the *Kozhikode Manorama*. In the early days, articles beneficial to the educational rights of the *pulayar* were printed in the *Manorama*.²¹ The articles published in the *Manorama* newspaper had a strong influence on the Malayali Memorial,²² Ezhava Memorial,²³ and on the Temple Entry Struggles in Travancore²⁴.

²⁰ K. C. Macintosh, "Publication and the Print Media in Kerala: A Historical Analysis", 1921, 1965, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 42, No. 12, 2014, p. 38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24372998>.

²¹ Vasu Thilleri, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²² Malayali Memorial was a mass petition submitted to the Raja of Travancore on 1st January 1891. This petition submitted to get proper representation for the educated native youths in government jobs. Barrister G. Parameswaran Pillai was the major propounder of this petition. For details see the work P. K. K Menon, *The History of Freedom Movement in Kerala (1885-1939)*, Vol-II.

²³ Ezhava Memorial is a memorandum submitted by the Ezhavas Community to Sri Moolam Thirunal, the Raja of Travancore on 3rd September 1896. This memorandum demanded opening schools for the Ezhava children and providing opportunities for the educated Ezhavas in government jobs. For details see the work P. Chandra Mohan, *Development of Modernity in Kerala: Sree Narayana Guru, SNDP Yogam and Social Reform*, Tulika publications, 2016, New Delhi.

²⁴ Temple Entry agitation was a movement launched by Indian national Congress. As a result of this agitation the Raja of Travancore Sri Chithira thirunal Bala Rama Varma issued a proclamation on 12th November 1936. This order permitted the lower caste Hindus to enter the temples in Travancore. For details see the work S. Raimon (ed.), *The History of Freedom Movement in Kerala*, Vol-III (1938-1948), State archive Department, Government of Kerala, 2006, Thiruvananthapuram.

Newspaper journalism, which was a concept of colonial modernism, had impacted different communities and castes. This concept was also well received among the Ezhava communities. Under the guidance of the S. N. D. P., a large number of magazines and a few newspapers were published to propagate Social ideals. *Sujanandini*, published by Paravoor Keshavanasan, has the reputation of being the first newspaper of the Ezhava community. In 1907, the *Mithavadhi* newspaper, printed by Moorkoth Kumaran from Thalassery was a newspaper that received wide circulation among the Ezhava community. The famous poem, “Veenapoovu” by Kumaran Asan, was first printed in this newspaper. This newspaper also exerted an unparalleled influence in the spread of the culture of newspaper reading among the people of the Malabar region. Moorkoth Kumaran later resigned from his post as the editor, and after him, C. Krishnan became the editor in 1913. During the tenure of C. Krishnan, this newspaper played an important role in the implementation of several revolutionary Social reforms.²⁵

The “*Kerala Kaumudi*” was another newspaper that received widespread circulation among the Ezhava community. This paper was started on 24 November 1910 jointly by K. C Kumaran and C. Krishnan Vaidyar. Kerala Kaumudi came out with the slogan, “newspaper by the Society” in its initial days. It was on 1 February 1911 that the first issue of the newspaper was printed. The newspaper that first came out as a periodical under K. C Kumaran became a daily newspaper in November 1940, under his son, Sukumaran²⁶.

In the latter years of the 19th C and the early decades of the 20th C, the growth of the newspaper was directly linked to the religious, communal, and

²⁵ Vasu Thilleri, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

²⁶ Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-68.

social reform movements. As part of the growth of the national movement in Malabar, the newspapers played a significant role in propagating the ideologies of national leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi. Some of the newspapers started during this period, under the influence of the ideological shift, became the mouthpieces for the spread of the modern ideologies of socialism and communism. Though the publication of many of these papers lapsed due to the prohibitory attitude and tyrannical strong-handedness of the local rulers and the British government, and also due to financial constraints, the services rendered by them during their publication is to be greatly appreciated.²⁷

The beginnings of newspapers that criticized the rule of the local governments, and were linked to the Freedom Struggle Movements can be traced back to 1905 when the *Swadeshabhimani* newspaper was founded under the direction of Vakkom Abdul Khader Maulavi. In 1906, R. Krishna Pillai became the editor of this paper²⁸. Later, articles against the functioning of the Travancore government began to appear in this newspaper. Following this, a large number of newspapers started to function all across Kerala as part of spreading and propagating the seeds of nationalism to the people.

The *Lokamanyan* started in 1920 by Koroor Namboothirippad from Thrissur, the *Swarad* founded in 1921 by Barrister A. K. Pillai, the *Mathrubhumi* that was started at Calicut in 1923, the *Al-Ameen* founded by the Congress leader Mohammed Abdul Rahman Saheb in 1924, the *Kesari* started by Kesari Balakrishna Pillai in 1930, the *Mahatma* formed by Amshi Narayana Pillai in Thrissur, the *Navajeevan* founded by P. Kunhuraman, the *Prabhatam*

²⁷ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 94.

which was the mouthpiece of the Congress Socialist Party, the *Chandrika*” started by T. Muhammad in 1934, the Communist newspaper *Deshabhimani* founded in 1942 by M. Devadasan, and the like, as mentioned earlier, were those that delivered the ideals of the nationalist movement to the people, and that exhorted the need for responsible governance in Travancore,²⁹

The Congress leaders had decided to distribute newspapers among the educated and the literate to instil in them national feeling and pride. The *Mathrubhumi* was one such paper that was at the forefront of this initiative. The *Mathrubhumi* started in 1923 as a joint-stock company of Congress leaders and played a dominant role in the formation of nationalism amongst the people of Malabar.³⁰ It was only by 1930 that articles based on Socialist principles began to appear in this newspaper. During this period, several articles on capitalism and labour were published in the *Mathrubhumi*, and they were remarkable for their polemical fervour.³¹

From 1932 onwards, translated works also began to find a place in the *Mathrubhumi*. Articles on Lenin and Marx and their writings, translated from English and Hindi, were printed. The ideological tug of war between the Congress right-wing and the Left also found expression in this newspaper. The *Mathrubhumi* was essentially a Congress newspaper, but after 1935, it began to be seen and perceived as an organ of the right-wing faction of the Congress party.

²⁹ Jayaraj, *op. cit.*, p. 75-76.

³⁰ K.K.N. Kurup, *Nationalism and Social Change, the role of Malayalam Literature*, Thrissur, 1998, p. 127.

³¹ Dileep. M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism In Colonial South India: Malabar 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 145.

The *Al-Ameen* was another newspaper that functioned as a mouthpiece of the Congress party. This newspaper was founded by Muhammad Abdul Rahman, a nationalist Muslim from Calicut. The *Al-Ameen* gained popularity among the masses in Malabar during the Civil Disobedience Movement, and also attracted several nationalist Muslim leaders to the Movement. In 1939, the *Al-Ameen* newspaper was closed down owing to the pressure imposed on it by the British authorities³².

The “*Yuktivadi*” was another newspaper that was published under the supervision of M. C. Joseph. This newspaper published lots of articles that were concerned with the Soviet Union and its advancement in the New World. According to N. E. Balram, the workers associated with these newspapers have inculcated a firm belief in Fabien socialism.³³

The newspaper that criticized the political authority and the social taboos of Travancore was the *Swadeshabhimani*, of which the editor was K. Ramakrishna Pillai. The activities of the *Swadeshabhimani* was confined to the Travancore region, and its impact upon the regions of Malabar was quite limited. In 1910, K. Ramakrishna Pillai was evicted from Travancore on account of his “intemperate and unmitigated opposition to the monarchy”. He later settled in North Kerala and, in 1912, wrote a biography of Karl Marx. The work was the first biography to appear in any Indian language. This book, which was, a translation by K. Ramakrishna Pillai, profoundly influenced the thinking of the literate and educated politicians of Malabar.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

³³ N. E. Balram, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam, Vol-I* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1973, p. 48.

When the Congress Socialist Party was formed in Malabar in 1934, the *Prabhatham* newspaper became its official mouthpiece. It was printed at a small printing press owned by K. S. Nair. Later, the Congress Socialist Party purchased this press and renewed the publication of the *Prabhatham* under the auspices of the Party. During this time, the headquarters of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (K. P. C. C.) shifted from Calicut to Shoranur. The *Prabhatham* was published with E. M. S Namboothirippad as the editor and received wide circulation throughout Kerala. The *Prabhatham* introduced prominent thinkers and personalities such as Karl Marx, Trotsky, Lenin, and Stalin to the common mass of Kerala³⁴.

The basic difference between the *Mathrubhumi* and the *Prabhatham* newspapers was that the *Mathrubhumi* reported the issues and problems of the agricultural labourers, whereas *Prabhatham* upheld the cause of the agricultural workers in the interior regions, and the mill workers and municipal employees in the towns. *Prabhatham* vividly described the activities of the Congress Socialist Party, including the formation of trade unions and peasant unions, the resolutions adopted in various meetings, reported on the working conditions in the factories, on the existence of bonded labour in the plantations of the high ranges, and also gave extensive coverage to the progress of various strikes.³⁵

The articles that appeared in the *Prabhatham* were mainly translations. When Jayaprakash Narayan wrote an article on the federation of the 1935 Act asking people to wreck it titled “Wreck-It”, it was translated into Malayalam as “Thakarkkuka”.

³⁴ N. E. Balram, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

³⁵ Dileep Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

The publication of the *Prabhatham* newspaper had to be stopped in August 1934, owing to the repressive measures adopted by the British government against it. The main reason behind this action was that a poem by Chovvara Parameswaran, a Left Socialist writer, “glorifying the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh”, was printed in the newspaper. Because of this, the British government imposed a fine of Rs. 2000/- on the newspaper. This sum was a huge amount at that time, and the Congress Socialist Party was not in a position to pay the fine, and the only available alternative before them was the closure of the press.³⁶

However, in the year 1938, the Congress Socialist Party was able to resume the publication of the *Prabhatham*. A. K. Gopalan was the person who took the initiative to restart the newspaper. At that time, there were no assets with the publishing company, and the press was in a damaged condition. The only capital that the paper had was the union of the class conscious workers. A. K. Gopalan reminisces about those days- “On the day the newspaper resumed its publication, I went to preside over the peasant conference at Alipparamba. I took with me some copies of the paper. The price of a single copy was two annas. The moment the people saw the copies, they purchased all the copies. Later many of them became the subscribers of the newspaper and liberally donated to the fund for the newspaper”.³⁷

When the *Prabhatham* faced a crisis with a crunch in the funds, A. K. Gopalan visited Bombay, Madras, and Colombo to raise funds to continue the publication. K. Damodharan and Keraleeyan became reputed writers among the

³⁶ E.M.S. Namboothirippad, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

³⁷ A. K. Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, Trivandrum, 1973, p. 114.

Malayalees writing articles in the “*Prabhatham*” newspaper. The press was an important means for the creation and dissemination of ideas, and also provided text to the readers, and served as an important means of mobilising the people.

The magazines too played a crucial part in disseminating the national feeling and revolutionary concepts and ideas among the people, as did the newspapers. Tracing the history of the magazines, it can be seen that many of the newspapers that were founded in the 19C started as magazines and weeklies. The “*Vidyavilasini*”, published in 1881 from Thiruvananthapuram is considered to be the first magazine in the Malayalam language. Later, the second Malayalam literary magazine, the “*Vidyavinodini*”, reached the readers in 1899. In Malayalam Literature, the genre of prose began to be well received and gained the upper hand over poetry with the arrival of the *Bashaposhni* magazine in 1898. The “*Mangalodayam*” magazine was started enthusiastically by Appan Thampuran of Thrissur and Kunjikuttan Thampuran of Kodungalloor at Deshamangalath Mana. In 1934, Joseph Mundassery became the editor of this magazine, and subsequently, the focus of the magazine shifted to the problems and issues faced by the people in modern Kerala, and towards the national movement.³⁸

It was on 18 January 1932, that the *Mathrubhumi Weekly* was first issued. All the prominent writers of that time wrote articles in this weekly magazine. The articles touched upon the contemporary issues of that time. During this period, pamphlets on current problems were also in circulation.

³⁸ M. Jayaraj, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-96.

These pamphlets focus on contemporary issues, and topics related to poverty and its related problems. Left-wing Congress Party workers such as E. M. S. Namboothirippad, Subrahmanya Sharma, P. Narayanan Nair etc., took the initiative to distribute these pamphlets in Kerala.³⁹

Most of these pamphlets had been translated from various foreign languages to English, and then later translated into Malayalam. Of the important pamphlets, some were titled “What is to be done” by Lenin, “Communist Manifesto” by Marx and Engels, Stalin’s pamphlet on Philosophy. Other pamphlets included the “poverty-stricken people of the Hamlets” by Lenin, “Wage Labour and Capital” by Marx, “People’s Friend” by Dimitrov, “The victory of Socialism in USSR” by Stalin. Some indigenous pamphlets were also written and circulated at that time. They included pamphlets written by EMS Namboothirippad such as “*Swarajyam Enthinu*”(why swaraj), K. Damodaran’s “*Dravida Sanghatana*” (organisations of the poor) and “May Day”, Jayaprakash Narayanan’s “Why Socialism”. All these articles were not printed with enough copies to circulate among the masses, so active readership was necessary. All these pamphlets spread more awareness among the masses about the idea of socialism and nationalism.⁴⁰

The reading habits and culture formed and moulded by the newspapers, magazines, novels, and other articles among the people of Kerala led to the formation of libraries or reading rooms. Reading rooms were established across the state to encourage Adult education among the people. The National

³⁹ K. Gopalankutty, “The Task of Transforming the Congress in Malabar 1934-40,” Vol-5 No.2, *Studies in History*, August 1, 1989 p. 151, <https://doi.org/10.1177/025764308900500202>.

⁴⁰ N. E. Balram, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-102.

Movement in Kerala took its form through many diverse movements. The Reading Room Movement is foremost among them. They became the centres of diversity of opinion. Small libraries and reading rooms were transformed into suitable hubs for the formation of Socio-political awareness among the people.⁴¹

If we were to examine the history of the reading rooms and libraries in Kerala, it can be seen that the circumstances in which they were established were distinctly different in Travancore and Cochin than how it was in the British-ruled Malabar. In Travancore and Cochin, the rulers of those regions contributed to the growth of the libraries. However, in Malabar, it was as a result of the national movement and the political concern that libraries and reading rooms came up. The Reading Room Movement played a crucial role in the propagation of the National Movement.

It was Raja Swati Thirunal who marked the start of the Reading Room Movement in Travancore, by establishing a public library at Thiruvananthapuram in 1829. In contrast, the first library in British India was established in Calcutta only in the year 1836⁴². For this very reason, Travancore has a prominent place in the history of the library in India.

The “Suguna Poshini” established in 1894 at Vanchiyoor Kunnu is considered to be the first democratic library in Thiruvananthapuram. Following this, numerous other libraries also sprung up in Thiruvananthapuram.⁴³ Another

⁴¹ Raman Nair, “Role of Public Libraries in the National Movement of Malabar”, *International Congress on Kerala Studies*, Vol. 3, AKG Study Centre, Trivandrum, 1994, p. 7.

⁴² Pirappancode Murali, “Keralathile Grandhasala Prasthanam” In A. D. Prathapan Thayatt (ed.), *Vayanashala Charitrathinu oru Mukhavura* (Mal.), Kozhikode, Haritham Books, Kozhikode, 2006, p. 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 17.

important library in the Travancore region was the “Jnana Pradayini” at Neyyatinkara. All these libraries have a vast collection of Malayalam books.

The growth of the regional newspapers had a direct influence on the growth of the regional libraries. As most of the people of that time did not have the financial ability to have newspapers delivered to their houses, the libraries became the centres for newspaper reading. As not everyone knew how to read, it was common practice for a literate person to read the newspaper aloud to people who would gather around to hear the news⁴⁴.

As a result of Western education, the reading rooms also became platforms for discussions on social reforms and social changes and also for debates on political ideas among the people⁴⁵. Many of the upliftment programmes such as the “Ezhava Memorial”, “Malayali Memorial”, and protests like the “Nivarthana Agitation” had their roots in such discussions that took place in the reading rooms⁴⁶.

In Cochin too, as in Travancore, the proponents of the libraries were the local Kings and rulers. The Public Library established in 1861 at Ernakulam was the first library that was accessible to the masses. This library was established in a corner of the present-day Maharaja's College as a result of the efforts of Diwan Shankunni Menon and F. C., a European who was the headmaster of the college at the time. In 1837, the government took the initiative to establish a Public

⁴⁴ Raman Nair, “Role of Public Libraries in the National Movement of Kerala”, *International Congress on Kerala Studies*, Thiruvananthapuram, August 1994. <http://eprints.rclis.org/7921>, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Raman Nair, “Role of Village Libraries in the Social and Political Reform of Kerala”, *Library and Information Science: S Panduranga Reddy Festschrift*. Hyderabad, 1998, p. 174.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Library at Thrissur. It was after the national movement spread across the local kingdoms of Cochin that the reading room movement became widespread. Following this, another library was established at Kodungalloor in 1912.

The Victoria Jubilee reading room started at Irinjalakuda in 1889 was renamed the Mahatma Reading Room under the influence of the National Movement.⁴⁷

In Malabar, however, the growth of the Library and Reading Room Movement was very different from what was seen in Travancore and Cochin. The Library Movement in Malabar was also the dissemination hubs of the ideologies and the literary culture of the National Movement, and of the Social Reform Movement. The Malabar District Congress that was convened under the direction of the senior Congress leader Annie Beasant in 1916, decided on the formation of independent panchayats. These panchayats were handed the responsibility of setting up schools and reading Rooms in each village.⁴⁸

In the annual meeting of the K. P. C. C. convened at Ernakulam in 1924, a political decision to disseminate the ideologies of the Congress party through the libraries was arrived at. As a part of the Congress rally held at Madras in December 1927, the Fifth All-India Library Association meeting was also convened. As the result of this meeting, Sri Ranganathan, who was the secretary of the Madras Reading Association sent Ambatt Sivarama Menon to Malabar to promote the Library Movement of the Madras state in Kerala. After discussing with the Special Officer for the education of the Malabar Special Board,

⁴⁷ Pirappancod Murali. *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁴⁸ K. S. Ranjth, *Rural Libraries of Kerala, Kerala Program on Local Government*, Centre for Developmental Studies, TVM, 2004, p. 7.

Sivarama Menon prepared the programme for the promotion of the library movement. Sivarama Menon who travelled across various parts of Malabar did not confine his activity to mere speeches, but met the influential citizens of each place and requested their help to establish libraries. He also formed a subcommittee to create a library association in Calicut. He set the subscription rates for institutions who wanted to join this library association as Rs. 3. In 1931, the Samastha Kerala Pusthakashala Samithi was formed under the supervision of Sivarama Menon. As a part of this organization, he also formed a trimonthly magazine called the *Granthaviharam*.⁴⁹

The propagation of ideologies through the reading rooms was officially acknowledged by the Malabar unit of the Indian National Congress. Thikkodiyar, in his autobiography titled, *Arangu Kaanatha Nadan*, describes the beginnings of the library movement in his hometown:

Kelappan, who returned to his native place after his release from the jail, gathered a meeting at his place. The first thing he did intend to dust off Social inequalities and to instil the spirit of Independence among the youth, was to form a rural reading room. As the activities of this rural reading room began to grow, unemployed youths who whiled away their time in playing cards, gambling, and gossiping, began to be attracted to the reading room. A large number of people started coming to the reading room in the evening. The membership increased. Many even tried their hand at writing books. The activists in the reading rooms and the libraries grew. The youth began to take interest in discussing Socio-

⁴⁹ Maduvanam.C.Krishna Kurup, Grandhasala Prasthanam Keralathinte Purogathiyum Athinulla Stanavum Prayojanavum , *Mathrubhumi Daily* 1943, July 18, p. 15.

political affairs. This rural reading room also later became a platform where many Social-plays were scripted and rehearsed.⁵⁰

Thikkodiyān also describes how the conservative-orthodox people of that region responded to the establishment of new libraries. They spread the rumours that libraries were dangerous, that they corrupted the youth, that it would erase the belief in God, and that temples would be defiled and contaminated by the people of lower castes. This shows the impact the reading rooms made on society. That it acted as a harbinger of change was easily recognised by the conservative elements in the society Hence their opposition to the library movement.

As a part of Gandhi's Constructive Programme, the play "Satyavathi Parinayam" was enacted in the rural reading room using Harijan students under the initiative of K. Kelappan in Malabar.⁵¹

Thikkodiyān also states that it was the Pallikkara Library that awoke the poet in him. It was in the library that he discovered that there were other books in the world than those by MacMillan. On reaching home from the library, he would spread the book on its back and painstakingly join letters and words together. This was how he began reading in his childhood.⁵²

In his novel, *Muthassi*, Cherukad reveals how the formation of the reading Rooms brought about changes in his town, and how this movement brought the participation of women into the public sphere. The major character

⁵⁰ Thikkodiyān, *Arangu Kaanatha Nadan* (Mal.), D. C. Books, Kottayam, 2008, pp. 27-30 (*my trans.*).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

in this novel, Nanikutty Teacher, exhorts the usefulness of the libraries that had been established in the region:

The crimes in the region are increasing due to the youth leading a slothful lifestyle without a proper job or aim. With the coming up of libraries, the youth began to spend their precious time reading, collecting memberships, participating in public meetings and debating on political issues.⁵³

Another character in the novel, Ityacharan Nair says that the library was the Congress. That is, the libraries were established for propagating the Congress party's ideas.

Cherukad, in his autobiography, *Jeevithapatha*, states that it was the youth association of Pulamanthol Kunnathuparambu that formed the reading room and that it was this very same reading room that attracted him to the ideologies of the Congress party:

I would go to the reading room and read the newspaper and listen to the discussions there in the evenings, and at times, I too would take part in the discussions. We, who read the *Mathrubhumi* newspaper and discussed the issues raised in the paper, thus became members of the Congress party.⁵⁴

It could be argued that there were fictional characters but Cherukad's novel *Muthassi* had elements of autobiography in it and the protagonist Nani teacher was modelled on his wife who was active in the teachers' movement.

⁵³ Cherukad, *Muthassi* (Mal.), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, 1989, pp. 105-107.

⁵⁴ Cherukad, *Jeevithapatha* (Mal.), Current Books, Thrissur, Reprint 2017, p. 151.

What is important is that Thikkodiyan and Cherukad, in different regions and different ways, describes the changes that the reading room brought about -which is remarkably similar in their respective villages. The literary works produced during this time bear witness to the changes brought about in different regions as the result of the setting up reading rooms.

It was with the formation of the All Kerala Library Committee in 1931 that a significant change was brought about in the functioning of the Reading Room Movement in Malabar. The libraries and the reading rooms that were established in Kerala during this period did not have much turnover in terms of finance, and the revenue generated was quite low. The financial crisis of 1929 and other problems only served to worsen this condition. In this situation, the respective political organisations were able to steer the libraries out of this storm. As a part of this, the library activists rallied behind the political leaders and served to instil a strong sense of direction in the movement⁵⁵.

After 1930, the reading rooms were transformed into the intellectual nerve centres of Malabar. After the Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934, as a part of its ideological dissemination, the party fostered the development of reading rooms and youth organisations. As per the records of 1924, there were 24 registered reading rooms in Malabar, with a total membership of 2802 individuals⁵⁶. The reading rooms established in Malabar were built like sheds. They functioned in buildings made of blocks and straw-thatched roofs. These reading rooms cannot be compared in any way with the reading rooms that we can see today. They were not stocked with sufficient

⁵⁵ K. S. Ranjith, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁵⁶ Dilip M Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

books, magazines or other reading material. The primary feature of these reading rooms was the newspapers⁵⁷. Even with these minimum facilities and infrastructure, they attracted the youth and made changes in their attitudes.

If we were to examine the names of the reading rooms that were established in Kerala, we can see that their names kept changing over time. In the early days, the reading rooms had such names as, “Jnanaprakashini”, “Vidyavardhini”, “Vijnanavardhini”, “Jnanapradhayini”, “Athmaposhini” etc. The meanings of all these names were linked to the act of imparting knowledge to the people. The reading rooms which came later had names like Motilal Nehru Vayanasala, Sengupta Reading Room etc. This is indicative of the fact that the names served as a memorial of the early national leaders. In the third phase, many reading Rooms had names like “Deshiya Vayanashala”, “Bhartiya Mandiram Vayanashala” (established by Vishnu Bhartiya in Naniyoor), “Deshapriya” (established in Kannapuram Mottam), “Navajeevan Vayanashala” (established in Eranjolil), “Deshaposhini Vayanashala” (established in Calicut). All these names are indicative of the concept of nationalism that was growing stronger in the Malabar region⁵⁸. Along with these the concept of a reading room where earlier people spent their leisure, also changed. The reading room now assumed a new vitality and in due course became one of the centres of disseminating revolutionary ideas, leading to an ideological transformation.

The active spread of the Socialist-Communist ideologies across Kerala after 1934 had exerted a strong influence on the naming of the reading rooms. The “Thozhilali Vayanashala” was established in Balipattanam, the “Abu-

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Chathukutty Vayanashala” was established as a memorial to Abu and Chathukutty who were killed in the police firing at Mattanoor in 1940, showcase the changing trends and the influence of ideologies.⁵⁹

Most of the reading rooms in Malabar were situated overhead or close to some tea stall. The “Sree Harshan Vayanashala” established in Kalyasherri was situated above the tea stall of a person called Kandathil Appu. E. K. Nayanar describes the beginnings of this reading room:

It was Keralaleeyan, K. P. Gopalan and K. P. R Gopalan together who started a reading room at Kalyasherri. Keralaleeyan called us to establish the Sree Harshan Vayanashala. Sree Harshan was a Harijan activist who had died as a prisoner in the Central Jail in Kannur. The Sree Harshan Vayanashala was situated close to my house. It was a great blessing for me. After school, I would go straight to the Vayanashala. In those days, a lot of people would gather in the Vayanashala. Someone would lonely read out the newspaper. Individuals like Keralaleeyan would express their opinion about the various news. Those who listened would then raise their doubts and questions. The leaders would clear the doubts. The Sree Harshan Vayanashala also formed a drama group for enacting plays, and under the auspices of this group, plays such as Pattabakki were staged in the town.⁶⁰

The “Yuvajana Vayanashala” was another reading room that was established in Kalyasherri in the same manner as was the “Sree Harshan Vayanashala”. This

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ E. K. Nayanar, *Samaratheechoolayil: E. K. Nayanarinde Athmakadha* (Mal.), DC Books, Kottayam, 1995, pp. 16-17.

reading room was situated above the tea stall run by a person called Nurudhinn. The organization is known as the “Bala Baratha Sangam” was formed in this reading room. This organization was modelled after the Young Pioneers of the Soviet Union. It was Keralaleeyan and Krishna Pillai who took the initiative to form this organization⁶¹.

The “Vijnanavardhini Vayanashala” that was established in Edanoor in April 1934 too was situated above the tea stall run by Maroli Ravunni. This reading room had its handwritten magazine, which was known by the name “Yuvabhanya”⁶².

What can be understood based on examining the working environment of the reading rooms is that the functioning of the reading rooms was directly linked to the tea stalls. The communal drinking of tea was one of the primary distinguishing features of these reading rooms. As tea was a new drink introduced by the British, the drinking of tea did not have any social taboos associated with it. Many of the people who frequented the tea stalls did not know how to read. Tea is also a drink that stimulates the brain. As the acts of drinking tea and reading the newspaper came together at such places, discussions on political issues became frequent, and a new culture linked to the reading rooms took form⁶³.

We can compare this phenomenon to the coffee houses of England in the 18th C. These coffee houses had played an important role in making the people aware of the political atmosphere of England at that time.

⁶¹ Kunjananthan Nair, Polichezhuth, *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Feb. 22, 2004, p. 18.

⁶² Tagore Library and Reading Room *Souvenir*, Edannur, 1985, p. 35.

⁶³ Dilip M Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

The Reading Room Movement took form by linking together the reading rooms that had been established mostly by individual initiatives in Malabar. In 1937, the Malabar Reading Room Conference was organised at Calicut. Representatives from the reading room in various places took part in this meeting. K. Kelappan presided over this conference. The welcome speech was delivered by Madhuvanam Krishna Kurup. It was K. Damodaran who played an important role in convening this conference⁶⁴.

In this conference, many felt that the reading room movement needed an organisational structure and this was implemented in this conference. It was also decided to establish a reading room at every primary educational institution and elementary school in Malabar. It was due to the lack of finances that most of the reading rooms had fallen into decline. It was also decided to convert the reading rooms in rural areas into centres of rural upliftment. Night tutorials, Hindi classes, rural entrepreneurship, Harijan service organizations, and other services were also to be made available with the functioning of the reading room. Games that would build up team spirit and songs were also decided to be held and this was to be propagated through songs. This conference was crucial in giving a direction to the reading room movement in Malabar.⁶⁵

After 1935, the rift between the left-wing faction of the Congress party (Congress Socialist party), and the right-wing began to widen. It was the left-wing faction that followed the Socialist-Communist ideological principles that had a close working relationship with the Reading Rooms. The Hindi language propagation was an issue that was specifically mentioned in the 1937 reading

⁶⁴ *Mathrubhumi Daily*, June 13, 1937, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

room conference. The reading rooms functioned as major centres for the propagation of Hindi. Knowledge of the Hindi language was required when communicating with leaders from the northern part of India. Comrade Krishna Pillai's earliest political activity was his part as a Hindi language proponent. Other than these activities, the reading rooms also organized sports competitions, including football.⁶⁶

E. K. Nayanar states that as part of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Congress party in 1935, the Sree Harshan Vayanashala had organized volleyball and football matches in his hometown⁶⁷.

Each reading room in Kerala had its style of functioning. Usually, most of the reading rooms open at 4 PM. The reason for this timing was that this was the time when the farmers and other workers came back from their work. P. Narayan Nair describes this in his autobiography:

The farm labourer named Kottayil Krishnan underwent a marked change after being introduced to the Reading Room. Kottayil Krishnan was the cattle-herder of the prominent landlord of North Malabar Karakattidathil Nayanar. When the Punam Farmers Movement gained strength, he joined it. He actively participated in the programmes of the movement, despite the surveillance of the Police. Krishnan, who joined the reading classes under the aegis of the movement, learnt to read and write within a short

⁶⁶ T. J. Nossitor, *Communism in Kerala: A Study of Political Adaptation*. C Hurst & Company, London, 1982, p. 72.

⁶⁷ E. K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

time. Inculcating the political literature that was in vogue at that time, he became an enthusiastic worker in the Taluk farmers association.⁶⁸

This sheds light on how the reading classes conducted by the reading rooms influenced the farmers.

All the reading rooms functioned according to a by-law. Each reading room had regular meetings, and some classified their membership into 4 classes- A, B, C and D. This classification was based on the monthly subscription rates. All reading rooms collected only a nominal subscription to attract the widest participation⁶⁹.

The role played by the reading rooms in the political sphere is an acknowledged fact. Most of the people who were arrested concerning the Morazha Case were those who were active in the “Velam Vayanashala.”⁷⁰

“*Swatantra Bharatam*” was a publication that functioned in secret during the Quit India Movement. This journal was distributed via the reading rooms. The magazine had a note printed on the top of the cover page that read: “For the attention of the readers: as we have no sufficient paper to print copies for everyone, it is requested that the current copies may be handed over to other readers and circulated without destroying it.”⁷¹

The registration of the Kerala Granthashala Sangam formed under the Malabar Vayanashala Sangam in 1934 that included all the reading rooms in

⁶⁸ P. Narayanan Nair, *Aranoottandiloode* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 1973, p. 119.

⁶⁹ Velam Public Reading Room, Golden Jubilee *Souvenir*, 1988, p. 118.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Raman Nair, *The Role of Public Libraries...*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

Kerala was another important milestone in the history of the Reading Room Movement in Kerala. This organization to bring together all the libraries in Kerala started functioning with the blessings of Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, who was a library science scholar⁷².

The first conference of the Travancore Granthashala Sangam was held at the P. K. M. Library at Ambalapuzha in 1945. Representatives of 47 Libraries in Travancore took part in this meeting. P. N Panicker was the leader of this movement. The Travancore Granthashala Sangam was established under the Travancore company act on 27 May 1947. This organization functioned with extreme national zeal and the blessings of the government.⁷³

After the state of Thirukochi came into existence in 1949, the activities of the Travancore Granthashala Sangam spread to Cochin as well. After the state of Kerala was formed on 1 November 1956, the Travancore Granthashala Sangam changed its name to the Kerala Granthashala Sangam. Thus, the Reading Room/Library Movements which occurred under different political regimes joined together and led to the formation of the Kerala Granthashala Sangam.⁷⁴

The formation of the Sahitya Pravarthana Sahakarana Sangam (SPSS) in 1949 was another significant event in the growth of the library movement in Kerala. As a result of the activities of this publishing company, over 2000 titles were printed and published in Kerala within 18 years.⁷⁵ These books enriched the libraries in Kerala.

⁷² Pirappancod Murali, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

⁷³ K. S. Ranjith, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Reading rooms are channels of great social and political change. They had a significant role in empowering the ordinary and traditionally submissive farmers and labourers to react against the exploitative and abusive practices of the feudal landlords and the aristocrats. The growth of the reading rooms led to the increased appreciation of the works of progressive writers. Thus the library movement also directly contributed to the growth of progressive literature.

The reading rooms greatly helped to spread the Socialist, Nationalist, and Communist ideologies among the peasants and labourers in Kerala. The educational advancements of Kerala and the popularity attained by the Granthashala Movement in later years can mainly be attributed to the systematic work carried out by the Vayanasalas of Kerala. The attitudinal change among the people which however cannot be quantified but which became manifest in many ways is indicative of an overall ideological transformation.

CHAPTER III

DRAMA AND POLITICAL MOBILISATION IN KERALA

Kerala has a very rich history of visual arts. There are numerous art forms linked to religious rituals and communal traditions in Kerala. It was when visual art forms such as Kathakali, Kakkaserry Natakam, Theyyam, Modiyettu, Padayani, Krishna Natakam ruled the stage that drama made its entrance to Kerala

The theatre stage in Kerala was much older than the Malayalam drama. The drama movement had spread to other parts of India quite early. Kattumadam Narayanan records that the drama considered to be the first in an Indian language was the translation of Harshan's *Rathnavali* into Punjabi in 1634.¹

The national consciousness that sprouted among the Indian population was also reflected in the growth of the drama. It was in the regions of Maharashtra and Bengal that the development of the drama was the greatest. The *Madhavaravu Peshwa*, which is considered to be the first drama written in the Marathi language, was staged in 1860. It was with the *Neeldharpan* scripted by Dheenbandhu that the contemporary problems and issues faced by the farmers were first presented on the stage. Most of the actors in this play were ordinary labourers. The abuse and the exploitation that they faced were presented very powerfully. The drama was powerful enough to question the afflictive practice

¹ A. Appukuttan, "Keraleeya Rangavedhiyude Oru Noottandu", in M. N. Vijayan (ed.), *Nammude Sahithyam, Nammude Samuham*(Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2000, p. 314.

of the white man. However, the British government later enforced a ban on this drama by implementing the Dramatic Performance Act.²

In later times, as a result of the influence of Western drama, numerous drama groups came up in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. It was at the same time when the drama stage began to develop in all Indian languages that it started to grow in Kerala.

In Kerala, the drama first developed in the form of translations of Sanskrit plays. Drama literature such as Kerala Varma Valiya Koyi Thampuran's critical review of the *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* in 1882 titled *Kerala Bhasha Shakuntalam*, Chambathil Chathukutty Mannadiyar's *Janaki Parinayam* in 1888, M. R. Raja Varma Thampuran's *Malayala Shakuntalam*, Kunjikuttan Thampuran's *Ascharya Choodhamani*, and Chathukutty Mannadiyar's *Uthara Ramacharithram* fuelled the growth of the drama in Kerala. Of these, it was Valiya Koyi Thampuran's *Kerala Bhasha Shakuntalam* that was staged in many parts of Kerala.³

By the last leg of the 19th C, there were five major streams of the drama. The first was the translations of Shakespeare's plays, the second was the critique of Sanskrit plays. The third stream was the musical plays, and especially the plays modelled after the Tamil plays, including the *Aryamala Natakam*, *Kovilan Charithram*, *Nalla Thanga Charithram*, and *Sadaram*, were being staged in

² Vallikkavu Mohandas, *KPACyude Charithram* (Mal.), SPCS, Kottayam, 2002, p. 23.

³ M. Achuthan, *Swathanthra Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2002, p. 225.

Kerala⁴. T. C. Achuyutha Menon's *Sangeethanaishadam* is generally considered as the first of the Malayalam musical plays. This was a highly popular play.

The fourth stream of the drama was the dramatization of the Puranic tales. The *puranic* plays were in Sanskrit. The fifth stream was the plays that were independent of the Puranas. This important period in the history of the drama is represented by C. V. Raman Pillai's comical satires. The *Chandramukhi Vilasam* is considered to be one of his most powerful plays. Kandathil Vargheese Mappila's *Eprayakutti* also belongs to this category.⁵

The growth of different drama kinds of literature led to the composition of plays that criticized drama literature. The *Chakki Changaran* is a play that belongs to this category. *Thekkan Chakki Changaran* by P. Raman Kurupp in 1894, and K. C. Narayanan Namboothiri's *Vadakkan Chakki Changaran* were two plays that satirised drama-literature. Kochu Eapen Tharakan's *Mariyamma* is a play that stands apart from the other Malayalam plays that were staged during this period due to its striking plot. This work was a dramatic portrayal of the mother-in-law wars that existed in the Christian community. Though this first appeared as a musical play, it is also described as a prose-drama that was the face of social reform⁶.

With the start of the 20th C, the genre of Malayalam drama began to expand greatly, and numerous sub-genres were formed. The entry of C. V. Raman Pillai into the Malayalam drama literature was another event that

⁴ K. M. George, *Adhunika Malayala Sahitya Charithram Prasthanangaliloode* (Mal.), DC Books, Kottayam, Revised edition, 2018, p. 421.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

enriched this literary genre. C. V. Raman Pillai's entrance also signalled the entry of the satirical-comedy plays in Kerala. It is with his plays that the relation between drama literature and the drama stage came to be acknowledged. An intense mockery of the contemporary Social norms and traditions is a distinguishing feature of C. V's satirical comedy.⁷ The first of his satirical comedies was the *Kuruppilla Kalariyaanu* which was staged in 1909. The formation of the prose-drama is generally considered as beginning with this play. It is also notable that C. V. engaged with plays such as *Kuruppilla Kalariyaanu* in the same period when plays such as *Dharma Rajyam* and *Ramarajum Bhahadur* were also composed.⁸

After 1925, Malayalam drama literature became independent of the influence of mere translations and musical plays, and the drama movement gave way to the genre of prose drama. The momentum derived from the historical novels and satirical comedies of C. V. Raman Pillai gave the impetus for the strong development of the drama movement in Thiruvananthapuram. The influence of this growth is highly apparent in the plays of E. V. Krishna Pillai. On the one hand, Krishna Pillai used his masterly scriptwriting to write serious plays, and on the other, he also gave due importance to satirical comedy. E. V's first satirical comedy was the *Kallapramanam*; he also wrote works such as *Kuruppinte Daily*.⁹

While the development of the drama movement in Travancore was in an above-mentioned manner, the growth of the drama movement in Malabar was

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

focused on social and political themes. If the history of the drama movement in Malabar were to be examined, it can be seen that its early stages mirrored the history of the visual arts. The earliest visual arts in Malabar were the primary ritualistic art forms of Northern Kerala such as the Theyyam, Thirayam, and the Kuriñji Aattam. Most of these art forms were centred and staged around temples.

However, in North Malabar, the growth of the drama movement was through the musical plays of Tamil Nadu and the *Vellari Natakam*. If we were to look into the development of the *vellari* plays, it can be seen that after the first harvest and the ‘Punja Krishi’, the farmers would cultivate Vellari(cucumber) in their fields. When the Vellari began to bear fruit, they would come to stay and keep watch over it. Thus, the first plays were staged in the platforms which were built by the watchers to keep guard over the fields¹⁰. The watchers played multiple roles in the plays and emulated the musical plays which were being performed in that period. The themes of many of these Vellari plays were family quarrels and conflicts with the neighbours and the like. Important Social issues or philosophical topics were never the focus of these plays. The *vellari* plays were primarily a form of art to pass the time. These plays were not regarded as ‘high art’¹¹.

The beginnings of the drama-tradition in North Malabar can be seen with the play, “*Amshumathi*”, by Kunniyoor Kunjambu Krupp, who was also the uncle of Mahakavi Kuttamath. The play, “*Dharmaguptam*”, was in circulation in

¹⁰ K. V. Kunhikannan, *Yavanikayku Pinnil* (Mal.), Kannur, 2000, p. 17.

¹¹ P. Appukuttan, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

a handwritten form in Malabar much before 1880¹². The Paramasiva Vilasam, a drama-troupe started by Kottakal P. S. Varrier, performed the Ramayana and the Shakuntalam in various places. This was the first locally-formed drama company in Malabar.¹³

Most of the plays that were staged in Malabar in the early decades of the 20C, served to bring about many improvements to the field of drama in Kerala. Many of them tried to instil a sense of nationalism and patriotic fervour. Some of them portrayed the prevailing social evils and invoked people to react against them. All these plays were staged in the rural areas of Malabar and greatly influenced the poor common folk. All of the changing political ideologies and thoughts were mirrored in the plays of that period. When Gandhi withdrew the Civil Disobedience movement and guided the Constructive Programme, this greatly influenced the plays of the time.

Many of the plays of Vidwan P. Kelu Nair strongly reflected the political upheavals of that time. Kelu Nair was a multi-talented genius. He was a noted poet, playwright, and nationalist. Kelu Nair, who returned to Kerala after serving in the Army in northern India, composed numerous plays. Though all the characters in his plays were Puranic characters, nationalism and love for the motherland were reflected in the issues they dealt with. Kelu Nair adopted a presentation that differed from the Conventional styles. For instance, the invocations of the *Padhuka Pattabhishekam*. The famous song of this drama later became associated with the national movement and was sung at all meetings

¹² P. Appukuttan, *Ibid.*, p. 321.

¹³ Kunjikkannan, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

and rallies in Malabar.¹⁴ Two other plays of Kelu Nair were the *Pakkanar Charitam* and the *Kabirdas Charitam*.¹⁵ Both of these plays had themes that resisted casteist practices. Kelu Nair, who was a follower of Gandhi, firmly believed in the Constructive Programme and Khadi. Therefore, his plays also propagated the concept of the Khadi.¹⁶

N. V. Krishna Warriar opines that if today's generation were to evaluate the plays of Kelu Nair, they would find many instances of artistic and literary shortcomings. However, at the time when these plays were staged, they were able to inspire and mobilise people and create an upheaval in the land.¹⁷

Another playwright who was attracted by Gandhi's Constructive Programme in northern Kerala was Mahakavi Kuttamath. The play “*Balagopalan*” is considered to be his most prominent work. The acute grief of poverty and the innocent devotion of a boy is presented in this play. Though all of his plays were musical plays, themes of nationalism were visible in all his works. Another important play of Mahakavi Kuttamath was the *Devayani Charitam*. This play advocated the need for a person to practice moderation. The nationalist A. V. Kunjambu acted in this play, and thus gained popularity in his hometown. The *Vidyashangadhvani* and *Chitrantharagal* were the plays that Kuttamath wrote criticising the casteist practices.¹⁸

¹⁴ K. K. N.Kurupp, *Nationalism and Social Change: The Role of Malayalam Literature*, Thrissur 1998, p. 101.

¹⁵ There was a retelling of ancient stories with a view to propagate Gandhian ideals.

¹⁶ K. K. N Kurup, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁷ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, 345.

¹⁸ Appukuttan, *op. cit.*, 324.

The period after 1930 gave birth to a new era in the history of drama in Kerala. In the early days of the 20th C, there were substantial changes in the Social reform movements in Kerala. In the period between 1930 and 1940, discussions on women and their rights took place in the backdrop of the national movement. Gender equality, women's education, family issues, and other public issues including the participation of women were discussed and debated. As a part of this, new plays took form in Kerala, and they were called Protest Theatre. This form of drama, in addition to lending a new layer of creativity to the drama literature, also resisted the Social evils and other malpractices¹⁹.

The Namboothiris were the class that influenced the existing Social and casteist practices. Though they were at the top of the caste hierarchy, many malpractices were present in this community. The Namboothiri women who were known as 'Antharjanam' were those who suffered the most. The task of 'modernizing' their community was taken up by Namboothiri youth, and in this backdrop, the Yogakshema Sabha was formed and started functioning in 1909²⁰.

It was in the same period that Yogakshema Sabha was formed, that other caste-based organisation such as the N. S. S. (Nair Service Society) and the S. N. D. P. (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam) were also formed. The concept of nationalism also reached the people at around this same time. It was in this circumstance that a Brahmin youth came forward with Drama-literature that was aimed at reforming his community. The young man was V. T. Bhattatirippad. He was a Nationalist, and took part in the Congress session at

¹⁹ N. Divya, "Drama of the Early 20th Century, the Kerala Reform Movement and Namboodiri Women" , *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. vol. 24, no. 2, June 2017, pp. 218–19. , doi:10. 1177/0971521517697880

²⁰ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*

Ottapalam, and also in the rally at Ahmedabad in 1921. He also firmly believed in anti-casteism²¹.

V. T. Bhattatirippad's first play *Adukkalayil Ninum Arangathekku*, (lit. From the Kitchen to the stage) was first staged in 1929 at the Yogakshema Sabha meeting. This play was well received by the Namboothiri youth. However, this play was criticized by the traditionalists and the conservative elements of the Namboothiri community²².

In the play *Adukkalayil Ninum Arangathekku*, V. T depicted the pathetic condition of the women of the Namboothiri community. As per the customs of the Namboothiris, only the eldest son of the family was permitted to marry. All the other male members had to follow the practice of 'Sambandham'. Whereas this practice existed among the males, the women were permitted to marry only within their community. This created a lot of problems in the community. A major consequence of this inequality was Polygamy. Another problem that existed in the community in addition to this was the considerable age gap between those who got married.

The major characters in the play *Adukkalayil Ninum Arangathekku*, were Kunju, his sister Thethi, and Madhavan. The story is based on the life of a Brahmin family in a place called Vilayoor. Madhavan and Thethi fall in love with each other. Madhavan had received a Western education. However, Kunju, against the wishes of Thethi, decided to marry her to Karakkatakunnath Karanavar who was old enough to be her father. As a result of Madhavan's intervention, Kunju received an injunction order from the court, and later, the

²¹ K. K. N. Kurupp, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

²² N. Divya, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

marriage of the Karanavar had to be called off. Later, Madhavan married Thethi. This is the plot of the play. The play was well received by the people. A major reason cited for this is that, in the play, the actors were not merely acting, but living out their lives on the stage.²³

Senior Nationalist K. Kelappan had this to say about the play. “This day, the Namboothiri community has progressed greatly.” However, this play was an important milestone in the improvement of the Namboothiri community. E. M. S. commented on the success of this play: “What the newspapers and other media could not do within the Namboothiri community even in ten years, the one play *Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku*, could achieve.”²⁴

Other plays that highlighted the problems and issues in the Namboothiri community were also staged. Important among them were the works of M. R. Bhattatirippad and M. T. Bhattatirippad. M. R. Bhattatirippad's *Marakudaykkulille Mahanarakam* and M. T. Bhattatirippad's *Ruthumathi* written in 1938, primarily dealt with the hardships faced by the Namboothiri women.

In *Marakudaykkulille Mahanarakam*, M. R. Bhattatirippad portrays the life of Itipalthi Antharjanam. Itipalthi, an Antharjanam, is the third wife of Poonthathappalli Moosad. The hardships which she had to face at the house (Illam) of Moosad were many. She had to undergo much abuse at the hands of

²³ E. M. S. Namboothirippad, *How I Became a Communist*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1987, p. 78.

²⁴ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 347 (*My Trans.*).

Moosad's first two wives, and finally, with no other way out, she commits suicide²⁵.

Another play that dealt with the difficulties of the Namboothiri women was *Rithumathi*. This play by M. P. Bhattatirippad (Premji) depicts the condition of Namboothiri women of menstruating age. Namboothiri women who attain the menstrual age have to cut off all ties with the outer world and be confined within the walls of the house, and when venturing out, use a *marakuda* (a veiling umbrella)²⁶.

The play "*Thozil Kendrangathileku*" stood apart among the social plays due to its excellent portrayal of its themes and representation of characters, and it marked a revolutionary change in society, and at the beginning of women's emancipation. This play was influential in providing impetus to social change and the strengthening of the women's emancipation within the Antharjanam community that was kick-started by the drama literature and creations staged by V.T. Bhattathirippad, M.R.B, and M.T. Bhattathirippad.

This play also has the distinction of being the first skit in Malayalam that was written by women, directed by women, and performed by women²⁷. This play was written and staged in 1948 intending to spread the concept of the

²⁵ N. Divya, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

²⁶ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

²⁷ K. N. Ganesh, "Thozhilkendram Puthulokathinte Naadhi". In Ushakumari (ed), *Thozhilkendrathilekku – Nadakam, Charithram, Padanam* (Mal.), Samatha. Thrissur, 2014, p. 313.

“employment centre” (*thozhil kendram*) that was organised by women and had functioned for a long time at Lakkidi in Palakkad.²⁸

If we were to examine the backdrop under which the concept of employment hubs for the Antharjanam women was formed, we see that it is linked with the formation of the Antharjana Samajam, which was started in 1931 as a women’s wing of the Yogakshema Sabha. The Antharjana Samajam was formed at Nenmini Mangalam under the direction of Parvathy Nenmini Mangalam and Priya Dutta.²⁹ Though the Samajam was formed, its activities did not spread throughout most of Kerala.

It was in the Yogakshema Sabha meeting at Ongallur in 1945 under the leadership of E. M. S Namboodiripad that the Antharjana Samajam gained force. It was in this meeting that E. M. S. Namboodiripad put forward the concept of “Namboothiriye Manushyanakuka” (Make the Namboothiri a Human being). This exhortation paved the way for numerous changes within the Namboothiri community. The Namboothiri women were eager to get education and to appear in public places. The idea of setting up employment hubs was formed in this meeting, and everyone approved it. In this way, an employment hub solely for Namboothiri women was established at Lakkidi.

The employment training centre that was set up in 1947 at the Mangalam Mana donated by C. M. C. Namboodiripad, was the first commune of women³⁰.

²⁸ Premji, “Antharjana Samajam: Adukalayil Ninnun Arangathekku”, in Ushakumari (ed), *Thozhilkendrathilekku – Nadakam, Charithram, Padanam* (Mal.), Samatha. Thrissur, 2014, p. 172.

²⁹ Usha Kumari, *Thozil Kendrangathileku*, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

³⁰ Girish Vishnu Namboothiri, *Principles of Structuring Community: The Case of Namboodiris of Malabar*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Kannur University, 2014, p. 192.

The Namboothiri women received training in skills including Tailoring, Embroidery, Weaving, Spinning, and Primary Health Care.³¹

The goal of the Yajana Yatra (Charity Drive) of the Yogakshema Sabha included raising sufficient funds and financial cooperation to establish the employment centres. This organisation also raised awareness among the Antharjanam women that the path of progress would be smooth only if they could achieve financial security through self-employment. In the initial stages, 16 students took part in the training at the employment centre. When E. M. S. Namboodirippad asked of the women who had taken up residential training the reason for their interest, some answered that they wanted to be free from domestic abuse, and others wanted to gain financial returns by working.³²

After the death of Parvathy Nenmini Mangalam who had played a decisive role in the establishment of the employment centre, the centre was named as the Parvathy Ninmini Mangalam Thozhil Kendram. However, this centre faced a lot of hostility from the conservative elements who were against this kind of social progress, and who went so far as to refer to the employment centre as the 'Thatri Memorial Vyabhichara Kendram' (in derogatory terms, as a brothel).

This play, Thozhil Kendrathilekku which was written and performed by women themselves, was staged in the Yogakshema Sabha meeting at Cherpu in 1948. The play deals with the issues arising from the androcentric familial system. The protagonist of the play is a Man, though having received an English education, justifies the traditional system of the family. Powerful characters such

³¹ Premji, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 286.

as Parvathy, Devaki, and Devasena raise their voices for the rights of women³³. Most of the stagings of this play were at the Manas (traditional houses) of the Namboodiris. The Antharjanam women were not permitted to even be seated in the arena where the plays were staged. They had to watch the play, seated beyond the portico, in the veranda, behind makeshift cloth curtains that were made by tying together the *mundu* (a long cloth worn around the waist).

After the play, *Thozil Kendrangathileku*, was staged, more and more Antharjanam women came to the employment centre at Lakkidi to work. The character of Devaki, who takes up a major role in this play, who forsakes her married life, and obtains freedom, by taking up work at the employment centre, sends out a clear message to the Namboothiri women. This play stressed the fact that the Namboothiri women could sustain themselves only by taking up some form of employment³⁴. 1000 copies of this play were printed at the Yogakshema Press in 1948. All the copies were stored at the Illam (traditional house) of Pariyanambatta Divakaran Namboodiri, who was the make-up man of this play, for safekeeping. Later, these copies were seized by the Police during a raid that was conducted as part of a Communist hunt. Moreover, due to Section 10 of the Dramatic Performance Act being passed in 1949 that required any staging of a play to have prior approval and permission of the authorities, further staging of the *Thozil Kendrangathileku* was not possible.³⁵

Towards Radicalisation:

As all the plays that were instrumental in the reformation of the

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Namboothiri community were staged inside the Illams, the Namboothiri Antharjanam women, widows, and girls were not only able to view the plays, they also got the chance to see plays that they normally would not have been able to see due to the restrictions in venturing out³⁶. Another feature of these plays was that the various roles were all donned by Namboothiri youth.

After the formation of the Congress Socialist party, a large scale propagation of revolutionary ideas took place in Malabar. The party accepted plays as a method of spreading their ideology, and plays with Socialist and Communist themes were composed during this period. With the formation of the Jeeval Sahitya/ literary movement, writers focused on the exploitation of the labourers and farmers at the hands of the feudal landlords. The first literary work linked to the Jeeval Sahitya movement was K. Damodaran's novel *Pattabakki*. He was an early and prominent Congress worker and had participated in the All India Conference at Lucknow³⁷. Later, he became a noted thinker of the Communist movement.

The dramas that were staged as part of peasant, workers or teachers' meetings or at the end of public demonstrations and meetings, differed from the dramas that were staged during festivals. These dramas were not ceremonious—that was no specificity of an ornate language, no illuminated stage or 'special effects, no special costumes offering a spectacle to separate the actors from the audience and no exaggerated stage movements. They were 'raw' and aimed not at providing any entertainment but at making a statement. In other words, they were preliminary propaganda pieces.

³⁶ E. M. S. Namboothirippad, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

³⁷ M. Mahesh, *Progressive Literature and Dramas*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Calicut, 1999, p. 54.

The play *Pattabakki* (meaning, Rent Arrears) was composed to be performed at the Farmers' Conference at Ponnani in 1937. It primarily deals with the class conflict between those who 'have' (the rich) and those who "don't have" (the poor). Damodaran had composed this play within a very short time. The organisers of the Ponnani Farmers conference decided to stage a play at the meeting, and hence, Damodaran was compelled to pen down a play at short notice. The play was written without any preparation and was staged without much rehearsal³⁸.

The primary plot of the *Pattabakki* is the story of a Kudiyan (tenant) family. Kittunni is the protagonist of this play. His family consisted of his mother, his younger brother, and his sister Kunjimalu. Kittunni worked as a farmer and also doubled up as a factory worker. What worried him were the arrears in rent that he owed to the landlord. He did not earn sufficient wages to both look after his family, and to pay the landlord. At the end of his tether, he attempts to steal some money, is caught by the police, and ends up in jail³⁹.

Raman Nair, the crooked steward of Kittunni's landlord Appan Namboothiri, citing the rental arrears, evicts Kittunni's family from their house. Kittunni's mother dies in the streets. Seeing no other way to raise her younger brother, Kittunni's sister turns to prostitution. When Kittunni is finally released from jail, he comes to know of all that has transpired. However, he does not blame his sister. Instead, he concludes that the real reason for their condition is

³⁸ K. Damodaran, *Pattabakki* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, Reprint 1979, pp. 5-6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

the existing socio-economic situation. The play ends by exhorting everyone to take up arms against the socio-economic conditions of the time.⁴⁰

Pattabakki received mixed responses. While some criticized this play, others were greatly influenced. K. Damodaran responded thus to the criticism against the play: “You don't have to acknowledge the artistic qualities of the play. But this was the need of the hour.”⁴¹

That year, *Pattabakki* was staged at 22 places. *Pattabakki* groups were formed to present this play at different places. In Payyanur, the *Pattabakki* group was formed under the guidance of Kunjambu, in Karivallur under Chandroth, in Kuthuparambil under Moyyath, in Ponnani under M. P Bhattatirippad, and as a result of this, the play was staged at various places⁴².

The staging of the *Pattabakki* not only brought the farmers and the workers together, it also served to strengthen the anti-feudal sentiments. A labourer lost his job after performing in the *Pattabakki* play in the Farmers Conference that took place in Vellinezhi in May 1939. K. Damodaran responded to this incident in the *Prabhatam* newspaper: “Earlier, it was only the *Pattabakki* play that was prohibited in many places. But now, even the actors of the play are facing bans.”⁴³ (*My Trans.*)

In the opinion of E. M. S. Namboothirippad, if the *Pattabakki* were to be evaluated, then as a play it had many artistic limitations. However, as a tool for

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ M. Rasheed, *Saghavu Damodaran* (Mal.), Ernakulam, 1990, p. 45.

⁴² C. Stephan, *Nadakam Samkarika Vyathiyathinte Sakshyapathram* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1990, p. 70.

⁴³ M. Rasheed, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

propagation, this play has been able to achieve complete success. Namboothirippad also opines that the difference between Social plays, and Social reform plays was that, whereas Social plays gave importance to individual relations, Social reform plays focused on class relations. *Pattabakki* falls into the second category⁴⁴.

If the scenes of the *Pattabakki* were to be examined, it can be seen that many of them were propagating ideologies against feudalism and land-lordship. One such scene is the part where Kittunni's mother, as she lay dying on the streets, advises her daughter to go to the landlord's house after her death, tell him her story, and plead for his help. But this is how Kunjimalu reacts to this statement: "I will never go and beg before the landlord for help. I will do some work or the other to care for my younger brother". What can be understood from this conversation is the great transformation in thinking that had developed between the two generations. If the older generation accepted the exploitation of the landlords, the younger generation resisted such suppression⁴⁵.

Another scene in the play is where Kittunni meets a friend of his in jail, Muhammad, who is a trade union worker. Muhammad advises Kittunni that the cause of all the existing problems is that the economic wealth is concentrated only at the hands of a few, select group of people. He reminds Kittunni that the only solution lies in the formation of a government by seizing power through the

⁴⁴ E. M. S. Namboothirippad, *Thiranjedutha Prabandhangal* (Mal.), Thrissur, 1990, p. 35.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

organised movement with the farmers, labourers, and the middle class joining together⁴⁶.

Another important play that K. Damodaran composed after the *Pattabakki* was the *Rakthapanam* (Drinking of the Blood). The goal of this play too was to make the labourers aware of the need of spreading the Socialist and Communist ideologies. After the success of the *Pattabakki*, the leaders of the time, including P. Krishna Pillai, N. C. Sekhar, and K. Gopalan, insisted on Damodaran writing a new play, and the result was the *Rakthapanam*. The play was initially known as *Panimudakkam* (*Strike*). This play was first staged in 1939 at the renowned P. S. V. Hall at Kallayi Road in Calicut. Later, this play was performed at places such as Kannur, Thrissur, Vadakara, Ponnani, Palakkad, Cochin. The plot of the *Rakthapanam* revolves around the class conflicts between the labourers and the capitalists/employers. The depiction of the labourers in the *Rakthapanam* differs from the *Pattabakki* in that they are class-conscious.⁴⁷

Shanku is the protagonist of the *Rakthapanam*. While taking part in a worker's protest, he is shot dead. In one instance, a dialogue by Shanku is a clear piece of propaganda. "All existing governments and forms of rule are designed to be unjust towards the poor and to exploit them. But we, the workers, will not be daunted by seeing this. What we stand to lose are only the chains of slavery". This declaration was a direct challenge to the existing system.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ K. Damodaran, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

⁴⁷ C. Stephan., *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁴⁸ Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Communism and Nationalism in Colonial South India: Malabar -1900-1948*, Cambridge university Press, 1992, pp. 148-49. (*My Trans.*).

The *Rakthapanam* was not able to match the reception meted out to the *Pattabakki*. A major reason cited for this is the influence of Second World War. During this period, strict measures were imposed by the government upon plays that would arouse anti-British sentiments.

The proof that both the *Pattabakki* and the *Rakthapanam* had exerted a strong influence upon the people can be seen in the fact that ordinary people who had no awareness of the rules of drama formed clubs in the countryside, wrote plays, and performed them in various stages. Moreover, the fact that many farmers' organizations were formed at various places in Malabar, as depicted in the *Pattabakki*, stands as a testament to the influence and popularity of these plays.

In the period following the staging of the *Pattabakki* and the *Rakthapanam*, many other similar political plays also began to become popular. The various standpoints taken by the political organisations in Kerala on World War II paved the way for the creation of new plays. It was also at the same time plays such as *Pattabakki* and *Rakthapanam* were being staged that figures such as Kesari Balakrishna Pillai introduced foreign literature to the Malayali people. Kesari translated Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghosts* into Malayalam as *Pretham*. Prof. N. Krishna Pillai was a person who entered into the field of drama literature based on the influence exerted by Balakrishna Pillai. The influence of Ibsen's plays can be seen in the plays that were written by Krishna Pillai⁴⁹. He composed plays such as *Baghnabhavanam*, *Kanyaka*, *Anuranjanam*, *Balabalam*

⁴⁹ P. Appukuttan, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

etc. It was with these plays that serious and fundamental problems of life began to be presented on the stage after being subjected to close and realistic analysis.⁵⁰

The influence of the Communist-Socialist ideologies and the concepts of the progressive literary movement led many writers to compose plays that reflected the problems faced by the labourers and farmers. The *Samathvavadhi* written by Pulimana Parameshwaran Pillai, and performed in 1945, pushed forward the idea of economic equality based on Socialist ideology. Though this play was not staged much, it retains the distinction of being a play that was composed with a specific political goal in mind. The characters in this play do not have names and are merely symbols of varying and conflicting interests.⁵¹ The majority of the political activists believed that with the end of economic inequality, social discrimination too would stop. However, they did not take into account the self-validating nature of the culture that was rooted in feudalism and aristocracy. Pulimana, by criticising the aristocratic culture in this play, highlighted the fact that it was extremely difficult to eradicate the system of feudalism only through the rectification of economic privation, and that in actuality, it was the feudalistic culture in itself that needed to be resisted.⁵²

Another play that came out in the same year as the *Samathvavadhi* was the “*Thotilla*”, composed by Thakazhi Sivashankara Pillai. The problems and difficulties faced by Aravindan, who is a worker in the Kochi constituency are presented in this play. The play moves around the protagonist, Aravindan, who comes to Kochi to organize a strike, is put in jail, loses his family, and finally

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

⁵¹ M. Achuthan, *Swathanthra Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2002, p. 366.

⁵² U. Mahesh, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

succumbs to ill-health. The play closes with an exhortation for a worker's-strike.⁵³

This play was able to propagate the ideas of the worker's movement. Thakazhi highlighted through various dialogues and conversations, the functioning of the left-wing organisations, their internal tugs-of-war, the responses of the leaders, and the ultimate transformation.⁵⁴

It was during the height of the revolt led by the Travancore State Congress against the Travancore government, and especially against the diwan. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, that Kuttanatu Ramakrishna Pillai's, the *Prathima* was enacted. The Travancore government banned this play right at the onset. In this play, C. P's reforms and misguided notions are depicted through the actions of a character named Sechchathipathi (meaning, "Autocrat"). The essence of the play is Sechchathipathi, who thinks of himself as popular among the people, forcing another person to build his statue.⁵⁵

After the *Pattabakki*, of the works that focused on the problems of the farmers, the play that attracted the people most was Cherukad's "*Nammalonnu*". The work was first published in 1948. The protagonist of this play is a farmer named Pangan. The play is about land eviction and other difficulties that Pangan faces. He had a strong belief that even though the landlord would evict those who had not paid their rental arrears, Pangan won't be evicted. This was because of his sincerity and honesty towards his landlord. However, later, Pangan realises that his landlord was planning to evict him as well. He finally

⁵³ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Vijaya Raghavan, *C.J. Muthal C.N. Vare* (Mal.), DC Books, Kottayam, 1988, p. 7.

understood that it is the class interests that matter, not values like honesty and sincerity. This realisation completely changes Pangan, and he turns into a full-fledged revolutionary, and rallies under the red flag. The play closes with the exhortation to unite under the red flag.⁵⁶

The fifties was the period in which there was an energetic activity of the plays, and the reading-rooms and the art forums that encouraged them. These groups which functioned with the full support of the people served to propagate the concept of the drama as visual-feasts. The vast publicity that the plays received motivated the playwrights to come up with new works. It was in such a backdrop that Edasseri Govindan Nair composed the play called *Kootukrishi*.⁵⁷ (Collective Farming)

This play was initially written to be performed at the anniversary of the Krishna Pillai Vayanashala at Ponnani in 1949. Ponnani and the neighbouring Vanneri were regions where the left parties had great influence. The first staging of the *Kootukrishi* became a big event there. Akkitham and Uroob were among the actors who donned the lead roles. Among the audience, well-known personalities including Kuttikrishna Marar, Joseph Mundassery, and Vargheese Kalathil were also present.⁵⁸

The major characters in this play included the landlord Sreedharan, his tenant Aboobacker who was a Muslim farmer, Aboobacker's daughter Aisha, her lover Sukumaran, her brother Bappu. As N. V. Krishna Warriar stated in the

⁵⁶ Cherukad, *Nammalonnun* (Mal.), DC Books, Kottayam, 1978, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Appukkuttan, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

⁵⁸ Dr. N. R.. Gramaprakash, *Nadakam Patanavum Prayokavum* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2009, p. 142.

preface of the *Kootukrishi*, the play was also written to address solutions to the boiling socio-economic issues in our land. Through the character of Sreedharan, Edasseri Govindan Nair shows us how land ownership and land-lordship can be stopped. How the partitioned scraps of farmland and the ensuing loss in cultivation can be transformed into a lucrative profession by joining the parcels of land together on a co-operative basis, and how the economic issues, caste and religious contentions that distance neighbour and hinders co-operation has addressed throughout in the play. The solution that Edasseri stated was mutual and cooperative economic production and inter-marriages. In this play, through the marriage of Aisha and Sukumaran, he showed how a great social change can be brought about.⁵⁹

The influence of leftist ideology made an impact upon the Muslim communities of south Malabar . After 1950 a group of Muslim young men came forward to reform their society through art forms like drama. They wrote dramas aiming to make social changes in the society. In the process they also challenged the orthodoxy of Muslim society . The Writers like K.T Muhammed and E.K Ayamu belong to this category .K.T Muhammed wrote *Ithu Bhoomiyanu* (1953) (This, the Earth). This play depicts the deplorable conditions of life of the Muslim women in Malabar region. E.k Ayamu wrote the play titled *ijju Nalloru Manushyan Avan Nokku* (1953)(You try to become a good human being). In this play the famous drama artist Nilambur Ayisha made her debut .⁶⁰ Muslim women did not participate in artist renditions in those times. Being a women from an orthodox muslim background she had to fought with the constrains imposed

⁵⁹ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, pp. 379-80.

⁶⁰ *The Hindu Daily*, May 30, 2013.

upon her by the society. Later she became a popular artist and she got all the support from the communist party ⁶¹

Formation of KPAC (Kerala People's Arts Club)

The political upheavals that came about in the backdrop of World War II, created huge ripples in the political fabric of India. Almost all the leftist nations acknowledged the supremacy of Russia (USSR). As a nation that stood up to the imperial powers, the Soviet Union was a source of motivation to all freedom movements across the world. With Germany breaking off the German-Soviet non-aggression pact and invading the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union joined forces with Britain and the Allied Coalition and attacked Germany. This political turnaround led the Communists in India to support the British in World War II. The war of the imperial powers became the war of the people. As a result, the British government lifted the sanctions on the Communist party and allowed it to function freely. Due to the restrictions on the party being removed, certain art groups began to form within the left wing.

It was in 1941 that the first people's theatre was started at Bangalore. But owing to the repressive policies of the government, this organisation could not make any progress. Anil De Silva, who was one of the leading activists of this group moved to Bombay, and in 1942, established a people's theatre in Bombay.

⁶¹ Sajith Soman, Dramas and social Change in South Malabar, *The International Journal of analytic and experimental modal analysis*, Vol- XII, Issue -II, Feb 2020, <http://www.ijaema.com/gallery/5-ijaema-february-3344.pdf>, p. 69.

It was this organisation that later came to be known as the IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association).⁶²

The first conference of the IPTA was held at Bombay on 25 May 1943⁶³. In the first conference of the IPTA that was held at Bombay in 1943, a draft model for the functioning of the organisation was formulated. The primary aim of the IPTA was to mobilize the people through the theatre movements. In addition to this, they also aimed for the renewal of old visual-art forms and were instrumental in the propagation of the freedom movements. The activities of IPTA was closely watched by the central government authorities. Government records mention IPTA as a Communist propaganda agency on the cultural front.⁶⁴

The plays of IPTA were those that depicted anti-fascist sentiments. In addition, through these plays, this organisation was able to bring to the attention of the general populace the problems faced by the labourers and farmers in India. Through the composing and performing of the plays of IPTA, the ordinary people of India who were at the lowest rung of the society were able to rise to the forefront of the field of theatre arts.⁶⁵ A Kerala-based organisation that inculcated the same concept of IPTA was the Kerala Peoples Arts Club (K. P. A. C).

⁶² Nandi Bhatia, *Actos of Authority, Acts of Resistance – Theatre and Politics in Colonial and Post Colonial India*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2010, pp. 78-79.

⁶³ Mahim Batacharya, 'The Indian People Theatre Association, a preliminary sketch of the movement and the organization:1942-47'. In Nandi Bhatia (ed), *Modern Indian Theatre: A Reader*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi,2011, p, 159.

⁶⁴ File No. 57/29/49-Poll, Dated -09-02-1949, Ministry of Home Affairs, National Archives, New Delhi. For more details – See Appendix - 2.

⁶⁵ Sudhi Pradhan (ed.) *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, National Book Agency, 1960, p. 127.

The first group that was formed in Kerala in the footsteps of the IPTA was the Kerala People's Arts Club(KPAC). It was the Communists who were at the helm of the inception of KPAC. The primary aim of this organisation was the spread of leftist political ideology.

Many opinions prevail about the rise of the KPAC. Rajagopalan Nair, who was one of the earliest actors of KPAC opines, that the plan of the KPAC was first formulated in an unofficial discussion at the Ernakulam Bharat Café Tourist Home in 1950 between Rajagopalan Nair, Janardhana Kurupp, P. Narayanan, and Sukumaran, who were students at the Maharaja's Law College.⁶⁶

However, according to Advocate Janardhana Kurup who was the first president of the KPAC, it was after the elections in Travancore, at the house of Kurup at Marari Thottil, that the idea of performing plays under the aegis of a club first came up during discussions. Accordingly, Rajagopalan Nair directed that the name be 'Janakeeya Samithi'. However, Janardhana Kurup anglicised it and changed its name to the Kerala People's Arts Club.⁶⁷

O. Madhavan who was an early actor in the KPAC, and who later became its secretary, has a completely different opinion about the formation of the KPAC. In the period following the Punnappra-Vayalar uprising, as a result of the influence exerted on the people by the Arts and Culture wing of the Communist Party, discussions came up about the need to form a drama-society.

⁶⁶ Vallikkavu Mohandas, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

It was based on these discussions that the organisation called KPAC was formed.⁶⁸

Though the opinions regarding the formation of the KPAC are multiple and varied, there is no debate regarding the fact that the KPAC was established in 1950.

The first play written and performed under the banner of the KPAC was "*Ente Makanaanu Sari*" (My Son is Right). Its major plot follows the conflict between a son who goes to college for his higher studies during the period when the agitations against the Travancore government were intensifying, and the father's aspirations for his son. At the start of the play the son is portrayed as entering active politics against the dreams of his father, and as a consequence, his father who is an ardent supporter of the Travancore government throws the son out of the house. The play ends with the father after realising the disastrous effect of the policies of the Travancore governance, finally acknowledging that his son was right.⁶⁹

Thoppil Bhaskararan Pillai, otherwise known as Thoppil Bhassi, hailing from the region of Shuranadu, having the good fortune to view this play, requested the drama committee to consider staging a play that he had written. It was as a result of this request that the play "*Munnettam*" scripted by Thoppil Bhassi was printed. However, other than the fact that this play was printed, it was not performed on the stage⁷⁰. Though Thoppil Bhassi wrote many plays after this, they never achieved much fame. It was much later, in 1952, that he

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-48.

wrote the play, *Ningal Enne Communist Aaki*. (You Made me a Communist) During the time that this play was written, Thoppil Bhassi had participated in the agitations against the Tenant-Landlord System on behalf of the communist party, and being incriminated on the count of murder, was in hiding. The play *Ningal Enne Communist Aaki*, was composed by Thoppil Bhassi under the pen-name of Soman.⁷¹

It was at 9. 00 pm on 6 December 1952, that this play was first staged at the temporarily erected Sudarshana Theatre at the Thattasheri Junction in Chavara. The performance was a great success. After the staging, on the same evening, the play was booked at 35 different venues.⁷²

The story of the play is situated in Shuranadu, the same place that Thoppil Bhassi hailed from, where the farm-labourers of the region unite under the Communist Party, and protest against the harsh and discriminatory approach of the policies of the government. Paramu Pillai is the protagonist of this play. He is the progenitor of a crumbling Nair ancestral house. His major pastime is to talk about the erstwhile magnificence of the ancestral house to everyone. Paramu Pillai has no intention of acknowledging the socio-economic exploitation that was prevalent during that time. His son, Gopalan, is an active worker of the Communist party. Comrade Mathew is Gopalan's close friend and a visionary. Kesavan Nair is a wicked landlord who plans to take the land of Paramu Pillai, and also plans to exploit a Pulaya girl named Mala. Mathew and his gang manage to break up all the plans hatched by Kesavan Nair. Sumam, the daughter

⁷¹ Eldhose A. Y., "Theatrical Counter Publics - A Reading of You Made Me a Communist, and its Rewritings", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 11, No. 10, March 2017, pp. 60.

⁷² Vallikkavu Mohandas, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

of Kesavan Nair, is in love with Gopalan. At the end of the story, Gopalan and his group, under the leadership of the Communist party, engage in vehement agitations, and manage to bring the farmers and the labourers together. Ignoring the opposition of Kesavan Nair, he weds Sumam in a Civil-Marriage. The major turn at the end of the play is the ideological change undergone by the traditional and conservative Paramu Pillai. When Paramu Pillai tells the Communist workers that *Ningalenne Communistakki* (You made me a Communist), they reply that it was his personal experiences that made him a Communist. The important slogan that he shouts while receiving the red flag at the end of the play is given below:

Mone aa kodiayangottu vangikko (Son, you take that flag)/

Aa kodiyingu thaa mole (Daughter, please give that flag)

Ithenikonnu pidikkanam (I want to hold it)

Ithenikonnu pidikkanam (I want to hold it)

Ithenikonnu pokki pokki pidikkanam (I want to hold it and raise it high)"

The play ends by exhorting the youth to join the Communist party⁷³.

According to Robin Jeffrey, what the play *Ningalenne Communist Aaki* represents is the changing political culture of Kerala. The concepts presented in this play received a very interesting response from the viewers.⁷⁴

The banning of this play by the government reveals the anxiety and fear it created among the propertied classes and the popularity of the play among the common people. It was in 1953 that the Thirukochi government banned

⁷³ Robin Jeffrey, *Politics Women and Well Being- How Kerala Became a Model*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1992, New York, pp. 143.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Ningalenne Communist Aaki. It was following the Dramatic Performance Act of 1876 that the ban was enforced. The police arrested and removed the KPAC actors who ignored the ban in its performance staged it at Kovalam in Thiruvananthapuram.⁷⁵

The CPI protested strongly in the Thirukochi Assembly against the ban on the performance of this play, and after two months, based on a review petition submitted by Janardhana Kurupp, the High Court issued an order lifting the ban on the play. All these incidents served to heighten the popularity of the play. During the time that *Ningalenne Communist Aaki* filled the theatres, its author, Thoppil Bhassi, was in the police lockup awaiting trial. Inspector 'Kurup', who after reading the favourable reports about the play in the newspapers, recognized the genius in Thoppil Bhassi, and arranged all the materials required for Bhassi to continue with his literary work during his lockup.⁷⁶

The play *Ningalenne Communist Aaki* became eligible for an unparalleled record, being performed over 10,000 times in various stages across Kerala. This play has been staged in venues outside Kerala too.⁷⁷

Notably, this play had not only many artistic innovations but also political achievements. The famous poet, O.N.V. Kurup opines that this was a 'play that turned Kerala red'. Many of the songs in the play were composed by Devarajan

⁷⁵ Darren. C. Zook, "The Farcical Mosaic – The Changings Masks of political Theatre in Contemporary India", *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 18 (2), 2001, p. 177.

⁷⁶ Thoppil Bhassi, *Olivile Ormakkal* (Mal.), Prabhat Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 2017 (1st Edition), pp. 299-300.

⁷⁷ Eldhose, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

Master. These songs later became the official songs that were played during the various programmes of the communist party.⁷⁸

Within a short period, other plays that criticized *Ningalenne Communist Aaki* began to be written and staged. In 1953, Keshavadev wrote the *Njan Ippol Communist Aagum*" (I will become Communist now). This was a parody of the play "*Ningalenne Communist Aaki*. However, this play did not have any specific message to deliver to society. The play ended with asking the people to join the Congress Party. Keshavadev had earlier written the play *Factoryileykku* in 1936 depicting the problems of the workers. He also served as the Secretary of the Communist party in Alappuzha. Keshavadas volte-face was due to two major reasons. One was the political stance adopted by Stalin in the Soviet Union after World War II, and the second reason was the conference of the progressive literary movement that was held at Thrissur in 1948. In this conference, a substantial number of writers disagreed with the concept that literary works be composed solely for the communist party's advancement, and formed a different faction. Keshavadev belonged to this faction.⁷⁹

Such individual parting of ways notwithstanding, it can be stated with certainty that KPAC dramas played a major role in ensuring the success of the communist party in the elections to the state assembly in 1956. The dialogues and songs of the plays were byhearted by a great number of people who assumed the status of folklore. They also became reference points in day-to-day conversations of common people. Later critics mainly the extreme left were raised against the 'romantic imaginary used in the songs but the plays should be

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 63

⁷⁹ U. Mahesh, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

seen in the context – a nation had become independent and there was a process of nation-building. How to situate ourselves within this? was a ‘peaceful transition’ possible in India?. These questions undoubtedly important are not raised here as they fall outside the purview of the research project.

A change that the early dramas of KPAC brought out has also been noted – the dramas of the late 20s and 30s were primarily aimed at mobilisation for social reform. Now it was aimed at propagating and popularising a political programme.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ In stating this we are not drawing any dichotomy between ‘social’ and ‘political’.

zCHAPTER IV

PROGRESSIVE LITERATURE MOVEMENT AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION: FORMATIVE YEARS (1944-57)

This chapter primarily sets forth the new literary works and authors in Malayalam literature, especially in the genres of novel and poetry, after the Jeeval Sahitya Prasthanam (Jeeval Literature Movement) that was transformed into the Progressive Literary Movement, and the influence that they exerted upon the development of the Left Movement in Kerala. The breakdown of the Progressive Literature Movement in the period 1948-49 and the ensuing division of the organisation is analysed in this chapter.

The literary works published between 1944 and 1957 are subjected to analysis in this chapter. Many renowned authors discussed here have published many famous works after 1957. These works have been omitted from the analysis in this section.

The Shoranur Conference of the Progressive Literary Movement held in 1944 was a decisive event in the history of the organisation. It was at this conference that the *Jeeval Sahithya Prasthanam* was renamed the *Purogamana Sahithya Prasthanam* (Progressive Literary Movement). Another importance of the Shoranur Conference was that the organisers were able to gather a large

number of literary minds into their fold. Keshavdev, Thakazhi, Ponkunnam Varkey were active figures in this conference.¹

Famous authors such as Joseph Mundassery, M. P. Paul too were actively involved in the conference. It was M. P. Paul who presided over this conference and Keshavdev and Achutha Kurup acted as the secretaries.² E. M. S Namboothirippad wrote of the 1944 Shornur conference thus: “Along with those who had entered into the literary field to produce working-class literature, other literary figures who had imbibed universal perspectives also became a part of the Progressive Literary Movement in this conference.”³

The period after 1940 was one where novels that depicted social realities began to come out in Malayalam. To analyse this, it is necessary to briefly examine the history of the Malayalam novel. There have been numerous studies that have defined the genre of the Novel.⁴ Many scholars have had differing views on the evolution of the novel as a literary genre. The Marxist theorist and literary critic Fredric Jameson views the novel as a bourgeois form of literature that took form with the strengthening of the capitalist market structure.⁵ Benedict Anderson, another prominent historian, explains the evolution of the novel as a

¹ P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *Purogamana Sahitya Prasthanam: Nizhalum Velichavum* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, Reprint 2000, p. 82.

² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³ E. M. S Namboothiripad, *Thiranjedutha Prabhandangal* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, Reprint 2017, pp. 100-101(*My Trans.*)

⁴ The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines the Novel as “an extended fictional prose narrative... it disregards the constraints that govern other literary forms, and acknowledges no obligatory structure, style, or subject-matter. Thriving on this openness and flexibility, the novel has become the most important literary genre of the modern age Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 338.

⁵ Adam Roberts, *Fredric Jameson*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 77.

literary form as an offshoot of the rise of the print culture that formed the basis for the formation of nationalism. He says that the novel came about as a part of the spread of the print culture. Just like the newspapers, the novel too played a significant role of its own in the formation of national consciousness.⁶

Novels as a new literary form dominate the reading public and the cultural acceptance of narratives about contemporary life and times. Unlike the traditional literary genre, the novel sought to record and privilege the specific details that shaped the daily contingent lives of ordinary people.⁷

The noted historian, K. N. Panikker opines that: the English education established in India by the British had a cultural aspect that created an interest in the English culture among the Indian population. With the advent of printing technology, this cultural interest could be implemented in India in a short period. English education and printing technology created a new literacy and literary consciousness among the Indians and reading public. The introduction of printing in regional languages, missionary enterprise, works of voluntary organisations, and private individuals led to the propagation of printed books in the local language among the people. All these activities brought about significant changes among the educated middle-class population of India. They became stronger, and a change came about in their concept of leisure time. Their free time was kept aside for reading newspapers and reciting literature. The

⁶ Michael McKeon, *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, John Hopkins University Press, Maryland 2000, p. 359.

⁷ J Paul Hunter, "The Novel and Social/Cultural History", In John Richetti (ed) *The Cambridge Companion of Eighteenth Century Novel*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 9-10.

literary genre of the novel that rose during this time suited the intellectual needs and aesthetic sensibilities of the Indian middle class.⁸

It was the western novels that shaped the Indian sensibilities of the novel. The Western form of the novel constricted and crippled the articulation of the multi-layered Indian reality. That the European novels that highlighted individuality were propagated in the Indian society that did not give importance to Individuated Consciousness is a striking feature of this.⁹

In Kerala, the English education contributed by the missionaries and the English administration and the colonial modernity that sprouted because of this, and the social reform movements and the spread of the print media and the rise of a middle class led to the spread of western culture and the rise of the novel as a literary form. Many of these novels provided a discourse between colonial modernity and traditional societies. It was with *Kunthalatha* written by Appu Nedungadi in 1887 that the Malayalam novel took birth.¹⁰ However, much before this novel was published, in 1882, the *Pullelikunju* by Archdeacon Koshy, and the 1877 prose work titled *Missus Collinsinte Ghathakavadham* (1877) had been released. However, literary critics opine that these works need not be accorded the status of a novel.¹¹

It was Oyyarath Chandumenon's *Indulekha* that was published in 1889, which is considered the first novel to depict the Malayali essence. Later, many

⁸ K. N. Panikker, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Transformations in Colonial India*, Anthem Press, London, 2001, pp. 126-129.

⁹ E. V. Ramakrishnan, *Narrating India: Novel in search of a Nation*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2005, p. 12.

¹⁰ K. M. George, *Adhunika Malayala Sahitya Charitram Prasthanangaliloode* (Mal.), DC Books, Reprint, p. 150.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

works were composed in Malayalam that aimed at the propagation and reformation of religion. A notable work among these is *Saraswathi Vijayam* composed by Potheri Kunjambu in 1892. Kunjambu was a courageous social reformer. He established and ran a school for the *pulayar*. This work was about the people who were left outside the Hindu caste system and who had converted to Christianity, and the ensuing lives of such who had changed their religion.¹²

C. V. Raman Pillai was another writer who enriched the Malayalam novel. His most famous work is the *Marthanda Varma*. This work is regarded as the first historical novel in Malayalam and was published in 1891. The *thampimar* who were the children of Raja Rama Varma who ruled the land, with the help of the Ettuveetil Pillamar attempted to overthrow the existing inheritance rights (*Dhayakramam*), and this is depicted in this work.¹³

After *Marthanda Varma*, another important novel written by C. V. Raman Pillai was *Dharmaraja Bahadur* which was published in 1918. This was a sequel to the *Marthanda Varma*.¹⁴

It was when the Freedom Struggle became active in Kerala that the Malayalam Novel began to expand into different directions. Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* (Malayalam- *Paavangal*) was one novel that was propagated in Kerala and can be said to have influenced the activities of the National Movement. This novel was translated into Malayalam by Nalappatt Narayana

¹² M. Achuthan, *Swathantrasamaravum Malayala Sahityavum* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur. 2003,p. 426

¹³ George onakkoor, "Novel", In Dr. K. M. George (ed.) *Adhunika Malayala ahithya Charithram Prasthanangaliloode*, (Mal.), D C Books, Kottayam, Reprint 2018, p. 155.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

Menon in 1925. Many saw similarities between the condition existing in Kerala and that depicted in *Les Miserables*.¹⁵

The noted writer Cherukad, reminisces in his autobiography *Jeevithapathayil*, how he procured the *Les Miserables* from his friend Ramanunni and read it. He records that he had felt as if a new light was twinkling inside his brain after reading the novel.¹⁶

The literary works that formed in the wake of the social reform movements among the Namboothiri people, brought to light the inhumane practices that existed within the Namboothiri communities. Such a work that was written along these lines was the *Afpante Makal* which was published in 1933, and was composed by Muthirangott Bavathran Namboothirippad.¹⁷

After the 1930s, the ideals of the Socialist-Communist Movements that spread throughout Kerala, the rise of the Jeeval Literary Movement, and the novel which depicted the lives of the farmers and the labourers and other ordinary folk who lived at the bottom rung of the ladder of society, propelled the short story as a genre into the Malayalam literary field. The Malayalam writers went down to the lives of the poor farmers, farm labourers, labourers who worked in the city, fisherfolk and the such, who had been displaced in the

¹⁵ S. K. Vasanthan, "Swathantrasamaravum Malayala Sahityavum", in M. N. Vijayan (ed), *Nammude Sahityam Nammude Samooham* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2000, p. 245.

¹⁶ Cherukad, *Jeevithapatha* (Mal.), Current Books, Thrissur, 2010, pp. 178-179.

¹⁷ S. K. Vasanthan, *op. cit.*, p. 246 - The social reform movements among the Namboothiris and the literature that evolved thereof have been discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

backdrop of the fall of the feudal system and the rise of the capitalist colonial society.¹⁸

It was at this time that Kesari Balakrishnan Pillai wrote articles introducing and the excellence of Western literature. These articles expanded the perspectives of the Malayalam writers and the general populace. Kesari Balakrishnan Pillai enabled the Malayalam authors to break away from the limitations of the traditional structures and localities and to focus on revolutionary ideas and concepts.

Kesari Balakrishnan Pillai holds an important position regarding the introduction of Malayali to European literature. He was a noted journalist, the editor of the *Kesari* newspaper, and a literary critic. He was able to introduce the French and Russian literature to the Malayali through a series of essays he wrote in 1935 under the title *Navalokam*. In his opinion, the Russian and French literary works were superior both in revolutionary content and aesthetic beauty than the works in English.¹⁹

A group of writers who were attracted to the scholarship of Kesari Balakrishnan Pillai gathered together at his residence at Thiruvananthapuram and formed a literary circle. Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai, C. Narayana Pillai, K. Bhaskaran Nair were active members of this group. Kesari Balakrishnan Pillai

¹⁸ K. N. Ganesh, “Malayala Sahityathinte Samskarika Bhoomishastram”, in M. N. Vijayan (ed), *Nammude Sahityam Nammude Samooham* (Mal.), 1901-2000, Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2000, pp. 637-638.

¹⁹ Dilip M. Menon, “A Local Cosmopolitan: “Kesari” Balakrishna Pillai and the Invention of Europe for a Modern Kerala”, In Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra (ed.), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones : South Asia and Global Circulation of ideas*, Palgrave Macmillian Transnational History Series, London, 2010, p. 137.

was very enthusiastic about propagating Western literary forms such as prose plays, short stories and novels.²⁰

The Socialist-Communist political tendencies that were prevalent after the 1930s and the perspectives of world literature contributed by thinkers such as Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, created a group of prose writers who wrote and thought about the ordinary/common folk. Prominent among them were Keshavadev, Thakazhi, Ponkunnam Varkey, Cherukad, Karur Neelakanda Pillai. Many of these writers later forged a close relationship with the Progressive Literary Movement in Kerala.

Keshavadev was a member of the Kesari circle who was deeply influenced by Marxist philosophy. It is indeed necessary to closely examine his prose writings.

Keshavadev (1905-1983)

Keshavadev was a writer who believed that Marxism was a philosophy of human liberation. It is indeed impossible to evaluate Keshavadev who declared that the novel was written for society and who respected the primary truth of Man from beyond the boundaries of Marxism. In his opinion, a literary writer is a man, man is a social animal, and it is because he is a social animal that he has become a literary writer.²¹ His writings appeared in the newspapers and periodicals familiarised Marx and Lenin among the people of Kerala.²²

²⁰ K. M. George, *op. cit.*, p. 803

²¹ Keshavadev, *Jeevithaveekshanam* (Mal.), Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangam, Kottayam, 1977, p. 8.

²² P. Kesavadev, 'Nasthikanaya Lenin', *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Feb 12, 1934, p. 9.

Keshavadev was also the leader of the Labour Movement in Alappuzha. The short stories and novels that he wrote in the 1930s and the 1940s were linked to the Labour Movement. His 1938 novels *Panimudakkam* (Strike) and *Kannadi* depict the formation and development of the coir-labourers union in Alappuzha²³. Keshavadev explains his political ideology in his autobiography: “I started my life as a revolutionary. My goal in life was to create a revolution in India as had happened in Russia. I wrote and delivered speeches about the revolution”²⁴ It was with this Marxist perspective that he wrote and published “*Odayil Ninnu*” (*From the Gutter*) in 1944. This novel was a turning point in Malayalam literature. “Pappu” who bravely refuses to bow to the evil forces of authority is the hero of *Odayil Ninnu*. Pappu was dismissed from the school for daring to question the teacher who shielded the wrongdoings of the landlord’s son. Going to the city away from his native village in search of a job, he lives as a rickshaw puller and by chance meets a little girl. He later becomes the protector of the girl and her mother. Through his job as a rickshaw puller, he can educate the girl and also succeeds in getting her married off. Finally, Pappu, who is exhausted from his demanding job, abandons his home and goes alone on a journey. This is the essence of the novel.²⁵

The protagonist of this novel becomes not only a powerful representative of the labour culture, but Keshavadev can present an alternative culture to the readers regarding family life and man-woman relationships. This novel became

²³ Azad, “Thozhilali Vargasarangalum Malayala Sahithyavum”, In M. N Vijayan (ed.) *Nammude Sahithyavum Nammude Samoohavum* (1901-2000) (Mal.), Vol. 2, Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, 2000, p. 214.

²⁴ P. Keshavadev, *Ormakalude Lokathil (Athmakadha)* (Mal.), Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangam, Kottayam, 1992, p. 55 ((My Trans.)

²⁵ K. M. George, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

one that received a lot of publicity within a short period. According to the historian Robin Jeffrey, the reason for this novel's wide acceptance was the period in which it was published. This novel was able to sufficiently/adequately depict the abject poverty that pervaded the country in the wake of the Second World War, and this contributed to its success.²⁶

After the publication of *Odayil Ninnu*, Keshavadev's *Branthalayam* (1949) and *Ulakka* (1951) reflect his distancing from the Marxist ideology. Keshavadev opined about this change thus: "I moved away from the Communist Party from the time that Communism became Stalinism."²⁷ The policy-based decisions finalised at the 1948 Calcutta Conference of the Communist Party further alienated him from the party. In addition to this, many of the policies of the Communist Party after 1944, and the ideological conflicts within the Progressive Literary Movement drove Keshavadev further away from the Communist Movements.²⁸

In the short story titled *Aarkuvendi* (For Whom?) published in 1953, Keshavadev's change of perspective and moral conflict is quite evident. His conflict-ridden mind pursued by the anxiety regarding citizenship even while believing in Marxism is reflected in the characters of Anilan and Arkan.²⁹

²⁶ Robin Jeffrey, *Politics Women and Wellbeing: How Kerala became a Model*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1992.

²⁷ Keshavadev, *Aathmakadha*, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-55 (*My Trans.*).

²⁸ At the all Indian level communist party was also undergoing 'paradigm shifts'. The 'Ranadive thesis' was adopted in 1948 which pushed P. C Joshi and others to the margins. All of this had a profound influence on writers and thinkers and left many ideologically confused. For details see.. Gene D Overstreet & Marshal Windmiller, *Communism in India*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1959.

²⁹ Keshavadev, *Jeevitha Veekshanam*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

Though Keshavadev later drifted away from Marxist philosophy, his works highlight the lives of the downtrodden and the displaced and reflect the intensity and the earnestness of a Socialist. He did not become a rightist reactionary.

Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai (1912-1999)

Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai was one of the novelists of the Kerala Renaissance who in his younger days made decisive contributions to the Malayalam literary field. However, he was also a novelist who patiently intertwined the principles of Marxist aestheticism into the genre of Malayalam novels. Thakazhi's works were different due to the variety of ideas and concepts contained within them. Though his important novels such as *Thottiyude Makan* and "*Randidangazhi*" were intense Socialist works, his later writings shunned and severed the 'placental relation' with Marxism, turning towards the Romantic imagination and emotional writings.³⁰ Thakazhi remarks that it was after studying Marxism that he had a clear understanding of literature, and realised that literature was political, social and historical. "I was, caught in a dense haze. It was Marxian ideology that gave me an awareness of reality. I admit this openly. I felt as if it had shed light upon me."³¹

While examining Thakazhi's works, it can be seen that his first work was the "Thyagathinte Prathiphalam" (The Reward of Sacrifice) that he started writing in 1934. Though his early novels and stories such as *Pathithapankajam* (1935), *Susheelan* (1938), *Vilpanakkari* (1941) were tastefully dominated by an

³⁰ V. Vijayakumar, *Rashtriyathinte Nervaranakar* (Mal.), H&C Publishing House, Thrissur, 2008, p. 42.

³¹ *Ibid.* (My Trans.)

excess of sex and emotion, they also contained sharp barbs of mockery and protest against the proponents of morality.³²

It was with the publication of the novel *Thottiyude Makan* (The Scavenger's Son) in 1945 that Thakazhi's second phase of the artistic life began. The novel depicts the life of Chudalamuthu, who is a scavenger (cleaner of night-soil), and his son Mohanan, and their community which is engaged in the profession of scavenging. Through the major characters, Thakazhi narrates the scavengers uniting and protesting for their rights. He also deftly paints the human nature and interest in achieving development at all costs. Chudalamuthu, who unites the scavengers together and makes them conscious of their class, desired that his son should not become a scavenger. With this intent in mind, he sends his son to the school and educates him. With Chudalamuthu and his wife succumbing to Cholera, their son Mohanan is left without anyone to take care of him. He becomes a scavenger and tries to form an association/union of scavengers.³³

Chudalamuthu had a clear understanding of unionist notions as is clear from his statement "The loaders have a union, the carpenters have a union, we too need a union, only then will it work".³⁴ Realising the need to have a union, they come together, and as the first step, put forward some demands. Their demands turned into slogans and echoed and resounded in all directions. The

³² Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, *Ormayude Arakal* (Mal.), National Book Stall, Kottayam, 1973, p. 17.

³³ Vijay Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

³⁴ Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai, *Thottiyude Makan* (Mal.), DC Books, Kottayam, reprint- 1973, p. 189. (My Trans.)

authorities began to tremble. The novel *Thottiyude Makan* greatly influenced the people of the day. As a novel, it was able to garner a lot of readerships.

Banking on the public's enthusiasm for the *Thottiyude Makan*, and fruitfully using it to compose another novel that had a profound perspective into the lives of the working class, Thakazhi wrote the *Thalayodu*. Written in the backdrop of the Punnapra-Vayalar uprising, *Thalayodu* begins by focussing on a young woman who has been cruelly raped by a soldier during the revolts.³⁵

It was in his *Randidangazhi* (Two measures of Rice) that Thakazhi succeeded in artistically expressing class consciousness. It was published in 1949. The novel depicts the Parayas and the *pulayar* who led a life of slavery as underlings to the landlords, uniting as an organisation and becoming stronger. The plot of the "*Randidangazhi*" goes thus: Chirutha is the daughter of Kali Pulayan who is a farm labourer. Khoran a labourer marries her. Amongst the labouring class in Kuttanad, class consciousness is formed, and the Communist Party organises the Pulayas and the Parayas into groups. Khoran is one of the prominent leaders who organise the labour movement. The *Randidangazhi* clearly depicts the organisational awareness of the labourers.³⁶

The success of the *Randidangazhi* as a modern novel boosted Thakazhi and motivated him to compose yet another elegant piece of Socialist writing, the *Thendivarggam* (The Beggar Clan). However, the ending of the novel distances itself from Marxist ideology. The anticipation in *Randidangazhi* that the

³⁵ Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai, *Thalayodu* (Mal.), Mangalodaya, Pvt Ltd, Thrissur, Reprint -1968, p. 16.

³⁶ Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai, *Randidangazhi* (Mal.), DC Books, Kottayam, reprint, 2009, p. 1.

Labourer-Master class-conflict was approaching its final revolt, turns into despair.³⁷

In his autobiography, Thakazhi opines about this change in this manner: “I had a lot of hope in the Left-thought and its activities. Based on the Calcutta Thesis following the 1948 period, the Left Movement went forward asserting that even if blood were to be shed, it is of no consequence and that it was time for revolt”. During this time, Thakazhi also wrote a novel, *Perillakatha* (Story without a Name) that went largely unnoticed by many. The decline of the Communist Movement and the inherent weakness within the Party is depicted in this work.³⁸

As far as Thakazhi was concerned, when this time came around, he had lost the desire and hope that the world could be made a better place using literature. The novels that he composed in the 60s and 70s such as *Kayar* and *Chemmeen*, moved away from Socialist realism, and closer to the concept of Romanticism.

Ponkunnam Varkey was an active presence in the Progressive Literary Movement.

Ponkunnam Varkey (1910-2004)

In addition to being a writer, Ponkunnam Varkey was also an active political and social activist. Varkey, who was born into a Catholic family,

³⁷ Vijayakumar Vijayalam, *op. cit.*, p. 144. See also Foot note no. 27

³⁸ Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai, *Aathmakadha* (Mal.), Green Books, Thrissur, 2007, p. 407. (My Trans.)

started writing short stories criticising the supremacy of the Priesthood in the Church.³⁹

The major concerns and issues in Varkey's stories were the problems faced by the ordinary and poor farmers in their lives. From the despots who divided the people in the name of God along the lines of Church, Religion, and Citizenship, and exerted lordship over them, to the ravages of Diwan C. P. Ramaswami Iyer's suppressive administration, the Freedom struggle, the turbulent atmosphere created by the misrule of the State Congress, necessity of Communism all created themes of Ponkunnam Varkey's novels and short stories.⁴⁰

For publishing *Manthrikettu* and *American Model* criticising the misrule of C. P., Ponkunnam Varkey had to spend six months in jail. Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai, another writer, said about Varkey that he respected him all the more, because he refused to succumb to temptations while living thus among enemies, and instead plunged forward raising the banner of humanity and human rights.⁴¹

In the opinion of Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, Ponkunnam Varkey was a writer who wrote political stories in Malayalam. Marxist ideas were deep-rooted in his writings.⁴² In his works which were published from 1945 onwards, the first was the *Aniyara*. It was followed by *Anthithiri* (1946), *Eazhakal* (1947),

³⁹ K. M. George, Ponkunnam Varkey, *Indian Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Sahitya Akademy, July 1996, p. 73, Jstor. org/stable/23329505, p. 73.

⁴⁰ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

⁴¹ Navarangam Natarajan, *Karur Kathayude Rajashilpi* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 1998, p. 16.

⁴² K. M. George, Ponkunnam Varkey, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

“Edivandi” (1950), “Shabdhikunna Kalappa” (1956), which were also his more important writings. The *Shabdhikunna Kalappa* was the work that garnered the most popular reception for Varkey. It was a story about the affectionate relationship between Ousephettan, a farmer, and his Ox.⁴³

Ponkunnam Varkey never shied away from expressing his political standpoint before people. In May 1945, the second conference of the Progressive Literary Movement took place in Kottayam. Some salient points from the speech Ponkunnam Varkey, who was also the Secretary of this organisation, delivered set forth his ideas.

“If an artist is indeed an artist, he will not be a partner to the scenes of crime taking place around him by closing his eyes to it. Reluctance to touch upon matters of politics, for fear of the dungeons, does not make an artist ”⁴⁴ Thus Ponkunnam Varkey contributed through his writings to the left movement in Kerala.

Vaikom Muhammad Basheer was a writer who differed from the ideological rigour of Ponkunnam Varkey. The writings of Basheer were a reflection of the lives of the common people.

Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (1908-1994)

Keeping aside the perspective of Marxist modernism with its sloganeering and propaganda, Basheer viewed human life with the calm outlook of Sufism.

⁴³ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, pp. 402-403.

⁴⁴ Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer was a writer who developed his writings as a site of resistance against exploitation and for economic equality.⁴⁵

The noted linguist R. E. Asher remarked that it is indeed difficult to discover the themes of socialist realism in the writings of Basheer.⁴⁶ Vaikom Muhammed Basheer said thus about Marx: “His intense love and honour toward the downtrodden world of the labourer, prompted me to respect him all the more.”⁴⁷ Though not a proponent of applied Marxist philosophy, the atmosphere of terror created during the Second World War, starvation, unemployment, the black market, exploitation that followed and the social issues that the common man had to face formed the major themes in Basheer’s early writings.⁴⁸

The first among Basheer’s works was the romantic tragedy *Balyakala Sakhi* (Childhood Companion) that came out in 1944. It was in the same year that another of his important works, *Premalekhanam* (The Love Letter) was published. It was followed by *Shabdangal* (Voices) in 1947, *Ntuppuppakkoranendarnu* (My Grandfather Had an Elephant) in 1951, *Mucheettukalikkaranthe Makal* (The Card Sharper's Daughter) in 1951, and *Aanavariyum Ponkurisum* in 1953.

Though all of Basheer’s writings displayed the features of socialist realism, he never acknowledged it. “Communism took birth in front of my eyes. Krishna Pillai, K. C. George, and E. M. S are my friends. However, I did not

⁴⁵ Aazad, *Op. cit.*, p. 206. (*My Trans.*)

⁴⁶ Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, *Sampoorna Krithikal*, Vol. 2, (Mal.), DC Books, Kottayam, 2001, p. 2516.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

become a Communist”⁴⁹ What Basheer did through his early writings was to propagate through his characters the concepts of Communism without becoming a Communist himself.

S. K. Pottekad (1913-1982)

Sankarankutty Kunhiraman Pottekad was a renaissance writer who viewed revolution with a romantic mind. While Basheer distanced himself from the Communist Movement, S. K. Pottekad nurtured a close relationship with the Communist Party and fully participated in its activities. In independent India, he contested the election as a leftist candidate. However, his writings did not focus on the social issues faced by one specific community like the farmers or the labourers. The primary characteristic of his writings was their romanticism.⁵⁰

Though the writings of Pottekad did not much reflect the Communist ideology, he had close links with the Progressive Literature Movement. His decision to take part in the conference of the All India Progressive Writers at Bombay is indicative of this.⁵¹ However, S. K. Pottekad revealed his ties with the Movement as follows: “I chose to neither get too close nor too distant from the Organisation”⁵² Even so, his writings approached social reality with a critical eye. It was in 1942 that his most important work, the *Naadan Premam*

⁴⁹ M. K. Sanu (ed.) *Basheer Varthamanathinte Bhavi* (Mal.), Ashayam Books, Kozhikode, 1994, p. 501. (My Trans.)

⁵⁰ S. K. Pottekad, *Samsarikunna Diarykurippukal* (Mal.), Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham, Kottayam, 1981, p. 147.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Prof. A. P. P. Namboothiri, *S. K. Pottekad Patanavum Anusmaranavum* (Mal.), Poorna Publications, Kozhikode, 1982, p. 178.

(“Country Love”) was published. Though the novel is about love and separation, the conflict of interest between ‘high.’ And ‘low’ classes are depicted in it.⁵³

After *Naadan Premam*, another important novel written by S. K. Pottekkatt was “*Premashiksha*” (“Lesson of Love”) in 1945, followed by *Moodupadam* (“The Veil”) in 1948. This novel is a cry against communal violence. However, amongst his writings, the one which was discussed the most was *Visha Kanyaka* (lit: “The Poison Virgin”) published in 1948. This novel tells the story of the Christians who sold their lands in the regions of Travancore and took up their journey to the hills of Malabar with a vision of a dreamlike life. The major character in this novel is Anthony. Critics have pointed out the influence of John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* in this work. The novel *Visha Kanyaka* ends tragically. It was a response against immorality, the boundless desire for riches, and greed, which are inherent in man. Through Romanticism, Pottekkatt tries to display the ideals of Marxist realism.⁵⁴ So in his way, S. K. Pottekkatt contributed to the spread of leftist ideology.

Karur Neelakanta Pillai (1898-1975)

It was in the same period that Thakazhi and Keshavadev entered the arena of the short story that Karur started writing short stories. Though his writings were not overtly political, the discord in society was reflected in his works. Karur stepped into the world of literature with his *Annathe Kooli* (“The Wages of Yesteryear”) being serialised in the *Mathrubhoomi Weekly* in 1932. In all, Karur composed 178 short stories. They can be divided into two major types: Teacher

⁵³ K. M. George, *Aadhunika Malayala Sahitya Charithram, op. cit.*, p. 169.

⁵⁴ V. Rajkrishnan, “Look Back Tenderness: S. K. Pottekkatt”, *Indian Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 5(277), Sep 2013. www.jstor.org/stable/43856431, p. 22.

Stories and Non-Teacher Stories.⁵⁵ The work fatigue experienced by teachers, their low wages, the insecurity of tenure, the harassment and abuse by the managers, the lack of recognition on the part of the society, and similar issues are reflected in the writings of Karur.

Karur, who was a teacher by profession, along with other teachers, formed the organisation called the “Adyapaka Mahasabha” in 1920. The major goal of this organisation was to represent to the government the issues faced by the teachers. The Travancore Government later dismissed all the teachers under their employees who had participated in this conference. Karur too was subjected to dismissal. In the backdrop of this incident and other experiences, he wrote eighteen stories about the lives of teachers alone. Prominent among them are *Pothichoru* (“Packed Lunch”), *Saar Vandanam* (“Sir Salute”), *Saarinum Pattikum* (“For Sir, and for the Dog”), *Kudumba Budget* (“Family Budget”) and *Onnam Vadyar* (“The FirstTeacher”).⁵⁶

Among these, the “Pothichoru” composed in 1946 is the most deserving of attention. More details about this work have been given in the previous chapters. The theme of this story is a teacher stealing the food packet of a student, unable to bear his hunger. In the story *Pension*, Karur describes the situation of a teacher who is forced to live off a pittance as his pension.⁵⁷

The *Kaalchakram* (“The wheel of Life) is a story that subjects to comparison the life of the rich toddy-shop contractor with that of the starving

⁵⁵ Navarangam Natarajan, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁵⁶ Vasanthan, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

teacher. In *Saar Vandanam*, we can see a teacher who burns in the furnace of hardship.⁵⁸

The theme that stood out in Karur's writings, whether situated in the city, or the countryside, was the pain and agony of poverty and hunger. He had close links with the Progressive Literature Movement. Along with M. P. Paul, he founded the organisation called 'Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham' (Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society- SPCS). It was this organisation that hosted the 1945 Conference of the Progressive Literature Movement in Kottayam. Karur was also at the forefront of forming a cooperative society for writers. Along with twelve members including D. C. Kizhakemuri and M. P. Paul, Karur collected eleven rupees as fees, and in 1945, started the Travancore Sahitya Sahakarana Sangham. This is considered to be the world's first cooperative society for writers.⁵⁹ This organisation later became the Sahitya Sahakarana Sangham in 1949. This organisation played a pivotal role in the printing and publishing of literary volumes in Malayalam which was a revolutionary move in the field of Malayalam literature.⁶⁰ It also freed the writers from the clutches of unscrupulous and exploitative publishers.

Cherukad Govinda Pisharodi (1914 –1976)

Cherukad Govinda Pisharodi was a writer, teacher, and political activist whose works stressed the ideals of the Progressive Literature Movement. He was born into the Pisharodi family of Cherukad in Pulamanthol which strongly upheld the traditions of the time. He was an individual who experienced the ill

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁵⁹ N. Natarajan, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

effects of the matrilineal system. It was in the 1930s that he broke free from the ‘cage-like structure of tradition’ and plunged into the National Movement. The advancement of the National Movement in Malabar influenced him. Cherukad, who was an enthusiastic activist of the Congress, later engaged himself in the activities of the Congress Socialist Party after its formation. He came to the forefront of the Party by organising the farmers and the teachers.⁶¹

In September 1940, when the anti-colonial protests and rebellion strengthened the frontline Communist leaders all had to go into hiding, Cherukad was also forced to go into hiding. He notes in his autobiography that he and his friends ‘proclaimed the birth of the Communist Party on the 26th of January 1940, through posters and writings on the wall. In the wake of the Second World War, in 1941, the sanctions that had been placed upon the Communist Party was lifted, and Cherukad came forward in the fight against fascism by volunteering for propagandist activity. It was as a part of this propaganda work that he started writing poems, songs and satirical verses.⁶²

For his propagandist activity, Cherukad extensively used the art-form of *Pathakam*.^{*} In the backdrop of the impending invasion of India by Japan, he performed anti-Japan *Pathakams* in various parts of Malabar.⁶³

Cherukad had to often face dismissal from his job due to his intensive political activity, and also had to spend time in jail. He was involved in much

⁶¹ P. Govinda Pillai, Foreword, *Mutthassi* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 1989, p. 10.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Cherukad, *Jeevithappatha*, (Mal.) Current Books, Thrissur, 2014, pp. 452-456.

* *Pathakam* is a traditional temple art form of Kerala in which the stories from Hindu puranas are narrated.

political activity in the period after 1945, and as a part of this activity, produced several plays, poems, short stories, and novels. The major novels of Cherukad are as follows: *Manninte Maaril* (“In the Bosom of the Earth”/1954), *Mutthassi* (“Grandmother”/1955), *Shanidasa* (The curse of Saturn) (1959), *Pramaani* (“Leader”/1962), *Marumakan* (“Son-in-Law”/1963), *Devalokam* (“Land of the Gods”/1971), and *Bhooprabhu* (“Master of the Land”/1976).⁶⁴

Of Cherukad’s novels, only two are subjected to the analysis here, as the novels which were published within the timeframe selected for this research study are *Manninte Maaril* (1954) and *Mutthassi* (1955). Though *Mutthassi* was published as a single volume only in 1959, it had been serialised in the *Navayugam Weekly* from 1955 onwards. In addition to this, this novel articulates the political situation in Valluvanad from 1930 to 1950.⁶⁵

The novel “*Mutthassi*” records the history of various Movements in Kerala. It is a work that cannot be ignored by Progressive Literature. The Agricultural Movement, the Teacher’s Movement, the Communist Movement, the Library Movement all are intertwined into the plot and structure of this great novel.⁶⁶

The major character of this novel is Nani Teacher, also called Nani. . It is through her perspective that the community in the novel is seen. The pathetic conditions of the teachers in British Malabar are also depicted in this novel. The

⁶⁴ P. Govinda Pillai, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁶⁵ Prabhakaran Pazhassi, “Charithravum Novelum”, In Palakeezhu Narayanan (ed.) *Mutthassiyude Arannoottandu* (Mal.), Kerala Bhasha Institute, 2010, Thiruvananthapuram, p. 101.

⁶⁶ K.P. Mohanan, “Adhyapakaprasthanavum Malayala Sahityavum” In M. N. Vijayan (ed.), *Nammude Sahityavum Nammude Samoohavum* (Mal.), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, p. 184.

harassment and abuse of the unprivileged people who enter into the profession of teaching in an attempt to escape from starvation by the Management and Government officials are presented factually in this work.⁶⁷

Though Nani is the major character in this novel, the “*Mutthassi*”, another important character who grabs the attention of everyone is Narakath Ammalu Amma, the *Mutthassi*, the grandmother in the novel Ammalu Amma is a person who wields the package of matrilineal and old-tradition. She tries to force this tradition upon her daughter.⁶⁸

Another major character in this novel, Kuttimalu Amma, who has land-rent arrears to pay to the landlord is put into financial constraints and many difficulties due to this. In this novel, Cherukad depicts the grandmother who tries to give her granddaughter to the steward of the landlord, to temporarily live with him, to solve this issue of the land-rent arrears. But the protagonist/heroine of the novel, Nani, resists this relationship, and the plan of the grandmother crumbles before this opposition.

However, later, the Congress Party and the Farmer’s Organisation manage to make the grandmother aware of the fact that the ownership of the farmland could then be taken up by the farmer who had taken care of the land. At last, the traditional mindset of the grandmother begins to change. A Communist named Gopalan influences the grandmother very much. Nani teacher joins the Teacher’s Organisation Movement and becomes an activist of the Communist Party. Finally, the grandmother becomes a staunch communist.

⁶⁷ Prabhakaran Pazhassi, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

She helps to hide and give refuge to those in the Movement who were forced to go into hiding and is even willing to go to jail.⁶⁹

This change in the mindset of grandmother is not just personal it is essentially an ideological one. Cherukad asserts in the novel that the Communist Party succeeded in bringing this ideological shift to the older generation too.

The novel “*Mutthassi*” had certain other peculiarities too. This novel situates women at the forefront of the Socialist-Communist Movements. Critics have opined that it is Cherukad’s own life that is reflected in *Mutthassi*. This view is further strengthened by the fact that in both Cherukad’s autobiography *Jeevithappathayil* and in the novel *Mutthassi*, the events mentioned are the same.⁷⁰

The *Manninte Maaril* was a novel that Cherukad wrote before the *Mutthassi*. It was published in 1954. This is one of the noted novels where the lives of the farmers are depicted.⁷¹ The novel presents three generations of *Thiyya* farmers. Karimbanaykkal Komban Kondera and his younger brother Konga make up the first generation. They are the representatives of the tenants during the time of the feudal system. Chami, Ayyapan, and Kuttiraman who belong to the second generation, though they experience many changes, are not willing to abandon and cast off the old systems. However, Kochu Konderan, who is of the third generation, being influenced by the Communist ideals,

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁷¹ Santhalayam Keshavan Nair, *Kalapa Sahityam* (Mal.), SPCS, Kottayam, 2017, p. 22.

singlehandedly resists the feudal-landlord system and gives leadership to enforce these new changes, appearing before us as a class-conscious peasant.⁷²

These novels are not just leftist propaganda pieces but depict the ideological transformation underway in the region. This is done historically in the sense that the older generation is depicted as entrapped in feudal tradition and the new generation under the leftist influence in opposition. However, this tussle is not portrayed as a fight between two generations but as a fight between two world views. The leftist worldview emerges victorious in the end.

Cherukad's novels have often been subjected to the criticism that they were lacking in literary aesthetics. However, Cherukad countered this criticism by saying that his writings were meant to be readings that were focused on the Movements that liberated the ordinary people from the suppression that they were subject to.⁷³

Revolutionary poems and songs of revolt were literary forms, just like the novel, that strengthened the Progressive Literature Movement, the Left, and the peasant' Movements. As opposed to the novel, these were different in the sense that even those who were unable to read and/or write could also sing these songs and poems of revolt along with shouting slogans. This led to wider propagation of left ideas.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Govindan Nair, *The Influence of Maxim Gorky on Malayalam Novels between 1930 and 1950*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Russian Studies, University of Calicut, 1985, p. 216.

In the following pages, the poems and songs which were instrumental in propagating the revolutionary ideals will be examined in the backdrop of the growth of the Left Movement.

Poetry and the Left Movement

There is indeed a long list of poets in Malayalam Literature who wielded poetry as the sword to attack the poverty faced by the farmers and labourers, the systematic exploitation by the landlords, the repressive policies of the provincial kingdoms, the local administration and the British government.

The Socialist-Communist ideals which gained momentum in Kerala in the 1930s and the development of the Soviet Union as a model-Socialist state after the October Revolution greatly attracted the attention of Indian writers. The Influx of Bolshevik literature on India was rightly monitored by the British government agencies. There were several British records which speak about it.⁷⁴ October Revolution greatly attracted the attention of the Malayalam poets. The noted Malayalam poet G. Sankara Kurup wrote the poem *Naale* (“Tomorrow”), and the anthology titled *Chenkathir* (“Red Corn”). He wrote them both after being fascinated by the Socialist system in the Soviet Union.⁷⁵

When the Progressive Literature Movement took form in Kerala, the majority of the writers, and especially poets, became its members. The poets who maintained a close association with the Progressive Literature Movement reinvigorated the literature in Malayalam. Prominent poets in this list include

⁷⁴ *File No. 387-Part Serial 1-3-political*, Dated -1924 -Home Department, Government of India, National Archives, New Delhi. For details see the Appendix - 3.

⁷⁵ Pavanan, *October Viplavum Malayala Sahityavum* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2011, p. 114.

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, Vailoppilly Sreedhara Menon, and Edassery Govindan Nair. Vayalar Rama Varma, P. Baskaran, and O. N. V. Kurup were influenced by leftist ideals and wrote poems that oozed with revolutionary fervour. In addition to these, K. P. G. Namboothiri and Kedamangalam Pappukutty wrote poems that were wholly based on the propagation of the Party's ideals.

The poets whose works are discussed here did not compose poetry that was solely based on the concept of Socialist Realism. Many of them were romantics. Some of them did not have even a basic comprehension of Marxism. Even so, their works were highly instrumental in, the spread of leftist ideology.

The poets who have been discussed in the previous chapters have not been discussed here. In the following sections, the first to be analysed is Changampuzha Krishna Pillai.

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai (1911-1948)

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai was a poet who brought great changes into the realm of poetry writing in Malayalam. His predominant tone of the writing was in the Romantic style. However, the poverty and the difficulties that he faced in life from a very young age prompted him to think from the perspective of the ordinary folk. From the time he was working as a labourer in the Daras Mail Coir factory, he was aligned with the concept of the right to equality.⁷⁶ While he was studying in Intermediate College, Changampuzha composed three collections of poetry: 1. *Bashpanjalai*, 2. *Hemachandrika*, and 3. *Aaradhakan*. In 1936, pained by the death of his bosom-friend Edappally Raghavan Pillai who

⁷⁶ M Sanu, *Changampuzha Krishnapilla: Nakshatrangalude Snehabhajanam* (Mal.), DC Books, 5th Edition, Kottayam, 2014, p. 158.

committed suicide, he wrote the very famous poem *Ramanan*. Though half of the text was factual, the other half was pure imagination.⁷⁷

As the result of Changampuzha Krishna Pillai being influenced by the Marxist-Communist ideals, he wrote: *Vaazhakkula* (“The Plantain Bunch”). He wrote this before the Congress Socialist Party raised the issue of land rights and organised the farmers’ agitation. The plot of this work which was published in 1937 is about a *Malaya Pulayan* who plants a Plantain, which bears fruit. The family of the *Malaya Pulayan* dream about the day when the bunch of plantains would finally ripen and be ready to eat. However, when the bunch finally becomes ripe, the landlord spots it and commands the *Malaya Pulayan* to cut it down and bring it to his house.⁷⁸

This poem was sung around by the literate Malayali of that time. Concerning both the Character and the Plot, this poem became the prime representative of the emotional response of Kerala. The depiction of the Malayan’s mental anguish as he cuts down the bunch of plantains, not to feed his children who were waiting eagerly for them, but to take them to the landlord’s house to be displayed as an offering, captured the emotions of the readers and made them cry.⁷⁹ Changampuzha ends the poem with these lines that extort the reader to revolt and resist: “Ithinokke Prathikaaram Cheyyathangumo Pathithare! Ningalthan Pinmurakkar’ (*Can your succeeding generations/ abide without revenge for this, oh you wretched!*). However, there were also negative

⁷⁷ S. Guptan Nair, *Makers of Indian Literature: Changampuzha*, Sahitya Akademy, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 27-29.

⁷⁸ Changampuzha, *Vazhakkula*, NBS Kottayam, Reprint 2013, pp. 5-20.

⁷⁹ K. Balakrishnan, Nammalu Koyyum Vayalellam Nammudethaakum Painkiliye (Mal.), *Mathrubhumi*, Annual Issue, 2 Jan 2020, p. 1.

criticisms of this poem. The reason for this disparagement was that the poet adopted an escapist attitude by entrusting the duty of revolt to the coming generations, and not the present one.⁸⁰

In addition to the Vazhakkula, Changampuzha composed a large number of poems based on the lives of the farmers, and the poor. Prominent among them are: *Innathe Nila* (“The Present Condition”), *Rakthapushpangal* (“Flowers of Blood”), and *Spandikunna Asthimaadam* (“The Throbbing Tomb”. *Innathe Nila* (“The Present Condition”) was written by Changampuzha in his ire against the exploiting classes who thrived on the sorrow and destitution of the hardworking farmers.⁸¹ The poem *Rakthapushpangal* (“Flowers of Blood”), is about the destitute in their tiny huts who starve while Kerala celebrates the festival of Onam:

“For you to sleep in silk mattresses
We stand hungry in the burning sun, in the swamp
Let the sweeping winds of hunger’s raging storm
And crush and scatter the arrogance of the upper class once and for all”⁸²

That Changampuzha was a writer who leaned towards the left ideology is evidenced by the fact that during the Second World War, when the war of the imperialists became the war of the people, he wrote poems extolling the concept of the ‘people’s war’.⁸³

⁸⁰ M. Leelavathy, *Malayala Kavitha Sahitya Charithram* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 2002, p. 226. (My Trans.)

⁸¹ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 284. (My Trans.)

⁸³ K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai was also a writer who kept close ties with the Organisation of Progressive Literature. He took part in numerous annual conferences of the Organisation. In the second conference of the Progressive Literature Movement that was held in Kottayam in May 1945, Changampuzha was the Chief Guest for the occasion. The salient points of the speech delivered by Changampuzha in his Presidential address are given below:⁸⁴

Many mock the Progressive Literature Movement, saying that it is a Movement solely for the sake of propagating the philosophies of the Communists. There is no reason to go berserk on hearing the word 'Communism', like the county bull that goes mad at the sight of the colour red. It is an independent philosophical treatise that is founded upon economic science that is primary for the welfare and upliftment of human society. The goal of this organisation is the welfare of man. Therefore, in that sense, what is there to wonder about Progressive Literature trying to aid the spread of such principles?.⁸⁵

Though Changampuzha associated himself closely with the Progressive Literature Movement and the Communist Party, in later years, he distanced himself from them. The major reason for this was the negative criticism by the Communist writers against him. Changampuzha clarified the rift in a statement that he made during that time. His writings gave rise to a long list of young poets, especially revolutionary poets who were greatly influenced by him. Vayalar Rama Varma was one such young poet who was influenced by the writings of Changampuzha Krishna Pillai.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88. (My Trans.)

Vayalar Rama Varma (1928-1975)

It was in the middle of the Indian Freedom Struggle that Vayalar Rama Varma started to write poetry. He was excited by the Freedom Struggle and started to write poems at a young age. Later, revolts such as the Punnapra-Vayalar uprising caught his attention. Many of the leaders who were involved in the Punnapra-Vayalar uprising stayed in hiding at his house. Kumara Panikkar, a Communist leader who had taken part in the uprising, secretly met Vayalar Rama Varma, and it was this meeting that played a major role in planting and nurturing the seeds of leftist thought into the mind of Vayalar.⁸⁶

While examining the political importance of Vayalar Rama Varma's poetry, we can see that he initially stepped into the stage of poetry as an exponent of the National Movement and Gandhian thought in 1948 with his poetry collection, *Paadhamudrakal* ("Foot prints"). This was followed by many writings that contained the ideals of leftist Communist and Socialist thought. Prominent among them are *Konthayum Poonulum* ("The Rosary and the Sacred Thread"/1950), *Naadinte Naadham* ("Music of the Land"/1952), *Aiysha* (1954), *Oru Judas Janikunnu*, *Enikku Maranamilla* ("A Judas is Born, I do not Die"/1955). *Konthayum Poonulum*, *Mulankaadu*, *Ithiri Pattu* ("Little Song"), *Naadinte Naadham* are the more famous of Vayalar's works. In these works, the region of Cherthala which was plagued by poverty and hunger, its problems, the

⁸⁶ Chelangottu Gopalakrishnan, *Vayalar* (Mal.), Mathrubhumi Publications, Kozhikode, 2016, p. 29.

revolutionary thoughts of the Communist workers, their vain hopes and shattered dreams are all depicted.⁸⁷

As far as Vayalar was concerned, the perpetual theme of the poet was always the land and the problems of the people. It was in this fashion that the anthology “Naadinte Naadam” (“Music of the Land”) was composed.

The issue that always troubled the genius of the poet Vayalar Rama Varma was the problem of human emancipation. He divided human society into two classes: the oppressors and the oppressed. In a society that was divided based on class, Vayalar Rama Varma intended his poems to be sites of debate and questioning of the disgusting methods that the upper classes resorted to to keep the lower classes under control.⁸⁸ The poem *Konthayum Poonoolum* (“The Rosary and the Sacred Thread”) opens up the hindrances and the problems raised by the continued existence of Caste and Religion to the development of mankind. Some of its important parts are quoted below:

“The Chains with which you pierced and locked our feet centuries ago
Are now bit by bit being broken and fashioned by us into sickles today”⁸⁹

In the poem “Theejwalakal” (“Flames of Fire”), the poet compares the immortal light of revolt of the martyrs of the Punnapra-Vayalar uprising to the glittering stars. He wrote that when the workers unite together, when the mountains of fire

⁸⁷ Souhрудhan P. P., *Influence of Marxism in Malayalam Poetry: An Analysis*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Malayalam, University of Calicut, 1996, p. 33.

⁸⁸ Dr. Chandrika Shankara Narayanan, *Vayalar Ramavarma: Rithubedhangalku Varnam Pakarnna Kavi* (Mal.), SPCS, Kottayam, 2013, p. 627.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

spread, when the burning coals of movement glow in the bosom of the land, the landlords will tremble.⁹⁰

Much of Vayalar's poetry was songs that praised the revolts of the working class. He was closely associated with the Progressive Literature Movement. He described the ethics of Literature thus: He did not believe in the argument that literature should not become mere propaganda. He believed that Literature could do much for the liberation of fellow beings who were preys to oppression and exploitation. He believed that the poet is duty-bound to reflect social awareness in his poetry.⁹¹

P. Bhaskaran (1924-2007)

P. Bhaskaran was very much influenced by Changampuzha's works. Even during his student days, he was involved in the activities of the National Movement and wrote poems and stories that energised the National Movement. Later, for taking part in the 1942 Quit India Movement, he was imprisoned.⁹²

The poet who was a National Freedom fighter was afterwards attracted by the conclave of ideas, and composing poetry and other writings exhorting the use of arms for revolution. The goal of P. Bhaskaran was to create an environment conducive to social change through poetry. With this in mind, he wrote many poems, of which the most notable are, *Vayalar Garjikunnu* (Vayalar

⁹⁰ Vayalar Rama Varma, *Vayalar Kruthikal* (Mal.), SPCS, Kottayam, 1976, p. 205.

⁹¹ Chandrika Shankara Narayanan, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁹² M Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

Roars/1946), *Karshaka Gaanam* (Farmer's Song/1947), and *Mardhdhithan* (The Oppressed/1947).⁹³

In "Vayalar Garjikunnu", the poet expresses his opposition to the manhunt that took place in October and December 1946 in Vayalar, where an inspiring took place P. Bhaskaran, who visited the site of the Vayalar incident the very next day, wrote a poem about the revolt:

A rough translation is as follows:

"I will rise, again I will rise

Throughout the land, I will rise, Vayalar roars

The burning glow of rage shines in the eyes

The consciousness of revolt that overflows in the heart

Carried along with the Southern Storm that arrives with tossing waves

Hear oh hear, the roar of Vayalar."⁹⁴

Many of the revolutionary songs composed by P. Bhaskaran were a constant source of headache for the British Government and the local administration. The fact that the collections of his songs such as *Karavaal* (The Sword), *Oodakuzhalum Lathiyum* (The Flute and the Lathi), and *Nava Keralam* (New Kerala), were banned in the princely states of Kochi, and Travancore and in British Malabar, clearly attest to the calls for revolution and the clarion calls for agitations against the government in his poems.

⁹³ Souhrudhan, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁹⁴ Dr. C. Pallipuram Murali, *Marxian Lavanyashastram P. Bhaskarante Kavithakalil* (Mal.), Rainbow Publications, Chengannur, 2017, p. 73.

One of the poems composed by Bhaskaran in the collection “Karaval” goes like this:

“Padham Padham Urachu Naam Paadi Paadi Povuka
Paaril Aikya Keralathin Kaahalam Muzhakkuvaan
Cheruvinnu Saghaakale, Cheruvinnu Yuvaakale
Chora engil Chorayay Ee Keralam Varaykuvaan”.⁹⁵

These lines are roughly translated as:

“Let us then with singing, march with each foot firm
To blow the trumpet of a united Kerala throughout the land
Come join us comrades, Join us ye Youth
If blood, then with blood, to draw this Kerala.”

In his latter phase, revolutionary fervour is diminished in his poems and was replaced by tender moods. . . When P. Bhaskaran’s style of poetry is analysed as a whole, critics opine that his style is a mixture of realism and futurism.⁹⁶

O. N. V. Kurup

O. N. V. Kurup was a poet who tried his utmost to extol the virtues of Communist ideals in his poems. By profession, he was a Malayalam teacher. He composed numerous poems that contained leftist ideology. “Poruthunna Soundaryam” (Fighting Beauty/1941), “Samarathinte Santhathikal” (Children of Revolt/1951), *Njan Ninne Snehikunnu* (I love You/1953), *Ente Ponnarivalu* (My Precious Sickle/1954), *Maatuvin Chattangale* (Change the Rules/1955),

⁹⁵ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 322. This is set as a marching song.

⁹⁶ Dr. C. Pallipuram Murali, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

“Daahikunna Paanapathram” (Thirsting Bowl/1956) etc are his more famous poems that highlight the problems faced by the farmers and the labourers.⁹⁷

O. N. V. Kurup had close ties with the Progressive Literature Movement from early on. The Changampuzha Memorial Award instituted at the Conference of the Progressive Literature Movement in 1949, was awarded to O.N.V. Kurup’s poem *Arivaalum Raakuyilum* (The Sickle and the Nightingale’).⁹⁸ The poet who was a proponent of Communism added generous amounts of Communist ideas into his poetry.

Like Vayalar Rama Varma and P. Bhaskaran, O. N. V. Kurup too was moved by the Punnapra-Vayalar agitations. Based on these incidents, he wrote a poem titled the *Paris Commune*. The poem views the Punnapra-Vayalar revolts as the ‘Paris Commune’ of Kerala. Waving the red barley shoots, the peasants founded the ‘Paris commune of Kerala’. The poet extols the comrades to shout salutations to revolution.⁹⁹

O. N. V’s writings were not limited to poetry. He wrote drama songs for the K. P. A. C. drama company too. These drama songs became very famous and grew very popular among the common folk. On examining the poetry of O. N. V, it can be seen that up to 1960, the poems that he wrote were pulsating with ideas of revolt. However, pained by the political tug-of-war that he experienced, he withdrew from writing revolutionary poems and moved to the themes of philosophy, depression, moral dilemma, and love of nature later in his life.

⁹⁷ Souhrudhan, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁹⁸ Dr. Chandrika Narayanan, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

⁹⁹ O.N.V. Kurup, *Kavithayum Viplavakavithayum Prasanga Samaharam* (Mal.), Deshabhimani Study Circle, Thiruvananthapuram, 1981, p. 13.

Vailoppilly Sreedhara Menon and Edassery Govindan Nair were poets who wrote poems from a perspective that was different from the trio of Vayalar Rama Varma, P. Bhaskaran, and O. N. V. Kurup. Though they did not have a deep understanding of Marxist ideology, most of the poems they wrote dealt with the problems faced by the farmers and ordinary people. Both these poets were writers who kept away from the Progressive Literature Movement. However, as they were heralding humanism and showing concern for the poor, flashes of what stood for Progressive Literature can be seen in their poetry.¹⁰⁰

Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon (1911-1985)

Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon is a poet whose contribution to Malayalam literature is unparalleled. His writings touched upon the plight of the farmers and agricultural labourers. He was a contemporary of Changampuzha Krishna Pillai and achieved his status in the field of poetry along with Changampuzha. However, unlike Changampuzha, Vyloppilli was not a Romantic. Much of his poetry reflected the social changes and reforms that were taking place around him. The dominant tone in his poetry was that of the love of mankind. As Vyloppilli was a science teacher himself, scientific perception is manifested in his poems.

Among his many poems, the first anthology to be published was the *Kannikkoythu* (The Maiden Harvest) in 1947. Some of the important poems in this collection were, *Kannikkoythu*, *Padayalikal* (Soldiers), *Assam Panikkar* (The Workers from Assam), and *Ariyillanjittum* (Though without Grain). The poem “Kannikkoythu” is about the problems faced by the paddy farmers, and their

¹⁰⁰ Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

exploitation at the hands of the landlords. In the poem *Ariyillanjittum* (Though without Grain), Vayloppilli paints the picture of the tragic faces of hunger and starvation.¹⁰¹

Edasseri Govindan Nair (1906-1974)

Edasseri Govindan Nair was a writer who created a name for himself in the arena of Malayalam Literature as a poet and playwright. He was an active member of the National Movement and took up the profession as a lawyer's assistant to sustain his livelihood. M. Achuthan has opined that Edasseri was a poet who had the emotional power and restraint that only the family farmer's affectionate honesty, empathy and respect for the soil and the man could possess.¹⁰²

Edasseri who was an early Congress activist was a staunch Gandhian. He took part in the Guruvayoor Temple Entry Sathyagraha and the Quit India Movement. Edasseri's past had a major role to play in the shaping of his poetry. His childhood was brought up in poverty. His love for the ordinary folk was a hallmark of the poet's personality. According to Edasseri, "The writer must stand on the side of the suffering majority. He must also understand that ' he was one of the people.'" ¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Vailoppili Sreedhara Menon, *Vailoppily Sampoorana Kruthikal*(Mal.), Current Books, Thrissur, 2010, p. 35. In the poem when a person asks the dead man's wife a handful of rice grain to be strewn, as per custom, around the deadbody. the wife sobs and says that if she had a handful of rice grain her husband would not have died.

¹⁰² M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

¹⁰³ Edassery Govindan Nair, *Edasseri yude Prabandhangal* (Mal.), Mathrubhumi, Kozhikode, 1988, p. 619 (My Trans.)

Among Edasseri's writings, the works which stand out for their revolutionary ideas include the *Puthenkalavum Arivalum* ('The New Pot and the Sickle'), *Panimudakam* ("Strike"), and *Kudiyirakkam* ("The Eviction").

The poem *Puthenkalavum Arivalum* was published in 1948. Its plot is about the life of Koman, a farmer. Because he had incurred rent-arrears, the landlord had secured an order from the court permitting him to harvest the ripe-paddy that Koman had cultivated. When Ameen comes to harvest the grain, the farmers resist and protest, but he shows them the court order and silences them. Koman's wife, who arrives carrying a new pot to store the freshly harvested rice, sees what is happening and stands there stupefied. This is the plot of the poem. Eastern ends the poem thus:

"Koman ploughed and sowed this field
Koman cultivated a golden harvest in this field
Who did reap and eat this year
The golden harvest that Koman sowed
We must reap first the authority
And upon it be the golden harvest"¹⁰⁴

Here, the poet exhorts the people to end the exploitation of the landlords first they had to wrest the authority and power themselves.

The *Panimudakkam* (Strike), is yet another poem that strongly supports Marxist philosophy. The workers strike against the anti-labourer policies of the

¹⁰⁴ Dr. Naduvattam Gopalakrishnan, Vazhakkula Puthankalam, Arival., in Dr. Kavadiyar Ramachandran (ed.) *Edassery Kavitha Sambadanavum Patanavum* (Mal.), Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 2004, p. 213 (Roughly translated by myself).

employer. This is the plot of the poem. The central character in this poem is Raman, a worker, who takes part in this strike. One month into the strike, his family along with his little children, begin to starve. Later, the children die of hunger. But Raman and his family continue their struggle without giving up and moving on. The poet asks us to dig up and bury pains and leap from strength to strength¹⁰⁵

The poem concludes with Raman and his wife joining the procession of tens of thousands of people who shout this slogan and march forward in the streets.

The feature of Edasseri's poetry is the inherent paeans of change and their essential aesthetic beauty. Edasseri states that the visionary that had influenced him the most was Mahatma Gandhi. He says, "I am an ardent Gandhian and a person who has not studied Marxist philosophy. Many of the poems which I wrote that were merely objective were deemed fit by the Communist Party for their literary propagation". He continues and points out the reason for his failure in life: "For the Congressmen, I was a Red-Party person. For the Reds, I am a White-Cap wearer."¹⁰⁶ Edasserri's poetry combined the ideals of Gandhism, Marxism and Revolutionary ideology into one form.

'Committed' Poets: Differing from the poets discussed above, were the poets Kadamangalam Pappukutty, K.P.G. Namboothiri, Punalur Ramachandran, Puthuserry Balan, and Thirunellur Karunakaran who wrote solely for the Party's interests and propagated them.

¹⁰⁵ Dr. M. T. Sulekha, Edasserikavithayile Pratyayashastram, in Dr. Kavadiyar Ramachandran (ed.), *Edasserikavitha: Sambhadhanavum Patanavum* (Mal.), Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvanthapuram, 2004, pp. 148-49.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2004, p. 4.

K.P.G. Namboothiri was a poet who took up social service and the propagation of Party literature as his duty and responsibility. In the poem titled “Uyirthezhunelppu” (“The Resurrection”), in remembrance of the Vayalar agitations and the Worker’s Movement that disrupted the tyrannical rule of C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, K. P. G. details the history of the uprising of the agricultural workers of Kuttanad.¹⁰⁷

The *Naniyude Chintha* (“Nani’s Thought”) was another of K.P.G. Namboothiri’s poems that was widely discussed. The poet presents a country girl, Nani, who sings in praise of the Soviet Union and its economic and social development. She wishes that she should have been born in the Soviet Union. There were strong reactions and heavy criticism against this poem. The critic Kuttikrishna Marar described this poem as a ‘market song’.¹⁰⁸ As a response to the question as to why Nani had no respect towards Indian culture, K. P. G. Namboothiri wrote another poem titled *Naniyude Marupadi* (Nani’s Reply). In this poem, the poet compares India and the Soviet Union:

“In the country where Nani was born
No one gets even a measure of grain
The Soviet Union was man’s heaven
Not a single person will be found starving
That is why Nani is so enamoured of that land.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ K.P.G. Namboothiri, *Kavikaalathiloode* (Mal.), Chintha Publications, Thriuvananthapuram, 1974, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ M. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 300 (A literal translation is made here).

¹⁰⁹ K. P. G. Namboothiri, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

Kedamangalam Pappukutty was another poet who followed the footsteps of K.P.G. Namboothiri. His poems attempted to make the workers and labourers conscious of their citizenship and aware of their rights. Like K.P.G., Pappukutty was not a poet who gave importance to the form, theme, mood, or stylistic devices of poetry. In the poem *Kadathuvanchi* (“The Boat”). Pappukutty asks the poor to organise and stand united to lose servitude and to gain peace and well being.¹¹⁰

These lines are tailor-made to evoke the awareness and consciousness of the working class and the power of organisation in the minds of the people.

Kesari Balakrishna Pillai compared Kedamangalam Pappukutty to the Soviet Socialist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. The explanation he gave for this comparison was that Pappukutty viewed man as a social ingredient. He viewed the labouring classes through the hard-core Socialist perspective and though limited by his inherent artistic aestheticism, Kedamangalam Pappukutty transferred it into his poetry.¹¹¹

Just like Kedamangalam Pappukutty, Puthussery Ramachandran was a die-hard Socialist. His poems reflect the mind of a poet who loved mankind that was thirsting for the creation of a new era. His notable poems are *Grameena Gayakan* (“The Rural Singer”/1949), and *Aavunnathra Uchchathil* (“As Loud as Possible”/1955).¹¹² *Aavunnathra Uchchathil* is also the name of an anthology of Puthussery Ramachandran’s poems. The poet revealed the reason for this title it

¹¹⁰ Erumely Parameshwaran, *Malayalam Sahityam Kalaghattathiloode* (Mal.), Current Books, Kottayam, Reprint, 2019, p. 338.

¹¹¹ Souhrudhan, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹¹² The poet laments that though many battlegrounds on earth got drenched in blood, equality did not sprout and songs were forgotten.

was named after, the Soviet poet Mayakovsky's opinion that poetry should loudly proclaim and shout out the social realities and open the eyes of the people.¹¹³

His active involvement with the Student's Movement propelled him into the activities of the Political Movements in the country. It resulted in his first collection of poetry, *Grameena Gayakan*.

Thirunelloor Karunakaran was yet another poet who was a contemporary of Puthussery Ramachandran. He was the foremost among the leftist oriented poets in Kerala. The feature of his poetry is their utmost sincerity. His poems were quite similar to that of Punalur Balan and Puthussery Ramachandran. Thirunelloor Karunakaran was a College teacher, and his most important poem is the *Manjuthullikal* ("Dew Drops"). In his poems, he verbally painted and presented the excellence of revolutionaries around the world and revolutionary ideology, thus applying the beauty of poetry to bring about change. Thirunelloor Karunakaran is known as an esteemed poet of the Progressive Literature Movement.¹¹⁴

In addition to the poets and poems discussed in the above paragraphs which influenced the Left Movements, a large collection of poetry-slogans that were used in the agricultural worker's organisations and their marches are also worthy of attention. They were known as "Padappattukal" (Battle songs). Keraleeyan, in his memoir, opines thus about these songs:

¹¹³ Souhrudhan, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

“This was the first method discovered to wade into the depths of the farmers’ destitution and exhort them to organise- Rowing along the Parassini River in tiny canoes, and loudly singing the lines of these battle-songs for the farmer-families on both banks to hear, and proclaiming the necessity of organising themselves.”¹¹⁵

The songs were set to tune with traditional boat songs (Vanchi Pattukal). Each song had a propaganda value. As the peasants were comparatively less educated than the urban middle class, oral transmission was resorted to. In the middle of the 1940s, in various parts of the Hosdurg Taluk, and the regions of Kadakath and Cheemeni, the *Thol Virak* (Leather and Firewood) Strike organised by the Farmers’ Organisation in 1946 is not worthy for the participation of a large number of women. The song composed by Keraleeyan for this event was enthusiastically sung by those who took part in the strike. A literal translation of some of the notable ones follows:

“We will take up the bark and firewood
Even if kalan* comes to stop us
No one has bought for himself
The forest that stretches out like the ocean
Bark for farming
Firewood for the household
We will gather from the forest
Let no one have any doubt on this.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Andalat, *Rekhayillatha Charithram* (Mal.), Chintha Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 1987, p. 190.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159 (Kalan is the local term for yama, the god of death).

The novels and poems which were published after the 1940s, under the influence of the Progressive Literature Movement were instrumental in spreading the Socialist-Communist ideals to the people and thereby creating a political awareness against the Colonial rule and the exploitation by the feudal-landlords among the ordinary people of Kerala.

The line demarcating propaganda and ‘ pure literature is always thin. In 1940 English writer George Orwell said that ‘all art is propaganda though all propaganda need not be art’. Some authors, like Cherukad, would append the manifesto of the communist party or the resolution passed in peasant’s meeting to his novels without making any alteration or even attempting to camouflage such propaganda. This was not liked many some of whom were otherwise sympathetic to the leftist cause. But those with open political affiliation tended to take a hard line and those who did not, tended to differ. This led to a split in the progressive literature movement.¹¹⁷

The Ideological Split in the Progressive Literature Movement

In the 1944 Shoranur Conference, the Jeeval Literature Movement was renamed as the Progressive Literature Movement and the scope of the organisation was widened. If the Jeeval Literature Movement was an association of writers whose conceptual base was the Socialist-Communist ideology, the Progressive Literature Movement expanded to include those writers who did not subscribe to the Communist ideology as well. Prominent writers including Prof. M. P. Paul, Joseph Mundassery, P. Keshavadev, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and Ponkunnam Varkey took part in the 1944 Shornur Conference. The organisation

¹¹⁷ Dawin Dwan, *Liberty, Equality And Humbug : Orwell’s Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, London, 2018, p. 35.

tasked P. Keshavadev with the responsibility of creating the manifesto for the newly-formed organisation that was the Progressive Literature Movement. He included two things in the manifesto: One, the social awareness that a writer should possess, and Two, the artistic value of the writings. Though the writers who were Communist sympathisers had misgivings about P. Keshavadev's statement on artistic value, they later backed down.¹¹⁸

It was during this period that writers such as P. Keshavadev, Thakazhi Sivashankara Pillai, and Ponkunnam Varkey wrote the majority of their works.¹¹⁹ It was also during this time that the plays such as M. P. Bhattathirippad's *Ruthumathi*, and Cherukad's *Nammalonnunnu* were composed. In addition to these, many of the poems of G. Shankara Pillai and the literary reviews of Joseph Mundassery also came out during this period.

It was in 1945 that the second conference of the Progressive Literature Movement took place at Kottayam. The conference was inaugurated by Harindranath Chattopadhyay and presided over by Changampuzha Krishna Pillai. The presidential address delivered by Changampuzha gave rise to much debate. He began by asking the writers on which side were they on. M. P. Paul. detailed the meaning and aims of the Progressive Literature Movement.¹²⁰

In the backdrop of the great upheavals in the national politics of India after 1946 with the INA (Indian National Army) Trials and the RIN (Royal

¹¹⁸ Dr. Sardhar Kutty, *Purogamana Sahitya Niroopanam (Mal.)*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvanthapuram, 1993, p. 56.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

¹²⁰ P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85.

Indian Navy) Mutiny¹²¹, E. M. S. Namboodiripad and other communist writers including K. Damodaran, Devadas, Achutha Kurup, K. K. Warriar and Unni Raja prepared a short write-up titled “Purogamana Sahityam Purogamikkan” (“For the Progressive Literature to Progress”), highlighting the need for a change to be brought about in the public functions and programmes of the Progressive Literature Movement. In this article, they differentiated between progressiveness and literature and came up with a new definition for literature. The progressive Literature Movement was to become a part of the revolution of the masses. This article became the forerunner of the split in the Progressive Literature Movement. Joseph Mudaserry published a review of this article in the *Mangalodayam*. The dictum that “Politics is the heart of Progress” resounded in the arguments of Communist writers such as E. M. S. In his review, Joseph Mudassey criticised this approach.¹²²

K. Damodharan made it clear that the protest against conservative elements had already begun in India much before the formation of the Progressive Literature Movement, and that it was on the strength of this that the political reformations happened.¹²³

The article that Joseph Mudassey wrote against the “Purogamanasahityam Purogamikkan”, resulted in the formation of two schools of thought within the organisation. The speech that Changampuzha Krishna Pillai delivered at the Kottayam Conference of the Progressive Literature Movement was published in book form, titled *Sahitya Chintakal* (“Literary

¹²¹ See for details, Priya. P, *Royal Indian Navy Mutiny a Study on its Impact on South India*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Calicut, 2014.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

Thoughts”). The Communist thinker M. S. Devadas criticised this volume in the *Mangalodayam* Weekly. In his presidential address, Changampuzha had criticised Vallathol, G. Shankara Kurup, and Sanjayan. Devadas was not pleased with this stance. In his opinion, since Changampuzha had not written anything for the upliftment of the National Movement, he had no right to criticise the poets who had played a decisive role in instilling the National-Consciousness in the minds of the people. Devadas extended his criticism of Changampuzha by saying that Changampuzha always exploited and played upon the emotions of the youth by including the themes of love and romance in his poetry.¹²⁴

These criticisms resulted in Changampuzha Krishna Pillai drifting away from the Communist Movements, and the ensuing debates also contributed to the widening of the divide between the writers who were Communists and the writers who were not. During this time, A. Madhavan, who was known as the sharp thinker of the Communist Party, wrote and published an article titled “Shaityakaranmaaram Rashtreeya Partikalum” (“Writers and Political Parties”) in the *Mangalodayam*. In that article, he wrote, “If a person does not stand with any political party, it means that the person is standing on air.”¹²⁵

In 1948, before the Third Conference of the Progressive Literature Movement, there was another major incident that led to the split within the organisation. In 1947, Joseph Mudaserry wrote a review in the *Mangalodayam*, on Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai’s *Thottiyude Makan* (The Scavenger’s Son) which was published in 1944. In this article, he made a critical comment. He stated that along with the argument that literature must have progressive content,

¹²⁴ M. R. Chandrashekar, *Keralathile Purogamana Sahityathinte Charithram* (Mal.), DC Books, Kottayam, 2010, p. 212.

¹²⁵ K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 95. (*My Trans.*)

it must also have a careful form and structure that suited the contents. However, the writers leaning towards the Communist Party resisted and rejected Joseph Mundassery's argument. They viewed this as a renewal of the concept of "art for art's sake."¹²⁶

In his autobiography *Kozhinja Elakal* (Fallen Leaves), Joseph Mundassery remembers these views. "What I intended was that the formalism that plagued Malayalam Poetry like cancer must be cauterized with Radium if that was possible. This tendency and resistance to formalism could be seen even during the time of Asan and Vallathol. When the review of Thakazhi's *Thottiyude Makan* was written, to reduce the beauty of the various parts of the novel to a single term, the phrase 'attention to form' was chosen, and was used in the sense to refer to the state where the form was given careful attention. However, the Communists who proclaim that it is the reality of life that must gain prominence in literature misunderstood my argument as mere formalism and painted me as a formalist. Thereafter, they classified me and those who supported my arguments as formalists".¹²⁷

Thus, in the Progressive Literature Movement, the non-Marxist writers were mocked by terming them as 'formalists', and the Marxist writers called themselves 'content-ists'.

It was at the time when this debate was gaining momentum that the Thrissur Conference of the Progressive Literature Movement was organised. This conference was inaugurated by the prominent writer Mulk Raj Anand and

¹²⁶ Dr. Sardar Kutty, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹²⁷ Joseph Mundassery, *Kozhinja Elakal*(*Mal.*), Current Books, Kottayam, 2004, p.142. (*My Trans.*)

presided over by M. P. Paul. This conference became a platform for the clash of opinions between the writers.¹²⁸

When the Thrissur Conference was held, India had already gained its Independence. Because there was a change effected in the political condition of India, it affected a change in the social realities as well. Therefore, the goal of this conference was that based on this change that was happening in the realm of social reality, the role of literature and that of the Progressive Literature Movement needed to be re-examined.

The Communist writers prepared a blueprint for a new manifesto and presented it at the Thrissur Conference of the Progressive Literature Movement.¹²⁹ The manifesto asked the writers which side they were on. However, the blueprint did not make any mention of the fact that India had gained Independence, nor about the government that had come to power. E. M. S. Namboodhiripad stated the stance of the Communist writers according to the blueprint as ‘the heart of progress is politics and the foundation of all the injustice in society is Imperialism, and that all other Progressive Movements are part of the resistance to Imperialism.’¹³⁰ This drew a lot of criticism.

K. Damodharan describes the background in which such a manifesto was prepared and presented:

When India gained its Independence, P. C. Joshi was the General Secretary of the Communist Party. He acknowledged the Freedom Struggle and exhorted the people to move along the path of progress...In

¹²⁸ K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹³⁰ M. R. Chandrasekharan, *op. cit.*, p. 220. (*My Trans.*)

this period, under the leadership of the Communist Party, protests against the feudal system, farmers protests, and agitations demanding the unification of a princely state with Free India were organised, thus creating a new wave in the political realm of Free India. B. T. Ranadive a senior communist party leader came to the front by calling Indian independence a false one. In his opinion, Jawaharlal Nehru and other Indian leaders had fooled and cheated the Indian people and joined forces with the colonising imperialists to further exploit and oppress the people. Therefore, the duty of the farmers and the workers were to wrest the authority from the present government by engaging in armed revolt and insurrection and to establish a new democratic government. This statement, also known as the “Ranadive thesis”, was published as the blueprint of the Second Party Congress. E. M. S., Devadas, K. Damodaran and others decided that this new political line of thought should be recognized and approved by the Progressive Literature Movement.¹³¹

This was how the manifesto was presented at the Thrissur Conference of the Progressive Literature Movement. When E. M. S wanted it to be put to vote, Kesav Dev, Thakazhi and Mundasserri walked out in protest. When many joined them, E. M. S withdrew the manifesto.¹³²

The presidential address delivered by M. P. Paul leaned towards the stance taken by the non-Communist writers. He overtly and covertly opposed and criticised the manifesto presented by the Communist writers, and made clear

¹³¹ K. Damodharan, *Sampoornakruthikal* (Mal.), Vol 7, Prabhat Books, Thiruvananthapuram, 2011, p. 225.

¹³² M. R. Chandrasekharan, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

the position taken by the non-Communist writers throughout the length and breadth of his speech. He stressed upon and highlighted the freedom of expression of the artist or writer. Some important points of his speech are quoted below:

For an artist, his freedom of expression and his freedom to practice is more important than life itself. However, for a political sect, the cultural platform is just one among many sites of resistance. Similarly, for a cultural organisation, politics is just one of the many sites of resistance. The Progressive literary writer, as long as he is an artist, cannot ignore his conscience. But in the attempt to redeem art from the monopoly of the upper class and make it democratic, he should be willing to join hands with any organisation and work together.¹³³

The presidential address of M. P. Paul greatly opposed the motion of the Communist writers. At one point in his speech, when he very lightly touched upon the abuse of freedom in the Soviet Union under the reign of Stalin, this became a bone of contention, and M. P. Paul was then characterised as an anti-Communist, and enemy of the Soviet Union, and a servant of the colonial imperialists.¹³⁴

In the Thrissur Conference of the Progressive Literature Movement, the Communist writers and the non-Communist writers began to exchange strong words and cast aspersions on each other. This only served to increase the distance between the two groups. The Working Council of the Progressive

¹³³ K. Damodaran, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-29 (*My Trans.*)

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

Literature Movement that sided with the non-Communist writers gathered together in June 1948 at Changanacheri and approved a new manifesto.¹³⁵

The organised activities of the writers of the Progressive Literature had ended with the Thrissur Conference, though it took some more time for the name of this organisation to become obsolete. While the differences of opinion within the Progressive Literature Movement was being overtly and covertly broadcast in other platforms and in newspaper columns, it was decided that the next annual conference would be held at Kollam in the first week of May 1949. The well-known novelist K. A. Abbas was invited to inaugurate this conference. The inaugural address by K. A. Abbas stressed the importance of unity within the organisation at a time when the writers of Progressive Literature were facing a crisis. Three major events took place at the Kollam Conference: 1. A Committee meeting to finalise the themes 2. Discussion on Formalism under the moderation of Mundassery, and 3. The Presidential address of M. P. Paul.¹³⁶

The thing that was discussed in the Committee was upon the topic of granting membership into the organisation to persons. A group put forward the proposition that only writers be granted membership, while another side argued that all who had a keen interest in literature may be given membership. The Communist writers argued that a movement that was aimed primarily at the common population should welcome anyone interested in literature into its fold. When this proposition was not acknowledged, the Communist writers staged a walk-out from this committee meeting. This incident led to the official split of the Progressive Literature Movement. The Communist writers in December

¹³⁵ P.K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

¹³⁶ M. R. Chandrasekharan, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

1949, organised a gathering of the Kerala Purogamana Sahitya Sammelanam (Kerala Progressive Literature Conference) at Thrissur. This was the initial stage of the formation of a new organisation. This conference was inaugurated by the noted writer Kishan Chand.¹³⁷ Without much delay, the other non-Communist writers called a conference of their own at Kottayam. M. P. Paul presided over this meeting. This conference gave rise to an organisation of writers who had no alliances with any political party but yet had a clear political view of their own. The organisation was named the “Purogamana Sahitya Samithi” (Progressive Literature Association).¹³⁸ With this, the “Akhila Kerala Purogamana Sahitya Sankadana” (All Kerala Progressive Literature Organisation) split into two.

Among the political leaders and literary writers, there existed different views and opinions on the reasons that led to the split of the Progressive Literature Movement.

According to N. E. Balram, a senior Communist leader and writer, the fact that led to the downfall of this organisation were that the Marxists of that time did not have a sufficient understanding of the Marxist aesthetic philosophy. Moreover, the Communists failed to fully comprehend the social realities that had been shaped and formed by feudalism and colonialism.¹³⁹ M. S. Devadas, another Communist philosopher and a writer who had nurtured close links with the Progressive Literature Movement, opined that the major reason that led to the

¹³⁷ P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹³⁸ Sardar Kutty, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-69.

¹³⁹ N.E Balram, Marxian Soundarya Shasthran ...cited in -Nissim Mannathukaran, *Communism and the Appropriation of Modernity, Kerala India: A Critique of Subaltern Studies and Post Colonialism*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Queens University, Canada, 2006, p. 152.

failure of the organisation was the stand of the non-Marxist writers. He added that other factors such as the political upheavals that took place during 1948-49 in the National and International arena exerted their influences upon the organisation which led to its subsequent split.¹⁴⁰

E. M. S. Namboodhirippad, another senior Communist leader and writer, made a detailed analysis. According to him, two factors led to the split of this organisation. One was the fact that the non-Communist writers moved to the position that the National Independence and with it the democratic parliamentary government that came into existence throughout India made the local kingdoms a thing of part C. Secular politics, reforms on land laws and such changes that the writers of the Progressive Literature Movement had deemed primary, were being implemented. This to them was a revolutionary change. The Communist writers, on the other hand, expressed a strong disagreement and vehemently opposed this stance. Thus two different and varied approaches and thought regarding the role of literature and the responsibility of the writer met head-on. This hindered the forward journey of the organisation.¹⁴¹

The second factor, according to E. M. S., that led to the split of the Progressive Literature Movement was the debate on Formalism, which created a difference of opinion among the Communist and the non-Marxist writers. When Formalism became a point of discussion in literature, the primary point raised by Mundassery master was that when the contents of literature become progressive, its form must also be carefully attended to. Political activists like us had not paid much attention to the matter of form. . His call for formalism was not based on

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁴¹ Cited in K. Damodaran, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

‘art for art’s sake, but rather that, art for the progress of the society. However, its content was radical and formalistic. To quote him the reason why we opposed the concept of Mundassery at that time was that we, as Marxists, gave importance to literature that emphasised applied Marxist politics. It was not enough. Marxism had its aesthetic ideology. We did not possess adequate knowledge about this philosophy. In the view of Marxism, an artist need not consciously compose a progressive piece of work. Those writers who unconsciously compose progressive works are also artists.¹⁴²

According to M.P. Paul, the primary reason for the non-Communist writers to distance themselves distant from the Progressive Literature Movement was the allegations raised against them. It was common for the Marxist writers to ask the non-Marxist writers to make clear their stance on the events that were taking place at the National and International level daily. During that period, there were some important events on which they were asked to take a stand. There were the elections in Travancore, the boycotting of elections in Cochin, the Freedom Movements in Burma and Malaysia. In addition to these, they were forced to answer if they acknowledged the global leadership of the Soviet Union. The writers who failed to make clear their stance on any one of these events or who opposed these events were immediately branded and stamped as being the slaves of American imperialists.¹⁴³

After the split in the Progressive Literature Movement, the rivalry among the writers of different groups began to intensify. The ideological debates and

¹⁴² E. M. S. Namboothippad, *Thiranjedutha Prabhandhangal* (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 3rd Ed, 2017, p. 347.

¹⁴³ Nissim Mannathukaren, *op. cit.*, p. 154. After the Second World War, the world was broadly divided into two powerblocks, one led by the Soviet union and the other by the United States of America.

protests took place through the publications such as *Lokavani*, *Purogathi*, *Pravaaham*, *Deshabhimani*, *Mangalodayam*, and *Communist*. This rivalry sent the writers and their reviewers into different factions. On one side were the Communist writers, among whom the prominent men were K. P. G. Namboothiri, M. P. Bhattathrippad, D. M. Pottokad, Cherukad Govinda Pisharody, and Achuta Kurup. These men, while continuing as writers were also active political workers. In general, they gave importance to literary works that emphasised their ideology. On the other side were writers such as Keshavadev, Thakazhi, Ponkunnam Varkey, Muhammed Basheer, G. Sankara Kurup, Joseph Mundassery, and M. P. Paul. Though many of them were writers who in their earlier stage had composed works based on strong Marxist ideologies, they later became unwilling to compose literary works solely based on the perspective of a particular political ideology. Their works, along with giving importance to the content, also paid attention to artistic excellence.

The primary allegation raised by the Marxist writers against their rival group was that they stood by the maxim of ‘art for art’s sake. It was Kutty Krishna Marar who first introduced the concept of ‘art for art’s sake’ to the Malayalam literary world. In 1935, in the *Utbuddha Keralam* weekly published under the editorship of V. T. Bhattathirippad, Marar wrote an article titled “Kala Kalaykku Vendi” (“Art for Art’s Sake”). According to K. Damodaran, Marar did nothing else than bring up the adage that literature had no other intention than to be literary in form.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ K. Damodaran, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

Kuttikrishna Marar was known in literary circles as a literary critic. In addition to this, he was a proponent of ‘pure art’. He was a person who criticised the Progressive Literature Movement from its initial days.¹⁴⁵

When the Progressive Literature Movement was formed in 1944, Marar wrote a letter to its secretary. It was later included in the volume “Kala Jeevitham Thanne” (“Art is Life Indeed”) that Marar published in 1962. In the letter, what he stated primarily was that the ultimate aim of the Progressive Literature Movement should only be the progress of literature and the writer. He also stated that if a literary organisation were to be formed with temporary political gains as its ultimate aim, the poets who would grow to be world-renowned would end up being mere sloganeers for certain political outfits. He also stated that he hoped that the Progressive Literature Movement would be an enterprise for the advancement of the writers and that it would not ‘become a gutter flowing with politics.’¹⁴⁶

Kuttikrishna Marar kept up and maintained his habit of satirising, and described *Nanyide Chintha* (“Nani’s Thought”) by K. P. G. Namboothiri as a ‘market-song’ in and called the poems that were written by the Progressive Writers to spread their ideology as ‘battle-hymns’.¹⁴⁷ Criticising this approach, E. M. S. wrote: “It is not aesthetic sense that differentiates realistic literature and the Jeeval literature. Works of great aesthetic beauty might rise in the Jeeval literature, as well as in other kinds of literature. Likewise, the coarsest kind of

¹⁴⁵ K. M. George, *op. cit.*, p. 801.

¹⁴⁶ M. R. Chandrasekharan, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

¹⁴⁷ P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

writings might come up in both sides. Even the most aesthetic poem, if bearing the representations of the progressive forces, will become Jeeval literature.¹⁴⁸

Just like Kuttikrishna Marar, another satirist who criticised the Progressive Literature Movement using strong language was M. R. Nair who was better known by his pen name Sanjayan. He was a critic of the Congress Socialist Party right from the days of its formation. He also criticised the Communist-leaning tendency of the Jeeval Literary Movement that took birth in 1937. He likened Communism to the plague and stated that it would spread like an epidemic and must be stopped.¹⁴⁹

Sanjayan passed away before the formation of the Progressive Literature Movement. However, he duly criticised and satirised the Jeeval literature and called it *Chaval Literature* (“Incoherent Literature”). Viewing the Jeeval literary writers as those who had rejected lofty works of literature, he wrote an article in the Mathrubhoomi titled *Vanga Sahityam* (“Foolish Literature”) making fun of the Jeeval Literary Movement.

When the discussions and debates on formalism were intensifying, Kesari made known his opinion on the aesthetics of literature in this manner: “Mere propagandist literature can be compared to Quinine powder and Artistic literature for propaganda can be compared to sugar-coated Quinine tablets. Only if it is

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Binumol Abraham, “Laughter as an Ideology: Sanjayan and Satire in Colonial Kerala”, *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Vol. 77, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26552698, 2016, p. 692.

coated with the sugar of art will man swallow the Quinine powder of propaganda without distaste.”¹⁵⁰

Marxist writers including E.M.S. Namboothirippad criticised Kesari Balakrishna Pillai and labelled him as *Bourgeois Book Learned Slave* and “Learned Fool”. E.M.S. reveals that there were certain reasons behind such criticism. That Kesari Balakrishna Pillai had glorified Changampuzha as a “notable poet” was the major reason. The second was that Kesari paved the theoretical foundation for sexual anarchy among the young poets and writers. He had exhorted the young writers to write openly about all kinds of sexual deviancy and to ignore the protests of the elders.¹⁵¹

The Formalism Debate

It was based on formalism that the Marxist writers criticised the other writers through articles in newspapers and magazines. It was an article by Joseph Mundassery written in the Mangalodayam magazine about Thakazhi Sivashankara Pillai’s “*Thottiyude Makan*” (“The Scavenger’s Son”) that gave birth to the debate on formalism. This debate on formalism also played a major role in the split that occurred in the Progressive Literature Movement. Though this was touched upon earlier in this chapter, a detailed description was not given.

Most of the debates on formalism were spearheaded by Marxist writers including E.M.S. Namboothirippad, K.P.G. Namboothiri, and Devadas. Though it was only in 1947 that Mundassery presented the concept of formalism,

¹⁵⁰ S. Guptan Nair, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40 (*My Trans.*)

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

discussions on the form and style had taken place in Malayalam literature. Form and style had been considered a part of the appreciation of poetry. But Mundassery divided them into two distinct elements and did not see any fault in doing so. He considered internal and external factors in the forming of the structure. Mundassery argued that though flowery words and social representations were necessary in literature, what makes literature literary is attention to form.¹⁵² According to him, what attention to form refers to is merely the process by which the writer conveys what struck his heart in such a way that it would strike the heart of the reader too, in a unified structure. Mundassery presented this argument of formalism to criticise the inartistic writings which came out under the banner of Progressive Literature. In his opinion, the preservation of the writer's emotion must be determined by the preservation of the form in which that emotion has been contained.¹⁵³

When the debates and arguments about formalism intensified, Joseph Mundassery wrote a book titled *Roopabhadra* ("Formalism") to clarify what he had intended by the use of that term. The book was published in 1951.¹⁵⁴

According to the noted Marxist thinker K. Damodharan, Mundassery used the term "Bhava" in the same sense in which the ancient Sanskrit pundits had used it. Moreover, he points out that Mundassery himself had revealed that there was no difference between the concept of Mundassery's formalism and Kuttikrishna Marar's maxim of 'art for art's sake.'¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Dr.K.Sankaran Unni, *Anthappayiyudeyum Mundasseryyudeyum Sahitya Paksapathangal (Mal.)*, Vallathol Vidhyapeetam, 2006, p. 142.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁵⁵ K. Damodharan, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-161.

E.M.S. Namboothirippad, in an article published in 1984, acknowledged that the stance taken up by the Communist Party during the 1940s were mistaken. He opined that the mistake made by the Communist writers was that they tried to see an overt and mechanical relationship between the Economic-Political protests of the workers and the creative production of the writers.¹⁵⁶ However, concerning the debate on formalism, E.M.S. opined that underneath the call for attention to form was the idea that the content of literature is different from its form. Joseph Mundassery nurtures the concept that though the content of literature keeps changing with time and with the progress of the society, as far as its form is concerned, it follows rules that are timeless and permanent. Everyone who has studied world history knows that whenever social reforms of great magnitude occurred, great changes in literature have also come about. These revolutions have not only affected the content of literature, but also its form. Those who promoted Progressive Literature regarded that the concept of formalism has only one yardstick: whether the Tenant-Landlord oppression, the misrule of the bourgeoisie government and local governors, the superstitions upheld by the religious scholars etc. have been stripped bare in a manner that would strike the hearts of the maximum number of people, with power and vigour, and whether the energetic life and protests of the workers, farmers, the displaced poor, and the progressive intellectuals who fight against this injustice in their attempt to build a new democratic society, have been depicted in a captivating manner.¹⁵⁷

M.S. Devadas later commented that all the works written by the Communist writers for the propagation of their ideology were substandard in

¹⁵⁶ E. M. S. Namboothirippad, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

their aesthetic sensibility. For this same reason, these works could exert their influence only upon a very small group of people and if these works had been just a little higher in their quality, many more people could have been gathered into the party through literature.¹⁵⁸ In a similar view, E. M. S wrote that those, who formed the Jeeval Literary Movement were political activists. We approached literature based on political activism. Therefore, we were unable to give attention to the artistic qualities of literature. At the same time, he disagreed with Mundassery for putting forth the theory that form and emotion were different, and that both should be aimed at perfection. In reality, form and emotion are not quite contradictory to each other. Content that is progressive requires a form that is progressive as well. It is progressive content that creates attention to form. Writers like Mundassery master failed to see this relationship between the two.¹⁵⁹

In the 1950s, the Communist writers began attempts to bring unity to the Progressive Literature Movement. With this in mind, Achutha Kurup, Induchoodan, D. M. Pottekad, and P. Raman Menon issued a statement. They wrote an article titled “Purogamana Sahitya Aikya Munnaniyum Rashtreeyakaryangalum” (“United Front of Progressive Literature and Political Issues”) which emphasised the need for the Progressive writers to join together. When a positive response was received for this idea, based on the foundations of mutual understanding, democracy, belief and socialist goal, in 1954, the Progressive writers assembled at Kottayam and issued a manifesto. Though the Kerala Purogamana Sahitya Sammelanam (Kerala Progressive Literature

¹⁵⁸ Nissim Mannathukaran, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁵⁹ E. M. S. Namboothirippad, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

Conference) gathered in 1955 at Edappally under the leadership of Mahakavi G. Sankara Kurup, there was no follow up.¹⁶⁰

The Jeeval Literary Movement that took shape in 1937 became the Progressive Literature Movement in 1944, split in 1949 into different groups, and faded into the sunset with an attempt to re-join the divided factions not meeting its objective.

When the contributions of the Progressive Literature Movement are analysed, it can be seen that its activities resulted in numerous issues of social importance being discussed in the public sphere for the first time and numerous reforms being brought about in society and in literature. Some of the important issues related to literature that was taken up for debate were: the concept of ‘art for art’s sake, the theory of formalism, whose side the writers should be, literature and charisma, the inevitability of politics in literature etc. Though all these issues were taken up and discussed by the organisation, the influence exerted by the Progressive Literature Movement upon the Kerala society and Malayalam Literature is indeed great.

The Progressive Literature Movement played a lasting role in linking literature to the lives of ordinary people. This organization was able to make Kuttikrishna Marar who once stated that ‘art is for art’s sake’ to later declare that ‘art is life itself. It encouraged writers to understand that life did not mean the lives of kings and nobles, but the lives of the common folk.

The early Malayalam literature was trapped inside the clutches of Sanskrit literature. From the rules of grammar to the sacred texts, the Sanskrit tradition

¹⁶⁰ P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

pervaded throughout. The Progressive Literature Movement liberated Malayalam Literature from the Sanskrit tradition. The Progressive writers enriched Malayalam literature by focusing on folk imagination and rustic life and depicting them in their writings. This had a democratising effect on society.

Another important feature of the Progressive Literature Movement was that it composed stories, poetry and articles that were based on the problems of the common people like the workers, the farmers and the teachers. The Progressive Writers fought against the social and religious superstitions, against feudalism, against the system of matrilineal inheritance and used the pen as their swords.

They also engaged in composing works that would instil the hope of a better future in the common people. They exhorted the youth by making them aware of their rights and opened the eyes of the oppressed towards their exploitation. According to E. M. S, the criticisms that arose within the Jeeval Sahithya Prasthanam and the Progressive Literature Movement were self-criticisms, and through this, it gave rise to a Marxist aesthetic philosophy with a unique Malayalam strain and developed a tradition of strong literary criticism.¹⁶¹ The Progressive Literature Movement contributed significantly towards the development of the Prose in Malayalam Literature.

In its depiction of the problems of the ordinary people, the Progressive Literature Movement also dealt with the issues concerning women which included prostitution, abuse at the workplace, domestic violence, social

¹⁶¹ E. M. S. Namboothiripad, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

backwardness, educational backwardness, the representation of women in politics, and similar issues in its publications.

Though the works of Progressive Literature that were written to establish a strong ideological tradition greatly influenced the downtrodden and oppressed classes, they were unable to have much effect upon the other classes. Even so, the Progressive Literature Movement was able to create a long list of writers and readers who created and shaped numerous works that filled the shelves of poetry, short story, novel and plays and deeply influenced the process of ideological transformation.

CONCLUSION

'Kerala has been termed as different and unique' by many social scientists. Numerous books and articles has been written about Kerala's History and politics. Apart from the high living indices which made possible the so called 'Kerala Model.'¹ Kerala also attracted attention as a leftist stronghold, 'Yenan of India'. Explanations of how Kerala became a leftist stronghold usually emphasize the political aspect often ignoring the social and cultural. It has to be understood that objective conditions by themselves do not 'automatically' lead to radical politics, it requires a strong ideology and incessant propaganda based on it for any political programme to be initiated and for a movement to acquire a large social base. This explains to a large extent why some north Indian states with similar socio-economic condition, did not unlike Kerala, develop into leftist strongholds in independent India. While the political aspect of this development is more or less being studied in detail, the cultural aspect largely remains a neglected area among historians.

The relationship between language and politics has remained a subject of enquiry among social scientists for a long. The relationship is indeed a complex one, defying easy evaluation and explanation. Where and how do language and politics interact? Do they mutually reproduce and reimpose social hierarchies political power and economic inequality? Do they provide instances of struggle

¹ Govindan Parayil (ed.), Kerala: The Development Experience : Reflections on Sustainability and Replicability, Zed Books Ltd., London, 2000., Joesph Taramangalam (ed.), The Paradox of public Action and Development, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2006.

against the existing conditions? The relationship between language and society and language and history provides fascinating areas of research.

It can be argued that Kerala was marked by high literacy even before the advent of nationalist politics in the region and so the propaganda through print was made easy. Literacy is not a 'given' and should be seen as a process. High rates of literacy would lead to the publication of books and magazines and the emergence of a 'reading public' but this in turn would lead to greater literacy. Secondly and more importantly the mere existence of a reading public need not result in the publication of 'political and propagandist' works there could be an 'escapist' and cheap literature (the so-called sixpenny novels for example) which may become very popular among the public, especially women. That it did not happen that way in Kerala points to the interaction between politics and literature. We would argue that this was largely possible because of an ideological transformation.

We have noted that nationalist politics came to Malabar relatively late. But once it did the movements spread quickly and acquired a social base. With the emergence of socialism as an alternative ideology to Gandhian nationalism, a qualitative change took place. In the first-place anti-imperialist nationalism began to be seen as a part of the larger, worldwide movement against imperialism. Secondly from specific criticism of some British policies, a transition was made to a critique of imperialism at a large. Thirdly society was seen as made up of classes with mutually antagonistic interests. This was a new world view and it led to the organisation hitherto unorganised sections of society. Peasants, workers, teachers and the unemployed youth were organised in their own 'class' organisation and demands were specific to each class were raised.

But this was only in the initial phase later struggles became more ‘political’ and did not remain just ‘economic’. This programmatic change was due to a change in ideology leading to the emergence of a new worldview. We have not undertaken a detailed study of how well the leftists understood the principles of Marxism. By their own admission made later, the leftists have made it clear that they had only a limited understanding of Marxism initially. Even this knowledge of elementary Marxism was enough to strengthen the national movement considerably.

These changes found their echo in the literature of the period from romantic longing for a bygone ‘feudal era’. Literature has espoused the necessity of fundamental changes in society and the longing for a better future. The model of the Soviet Union at least in the initial phase guided them.

Mention has already been made of ‘blatant’ propaganda and propaganda which is subtle and concealed. Poems and songs -there were invocations songs sung at the beginning of the public meetings and meeting songs sung during demonstrations – were mostly written with rhythm and meter and propaganda was done without sacrificing ‘artistic and literary merit.’ But earlier dramas appeared to be crude by contemporary standards. Rightist criticism that slogans and political speech were thrust into the mouth of actors unrealistically has some validity. But by the 1950s K A P C were to acquire greater sophistication in terms of stagecraft. There was blatant and open propaganda – the very title ‘You Made Me a Communist’ (Ningalenne Communistakki) is a case in point – but such attempts were made only towards the last scenes of drama. The songs in these dramas with their simplicity, lyrical beauty and accompanied by a minimum of musical instruments like Tabala and Harmonium became so popular

that people began to sing them in their daily life.² They provided the much-needed entertainment but were not escapist. Fiction has been enacted as a political manifesto. That this was not escapist literature has to be emphasised

The thematic variation, especially in novels and short stories reflective of ideological transformation, could not as such be criticised by the rightists. How could you tell the readers that one should not write about poverty and deprivation and scavengers and rickshaw pullers? But the rightist could and indeed did criticise the overall treatments of such themes in literature. They were also critical of the solution offered through literature to the problems in society. The criticism was also done by caricature and satire³

Organisational support for such ‘different literature ‘ was at first provided through *Jeeval Sahithya Sangham* and later by Progressive Literature Movement. That this organisation was to split on the ideological ground is indicative of the ongoing process -ideological transformation.

The Progressive Literature Movement was able to make significant contributions towards the growth and development of Malayalam Literature and the Left Movement in Kerala.

At the International Congress for Defense of Culture, a conclave of world-famous writers against Fascism and Nazism that was founded in Europe in the backdrop of the Second World War gathered in France and England, the participants were exhorted to use Art to resist the growth of imperialism and

² Today there are renditions and retakes of these songs with an array of sophisticated musical instruments but that is another matter.

³ It is to be noted that the leftists response was harsh and abusive. Some of the leftists were to collect later that their response was not proper.

Fascism. Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand who attended this conference of writers from around the world were inspired by this concept, and on returning to India, established the All Indian Progressive Writers' Association in Lucknow in 1936.

Encouraged by the formation of the All Indian Progressive Writers' Association, the writers and political activists in Kerala who held a similar perspective formed the *Jeeval Sahithya Sangham* (Jeeval Literary Movement). K. Damodaran, E. M. S. Namboothirippad, and P. Kesavadev were the notable figures of this movement. The social and political atmosphere that prevailed in Malabar at that time was conducive towards the establishment and functioning of this organization. All the individuals who were involved in the formation of the *Jeeval Sahithya Sangham* were activists of the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala.

Through the establishment of the *Jeeval Sahithya Sangham*, the Congress Socialist Party which had brought together and led workers, farmers, teachers, and students in revolts against imperialism and feudalism to propagate the socialist-communist concepts, aimed at the formation of an “alternate culture” in Malabar. Through its activities in the cultural arena, the party was able to influence the general population. Most of the reading rooms that rose in Malabar after the 1930s were affiliated with the Congress Socialist Party. The availability of newspapers, magazines and pamphlets and the ensuing discussions at these reading rooms helped to foster the growth of political awareness among the people.

After the formation of the *Jeeval Sahithya Prasthanam*, the production of writings that leaned heavily upon the socialist-communist ideologies, especially

the plays of writers such as K. Damodaran (For instance, *Pattabakki* and *Rakthapanam*) were performed and staged at most reading rooms and in the meetings of farmers' organisations in Malabar. These plays were influential in bringing about a change in the mindset of the people and raised the awareness of the need to change the existing social system.

The motto of the *Jeeval Sahithya Sangham* was: "art for not arts' sake, but social progress". In 1944, this organisation was renamed the Progressive Literature Movement. Within a very short period, many writers and progressive thinkers became a part of this movement.

A long list of writers and critics who enriched Malayalam literature, such as P. Keshavadev, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Ponkunnam Varkey, K. Damodaran, M. P. Paul, Joseph Mundassery, S. K. Potttekad, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, Vayalar Ramavarmma, P. Bhaskaran, O. N. V. Kurup, Vylopilli Sreedhara Menon etc., were associated directly and indirectly with the Progressive Literature Movement. As the result of the influence exerted by this movement, works that depicted and described the lives and the problems faced by the common people, labourers, farmers, and women began to be created in Malayalam Literature. This, in itself, was the primary contribution of the Progressive Literature Movement. The conflicts between the landlords and the serfs, the exploitation of workers in the factories, the pitiable working condition and lives of teachers, and such, began to come out in the open. In addition, issues such as religious superstitions, the caste system and the issues of the matrilineal system began to be discussed and debated in the writings that came out during this period.

The beginnings of the liberation of Malayalam Literature from the caged confines of the Sanskrit tradition, and its renewal and recreation to reflect folk-and-country traditions in literature can be seen during the period of the Progressive Literature Movement.

After 1949, the Progressive Literature Movement faced collapse and divisions. Numerous factors contributed to this split. The internal differences of ideologies and perspectives between various writers who were part of this movement, political differences, and the formalism debate against Joseph Mundassery, ultimately led to the fragmentation of the Progressive Literature Movement. However, the works that were created in Malayalam Literature during the period of this movement were highly effective in bringing about a change in the social outlook of the Malayali, and in sowing the seeds of socialist-communist ideologies in the minds of the people.

We have seen that the perception of the state by a group of people and its cultural expression underwent a change due to nationalist propaganda . Later due to socialist propaganda, not only the perception of state but of society as well underwent a change. This found expression in songs, dramas and other forms of artistic expression. The socialist also used existing traditional and popular cultural forms for propaganda. However in doing so, there came about certain regional differences. Partly this was due to the different cultural expressions of different communities. While the leftists were able to use to an extant Muslim traditional artforms like ‘pada pattu ‘, they were not able to use Christian artforms. This was due to several reasons – the lack of a tradition of revolt in Christian dominated area, weakness of nationalist mobilisation, differences in agrarian conditions and tenurial patterns all contributing to this. The leftists were not able to gain

significant foothold in Christian majority areas partly due to the inability to use traditional Christian artforms. People like Ponkunnam Varkey did write about Christian peasants and their struggles but popular art remained under utilised for mobilisation by the leftists. This was a legacy of pre independence period and it continued well into the later period. The how and why of this difference is not elaborated here for reasons of time and space.

The dismissal of the EMS ministry, the later split in the CPI and the emergence of a left extreme group in the form of the Naxal created ideological confusion on the one hand and disappointment and desperation on the other. The emergence of cinema and television as very powerful media of artistic expression led old Marxist's certainties about art to disappear but these issues are outside the purview of our research project and are not taken up for discussion here.

The struggles of the oppressed for social justice did not happen in an ideological vacuum. The direction of socio-economic change that was to take place in Kerala was largely determined by the ideological transformation that has taken place in the period under discussion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

History is about change and it is difficult to provide all the explanations for social change in a region in a PhD thesis even if it is for a limited period of time. So, the recommendations which follow are to be regarded not as the shortcomings of the thesis but as the means through which a thorough explanation is provided.

In the thesis the thrust is on ideological transformation and so the relations between literature and left movements have been not elaborated due to the constraints of explaining the process within the framework of a PhD thesis. This can be undertaken in an elaborate way and this is one of the recommendations.

Secondly in the realm of visual propaganda only dramas have been considered. The reliance on visual imaginary and iconography for propaganda is a largely unexplored area. The second recommendation is a study based micropolitics as propounded by Christopher Pinney¹. This would greatly augment the study of performative arts and their relation to the leftist movement.

A third recommendation is a more elaborate exposition of identity politics. The political articulation was some times based on identity politics and it would be fruitful to make more elaborate study on this.

¹. Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the God. The Printed image and political struggle in India*, Reaktion, 2004.

The 'use' of traditional artforms, not treating them as just a means of entertainment but more as a means of propaganda is a promising area of study. In this thesis this has been done in a small way. It would be better if it is done in a more elaborate way.

Even in the study of indigenous and traditional artforms the emphasis was on 'Hindu' art forms. As each community had its own specific artforms, it would be interesting to see how this was done. This, we have seen, created regional differences. The leftists were not able to gain significant foothold in Christian majority areas partly due to the inability to use traditional Christian artforms. People like Ponkunnam Varkey did write about Christian peasants and their struggles but popular art remained underutilised for mobilisation by the leftists. This was a legacy of pre independence period and it continued well into the later period. The how and why of this difference is not elaborated here for reasons of time and space. This could be done in an elaborate way and that is another recommendation.

The dismissal of the EMS ministry, the later split in the CPI and the emergence of a left extreme group in the form of the Naxal created ideological confusion on the one hand and disappointment and desperation on the other. The emergence of cinema and television as very powerful media of artistic expression led old Marxist certainties about art to disappear but these issues are outside the purview of our research project and are not taken up for discussion here. This promises to be an exciting possibility and is recommended.

GLOSSARY

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|------------------|---|
| Harijan | - Literary means 'man of god' originally used by Gandhi to denote the scheduled caste or depressed classes in Hindu society |
| Janmi | - The Landlord, The holder of Janmam. |
| Kallachu | - Litho press |
| Kanam | - A customary land tenure interpreted by British courts as possessing the characteristics of lease and mortgage |
| Karanavar | - Male head of the Matrilineal family |
| Karshaka Sangham | - Peasant organisation |
| Kudiyan | - Tenant |
| Mappila | - Muslims of Malabar |
| Nadu | - A territorial division or region |
| Natakam | - Drama |
| Panimudakkam | - Strike |
| Pathakam | - Pathakam is a traditional temple art form of Kerala in which stories from Hindu Puranas are narrated. |
| Pattam | - rent |
| Pattayam | - Documents related to land in which owners specifying the details of their property |
| Taravadu | - Ancestral home, Common house for joint family system. |
| Vayalpattu | - Songs of the agriculture field |

Vellari Natakam - After harvesting the rice, the paddy fields used for cultivating cucumber (vellari) . During this time the farmers forced to conducting night watching to protect their crops from the animals. The farmers produced and performed different kinds of art forms to reduce their pressure of night watching duties and passing time

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APPENDIX I

Release of Communists detained in India and announcement of removal of ban on the Communist Party in India. National Archives - Dated-08-06-1942

SECRET
PS
10/16
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No.7/2/42-Political(I).
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.
Home Department.

From

The Honourable Mr. J. Conran-Smith, C.S.I., C.I.E., I.C.S.,
Secretary to the Govt. of India,

To

All Provincial Governments and
Chief Commissioners (except Panth-Piploda).

New Delhi, the 8th June 1942.

Subject:- Policy towards
Communists.

Sir,

Since the issue of Home Department letter No.7/2/42-
Political(I), dated January the 10th, 1942, enclosing a
memorandum on the above subject, the following develop-
ments have taken place:-

(1) The Communist Party of India has announced,
so far as it is possible for any disintegrated and
unlawful association to make such an announcement,
that its official policy is now in line with that
of the Communist Party in England and that it regards
the war as a People's war deserving the support of
the people of India, and no longer as an Imperialist
war.

(2) The Central Government's Reviewing Committee
has recommended the release of the sixteen leading
communists (out of the nineteen mentioned in Home
Department letter No.7/1/40-Political(I), dated the
5th March 1940) who had been arrested and detained
as security prisoners. In doing so the Committee
considered that the original orders of detention were
justified but that continued detention was no longer
necessary in view of the changed policy of the Party
and the fact that there was no particular reason to
believe that any of the sixteen individuals would
decline to subscribe to that policy and give effect
to it.

(3) The Government of India recently cancelled
the warrant for the arrest of P.C. Joshi, one of
the three leading communists out of the nineteen
referred to above who had not been arrested, and
have established contact with him. As a result, they
are satisfied that he is completely genuine in his
conviction that the only object which now matters
to the communists is to defeat Hitler and eliminate
Fascism from the world, and that he is prepared to
co-operate with the present Government of India in
pursuing that object.

(4) Certain leading members of the Communist
Party of India (including probably P.C. Joshi himself)
have produced "a Memorandum on Communist Policy and
Plan of Work," which while agreeing that effective
national resistance is not possible except under a
purely national Government, contains a clear statement
of their disagreement with Congress when they say
that the nation should not co-operate with the existing
war efforts because the present Government is foreign
and not national.

(5) Provincial Governments were recently invited (see Home Department letter No. 71/42-Political(I), dated the 14th April 1942) to consider the release of, or the removal of restrictions on, members of the communist branch of the All-India Students Federation, for whose anti-fascist views the executive of the Federation were prepared to vouch; and a considerable number of releases have been effected.

(6) Provincial Governments were also recently asked (see Home Department letter No. 7/10/42-Political(I), dated the 21st April 1942) to consider not only the release of communist security prisoners, but also all those members of the Party who had been convicted of offences not involving violence.

2. At the present juncture, the Government of India consider it to be of primary importance to allow freedom of action to the adherents of any Party in India who are prepared to help the prosecution of the war and to make use of any elements in the population whose activities will form an effective make-weight to the defeatist tactics of the Indian National Congress and thus help to discredit that Party. They are fully aware that there are risks in the policy which it is proposed to adopt. Provincial Governments have no doubt seen the "Summaries of Communist Activity in India" which are supplied to their Special Branches by the Intelligence Bureau and which illustrate some of the dangers involved. Moreover, even if there were no doubt that all released communists would follow wholeheartedly the present policy of their leaders, it is difficult to believe that persons who have bitterly opposed Government for so many years will find it easy to alter their attitude. In addition, the result of any complete release of communists might well be an ill-regulated flood of enthusiasm which would soon degenerate into competition with rival bodies for a commanding position in the labour world and, possibly, an embarrassing attempt under the guise of 'war fervour', to secure a footing in the Armed Forces. The communists now in jail are bitter opponents of M.N. Roy, (although he may be a better communist than any of them) and his Radical Democratic Party and anti-fascist Federation of Labour, although their aims are the same as those which the Communist Party now profess, will not receive their support. On the other hand, they will undoubtedly endeavour to capture the Trades Union Congress; and in order to gain the support of the workers, there is the danger that they will make exaggerated demands on their behalf which would have the effect, not of steadying, but of unsettling labour. It is indeed a regrettable feature of the present situation that, whatever agreement there may be among political parties as to the need for non-official effort to "save" India, no two parties will co-operate on a common platform and each separate party or communal organization claims a monopoly of the power to provide that salvation. Mutual jealousies and personal rivalries are the dominating factors; and there are thus clearly risks in letting loose on the Indian stage an additional political party which is known to have extreme views and forceful methods of giving effect to them.

3. Notwithstanding these risks and the difficulty of distinguishing between the genuine communists and those who would be prepared to subscribe to any creed or adopt any attitude towards the war which would give them freedom of action to consolidate their position in the ultimate bid for power, the Government of India are convinced that the considerations mentioned at the beginning of the previous paragraph must be given priority and that a forward step must be taken.

4. The Government of India are not prepared to recommend the release of all communists at present, but they consider that the policy of gradual releases should be pursued and accelerated. The practical results of each set of releases should be watched, but if the results are good, or at any rate not harmful, there should be no hesitation in pursuing the policy further. On the other hand, there should equally be no hesitation in taking action against any individual whose activities after release show that he cannot be trusted.

5. The Government of India are opposed to demanding any form of undertaking from those who are released. There is always a reluctance to give such undertakings and a demand for them might defeat the object in view. On the other hand, neither the individuals themselves nor the public must be left in any doubt as to the understanding on which the releases are made. The Government of India therefore contemplate, in Provincial Governments accept the policy proposed, the issue of a public announcement which would make it clear that the objects for which communists had sought liberty of action are substantially the same as those of the National War Front, and that the understanding on which they are being released is that they will use their liberty to co-operate fully and openly with the war effort. The announcement would go on to explain that, if Government find that these expectations are not being fulfilled and that the activities of those released are such as to impede production, to create discord, or to interfere in any other way with the successful prosecution of the war and the preservation of public morale, they will have no option but to withdraw the liberty given and will have no hesitation in adopting that course.

6. The final question for decision is whether, if this policy is adopted, the Communist Party of India should continue to be an unlawful association, as it still is under Home Department Notification No. 7/8/34, dated the 23rd July 1934. After full consideration the Government of India have come to the conclusion that the maintenance of this ban might well provide the ill-disposed among those released with exactly the kind of pretext they want to go under-ground and pursue their previous revolutionary activities. Indeed, the Government of India consider that they would be stultifying their own policy if they were to maintain the ban on the Communist Party of India and at the same time release individuals belonging to that party and expect them to throw their full weight into the war effort. The Government of India therefore propose that the ban should be removed and that its removal should be made the peg on which to hang the announcement referred to above. It would not be a matter of great difficulty to reimpose the ban should circumstances render that course necessary; nor would it be illogical to retain certain persons in custody after the ban had been withdrawn. This would be justified in each case by doubts as to their personal attitude. The removal of the ban against the Communist Party of India would be accompanied by the removal of any

separate ban that may now exist against their previous organs such as "The National Front" and "The New Age"; but it would be made clear in the contemplated announcement that any resumption of underground or 'illegal' publications would be a cause for withdrawing the liberty given to them.

7. In order to give effect to the policy mentioned above, so far as they are concerned, the Government of India are prepared to cancel the warrants outstanding against the remaining two leading communists G.M. Adhikari and P. Sundarama Reddi. Of the sixteen communists who formed the subject of the recommendation of the Central Review Committee, three, namely, Sajjad Zaheer, R.C. Sinha and S.K. Mukerjee have already been released. The Government of India are prepared to release seven more, namely H.D. Malaviya, S.S. Mirajkar, H.K. Mazumdar, Rahul Sanki Rayana, S.G. Patkar, A.S.K. Ayyangar and A.K. Ghosh. They are not for the present prepared to release S.A. Dange, S.V. Ghate, S.S. Batliwala, B.T. Ranadive, R.D. Bharadwaj and Sher Jung.

8. I am to enquire whether the Provincial Government is prepared to agree to the policy outlined above. In view of the urgency of the matter, I am to ask for a reply before June the 22nd and to say that, if no reply is received by that date, it will be assumed that the Provincial Government has no objection to offer.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient servant,

Secretary to the Government of India.

①

New Delhi, the 22nd June 1942.

D. 424-PC/1/42

No. 7/2/42-Poll(I)

Copies to

Private Secy. to H.E. the Viceroy.
Secretary, Governor General (Public).
Defence Department.
Political Department.
External Affairs Department.

By order

Under Secretary to the Govt. of India.

MW
11/6

NATIONAL

APPENDIX II

British Government Secret papers and reports about the activity of IPTA National Archives - Dated 09.02.1949

NOTE ON THE SIXTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ALL-INDIA
PEOPLE'S THEATRE ASSOCIATION HELD AT ALLAHABAD FROM
FEBRUARY 4 to FEBRUARY 9, 1949.

....

The All-India People's Theatre Association is the communist agency of propaganda on the cultural front. Though art and propaganda go ill together yet the Moscow inspired communist intelligentsia of modern India has unscrupulously profaned the art and has dished out pure propaganda of the most vulgar type in guise of art and culture.

The Conference was held under the presidentship of Anna Bhao Satho, a Marathi writer in the hall of the E.I.R. Indian Institute, Allahabad. It was attended by about 200 delegates from all over the country. The following office bearers were elected for the current year :

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. President | - Anna Bhao Sathe (Marathi writer) |
| 2. Vice President | - Shyam Lal (Delhi) and Narhari Kaviraj, Bengal. |
| 3. Genl-Secretary | - Niranjan Sen, Bengal. |
| 4. Joint Secretaries | - Gawankar (Bombay, Nemi Chand Jain (Allahabad). |
| 5. Treasurer | - Shri Ram Rao. |

A Reception Committee under the Chairmanship of Shri O.P. Bhatnagar, Professor, Allahabad University was formed to make the necessary arrangements for the success of the Conference. The following persons were found taking active part in the Conference.

1. Nemi Chand Jain
2. Prof. P.C. Gupta
3. Prof. Nirwani
4. Shri Krishna Das
5. Dr. Brij Mohan Gupta
6. Ram Bihari Shukla
7. Prof. R.N. Deb.
8. Niranjan Sen
9. Mukund Mukerji
10. Prof. Asa Ram
11. Chhodayal Pahari
12. Surendra Nath Dwivedi, Vakil.
13. Tung Nath Srivastava
14. Asif Ansari.
15. Suraj Narain Dube
16. Phillips.
17. Prof. A.B. Lal
18. Kripa Shanker of Railroad Workers' Union.

Every day in the morning and in the evening secret meetings of delegates were held in camera where various resolutions were passed. After the finish of the evening sitting open sessions

were held in which resolutions mourning the death of Sushil Mukerji and Bhao Madho Ghosh victims of Dison Lane Shooting and Bishwa Nath Mukerji, office Secretary and founder of the I.P.T.A. were passed. Messages of greetings received from different organisations and places were also read. One message was received from the President Mr. I.P. Dimitar and Secretary I.Y. Yoyeer of the Union of the Bulgarian Artists which read as follows :-

"The Union of Bulgarian Artists send its cordial greetings to the Conference and wishes the Indian nation success in the struggle of liberty and democracy".

An exhibition which was opened by Dr. Rashid Jahan of Lucknow was also organised. Pictures, Photographs and suggestive artistic paintings were showed representing different phases of Indian life. One picture depicted a huge procession of people emerging out of jails after breaking them open with gleaming eyes and determined faces. They were shown standing in the stream water singing joyful songs after their victory. A child was shown to sit on the shoulder with a sun flower and his hands symbolising the truth of a new culture under a clear sky. A picture showed the demands of people placed before the Hon'ble the Prime Minister of India who did not care to listen to them. Contrast between the rich and the poor was also shown. Capitalists dressed in princely garbs, and the poor halfnacked and roughly dressed, were shown in contrast to the happiness of the Russian peasants. In the night dramatic performances accompanied with musical songs were staged. The following dramas were staged :-

1. JADU KI KURSI
2. RAIL KA KANTA OR KANTOWALA
3. WE WANT LIGHT, a Pantomine Show.
4. MAINPUR.

JADU KI KURSI - Showed that the present leaders after getting into office have lost all sense of justice and fairplay, they have become cruel and undemocratic.

RAIL KA KANTA OR KANTOWALA - Described the life of a railway signaller whose son was an employee of the Railway but was dismissed as he had taken part in a railway strike.

WE WANT LIGHT - This was a pantomime show in which it was shown that labourers who were doing their work in the light of wax purchased at their own expense were asked to extinguish that light by a capitalist with the help of the police. On their refusal to extinguish the light they were whipped by the police and the light was extinguished.

NALINPUR - It was a drama staged by the Bengal Squad of the I.P.T.A. whose theme was about the life of Bengali peasants smarting under the oppression of the land-holders. The play gave a vivid depiction of their resolve to fight for self preservation.

Folk songs, ballads and dances were also staged.

The important ones are the following :-

1. Ek Naya Tarana Gayen.
2. Bastuhar Dal.
3. Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram, Fatit Mount Baitan
Tata Birla Saligram.

The last one was a very wild parody of Ram Dhan of Mahatma Ji and the vulgarity with which it was recited irritated a large section of the audience. One gentleman Mr. Salig Ram Pathak could not control himself and he stood up and asked them to stop it whereupon he was roughly handled and turned out of the hall.

The I.P.T.A. shows had little art and more vulgarity and filthy mockery of the Congress and Government. Open class hatred was preached and bitter attacks on caricatures of top most men and their political activities were shown. It was a terribly obnoxious and filthy propaganda under the cover of art. The public has strongly resented vulgar references to Gandhi Ji's famous song and other highly objectionable items of the shows.

9
18

S E C R E T

No.F.1(39)-D/49

From The Deputy Secretary to the Government of India,
Ministry of States.

To As per list attached.

Dated New Delhi, the ~~1st~~ June, 1949.

Activities of the Indian People's Theatre
Association and the Progressive Writers'
Association.

Sir,

I am directed to say that the activities of the All India People's Theatre Association at Allahabad and the All India Progressive Writers' Association at Calcutta have come under the adverse notice of the Government of India and the Provincial Governments have, therefore, been requested to consider the suitability of banning the performances held under the auspices of these two associations under section 3 of the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876 (Act XIX of 1876) where the Provincial Governments consider that public interests require banning of such performances. It is requested that similar action may kindly be taken by the under the appropriate State/Union Act.

Govt.
etc.

Yours faithfully,

C. G. ...
Deputy Secretary to the Government of
India.

Copy to -

1. The Regional Commissioner, East Punjab States, Simla.
The Regional Commissioner, Central India States, Indore.
2. The Adviser to the Governor of Assam, Shillong for appropriate action in respect of the State(s) with which he/H.E. is concerned.

Copy to -

The Regional Commissioner, Western India & Gujarat States,
Rajkot/
The Regional Commissioner, Rajputana States, Abu for
information. .

Copy to the Ministry of Home Affairs with reference to
their endorsement No. 57/29/49-Poll, dated May 23, 1949.

C. G. ...
Deputy Secretary to the Government of India.

Express Letter.

SECRET.

p.10.

From

Central India, Indore,

To

Dewan, Banaras.

No. MB/240.

Dated Indore, the 10th June 1949.

Activities of the Indian People's Theatre
Association and the Progressive Writers'
Association.

The activities of the All India People's Theatre Association at Allahabad and the All India Progressive Writers' Association at Calcutta have come under the adverse notice of the Govt. of India and the Provincial Govts. have, therefore, been requested to consider the suitability of banning the performances held under the auspices of these two associations under section 3 of the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876 (Act XIX of 1876) where the Provincial Governments consider that public interests require banning of such performances. It is requested that similar action may kindly be taken by the Benaras State under the appropriate State Act.

O/C

Cu

for R.C. for C.I.

APPENDIX III
Examination and Interception of Seditious literature from post
(Bolshevik Literature) National Archives - Dated, 1924.

File no. 387-Political.

Part

NOTES.

Serial nos. 1-3.

EXAMINATION AND INTERCEPTION OF SEDITIOUS LITERATURE IN THE POST.

The interception of communist and Bolshevik literature, which is done by the postal officials, has been much more efficient of late, largely owing to the practice, by local C. I. D.'s, of deputing a plain-clothes police officer to be present in important post offices to assist the postmaster by pointing out postal articles which he considers proper objects of suspicion under Article 27-B (1) (a) of the Indian Post Office Act, as amended by Act no. XIV of 1922. Recently, however, this practice has been called in question by the Director General, Posts and Telegraphs, on a reference from the Postmaster General, Bihar and Orissa, who wrote: "... although orders were issued from time to time for the interception of objectionable articles, the actual interception was only nominal and, in order to assist the Postmasters in detecting the interceptable articles, it has been arranged, at the request of the Deputy Inspector General, Criminal Investigation Department, that a Police officer in plain dress should attend those Post Offices, where the chances of such articles being received are great, (and) to assist the Postmasters in detecting the suspected articles. I presume there is no objection to this arrangement which has already shown good results." The Director General wrote, in reply "I am to say that the Director General strongly deprecates the presence of Police Officers in Post Offices." I have seen the Director General (Mr. Sams), who informed me verbally that copies of this reply have been sent to other Postmasters General. In reporting this development, the D. I. G., C. I. D., Bihar and Orissa, writes to me "... the Postmaster General has now written requesting the withdrawal of the Police Officers selected to assist Postmasters in examining the foreign mails. I have issued instructions in regard to the withdrawal of the Police Officers referred to and in consequence... do not expect to report further interceptions of seditious literature."

2. It also appears, from the D. I. G.'s letter, that paragraph 8 of Government of India, Public Works Department letter no. 2140-P. W., dated November 9th, 1921 is being construed so strictly as, in the words of the D. I. G., "to nullify the provisions of section 27-B. of the Post Office Act, which clearly permits the interception of articles suspected to contain seditious matter and lays down the manner of their disposal. In fact, we find ourselves in a vicious circle. Interception is not to be carried out unless the article is first proscribed, but in the majority of cases we cannot proscribe without previous interception." Paragraph 8 of the letter quoted says, "when the local Government desire that any postal articles should be intercepted...under 27-B (1) (a)... it is necessary that they should communicate the names, full description, and if possible a sample copy and the wrapper, of the

books or printed periodicals which are to be detained...". This, of course, refers to articles for the interception of which specific orders have been issued by local Governments: but it is apparently being construed, in some cases, to refer to postal articles suspected to contain "any seditious matter": i.e., that "suspicion" must be translated into practical certainty before a Postal official can act under the Section.

3. It is of the first importance that the machinery for intercepting seditious literature from abroad, with which a deliberate attempt is being made, by M. N. Roy and his friends, to flood India, should be as effective as possible: and, to ensure this, it is, I think, necessary that the Director General, Posts and Telegraphs, should be instructed to issue orders, to Postmasters General, that full advantage must be taken of the very comprehensive powers, given under section 27-B (1) (a), to officers of the Post Office to detain, and deliver to the officer appointed for the purpose by the local Government, "any postal article" which they "suspect to contain...seditious matter": and that the assistance, in guiding their suspicion aright, of expert Police Officers (in plain clothes) should be taken full advantage of also.

C. KAYE,—28-2-23.

Home Department.

DEMI-OFFICIAL LETTER FROM THE CHIEF SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF BIHAR AND ORISSA, TO J. CRERAR, ESQ., C.S.I., C.I.E., I.C.S., SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, HOME DEPARTMENT, DELHI, NO. 431-C, DATED PATNA, THE 26TH FEBRUARY 1923.

I am desired to refer to your cipher telegram no. D.9319-Political,* dated the 24th January on the subject of the examination of correspondence between *khilafat* leaders and Turkey and between the *khilafat* committee and their correspondents.

2. Orders have been issued by the local Government under section 26 of the Post Office Act for the interception and examination of the correspondence of certain prominent *khilafat* leaders in the province. I am, however, to say that the local Government do not anticipate that the object the Secretary of State and the Government of India have in view can be adequately secured by this measure alone. In November last it began to be apparent that very little seditious literature was being intercepted by the local Post Office, though there was evidence of circulation through the post. The Deputy Inspector General, Crime, accordingly approached the Postmaster General, who agreed to allow selected police officers in plain clothes, to attend

at certain post offices on the arrival of the foreign mail to act in a purely advisory capacity by indicating to Postmasters what appeared to be suspicious articles. The results were at once apparent, and the volume of seditious literature intercepted largely increased. The Postmaster General reported the action taken to the Director General, Posts and Telegraphs, and as a result of the instructions he received he has been asked that the existing practice be discontinued. Copies of the letters which passed between the Postmaster General and the Director General, Posts and Telegraphs and also of the letter from the former to the Deputy Inspector General, Crime, are enclosed.

3. It will be seen that the Director General, Posts and Telegraphs has issued general instructions that, while articles intercepted under the Sea Customs Act are to be sent to the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Simla, *only* articles in respect of which the local Government issue orders for interception under section 27-B of the Post Office Act are to be made over to the Deputy Inspector General of Police. These instructions are far from clear, since the local Government has no power to order the interception of postal articles under section 27-B of the Post Office Act. If, however, they mean as apparently they do—that postal officers are to exercise their powers under this section only in respect of articles which the local Government has ordered the interception under section 26, then the Governor in Council can find no warrant for them either in the Act itself or in the standing orders conveyed in the letter from the P. W. D. no. 2140-P.W., dated the 9th November 1922. In accordance with the directions given in paragraph 6 of that letter the description given in the order must be such as to enable the postal authorities to recognize the articles from an inspection of the cover, and must never be such as to require them to open a letter in order to decide whether it is the article intended to be intercepted. The only direction, therefore, which the local Government can give as to the interception of letters is that all letters addressed to particular persons, or all letters coming from a particular place or country and addressed to a particular person are to be intercepted. In that case the postal authorities have nothing to do but to obey the orders conveyed to them, and no question of acting on suspicion under section 27-B of the Act can arise.

4. In the case of newspapers, book pattern or sample packets the instructions conveyed in the P. W. D. letter cited above are not so stringent, and it is recognized that the covers may be opened in order that the contents may be examined. Nevertheless the instructions do apparently postulate a previous knowledge by the local Government not only of the literature which may be expected to arrive in India, but also of the manner in which it will be transmitted. The Government of India are of course aware that there is a constant stream of fresh objectionable literature coming into India of which there can be no previous knowledge until it has been intercepted, and that special precautions are taken to disguise the parcels or wrappers in which it is transmitted. This is obvious from the fact that so much of it escapes the notice of the Sea Customs and Postal authorities at Bombay and other ports, as shown by interceptions at local post offices in this province and elsewhere. The "Vanguard" for instance changed its name to the "Advance Guard" to escape the censorship, and has been frequently found concealed

in copies of English newspapers and also in plain closed envelopes, the only indication of suspicious contents being German or Swiss post marks and stamps. A big haul of seditious literature was made at Gaya during congress week, when 16 packets containing 540 copies of Roy's "Programme for the Indian national congress" (since proscribed) were intercepted. These were all concealed in carefully closed packets, and the interception would have been impossible under the conditions laid down in Sir S. D'A. Crookshank's letter, as the contents had not even been proscribed at the time. At the same time the interception was perfectly legitimate under section 27-B (1) (a) (ii) of the Post Office Act.

5. The local Government apprehend that, if the orders conveyed in Sir D'A. Crookshank's letter no. 2140-P.W., dated the 9th November 1922, are to be interpreted as the Director General proposes, the effective interception either of seditious literature or seditious correspondence will be impossible. The Governor in Council can find nothing illegal in the arrangements made between the Deputy Inspector General, Crime and the Postmaster General which have now been cancelled at the instance of the Director General, and without some arrangements of this kind the powers with which postal authorities are vested under section 27-B of the Post Office Act must become a dead letter. It is, however, for the Government of India to decide what course is to be adopted.

COPY OF A COMMUNICATION NO. M-5|CON., DATED 7TH DECEMBER 1922, FROM THE POSTMASTER GENERAL, BILAR AND ORISSA, TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS.

Reg. Disposal of intercepted articles.

With reference to your letter no. E.P.-9, dated the 28/29th November 1922, I have the honour to say that under paragraph 7 of the orders of the Government of India received with your letter no. C.A.-72, dated the 5th December 1922, there appears to be no distinction between a literature proscribed under the Sea Customs Act and one proscribed under the Post Office Act as amended by the 4th Schedule of the Press Law Repeal and Amendment Act. The local Governments have further been authorised to take action in respect of articles entering British India and for this purpose they have been asked to address the heads of circles under section 27-B of the Post Office Act in the same way as they do in respect of articles posted in India. I beg, therefore, to enquire whether there is any objection, in view of the recent orders of Government to deliver all intercepted articles to the Deputy Inspector General of C. I. D. who has been authorised by the local Government to receive them instead of sending the oversea articles to the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Simla.

2. In this connection I beg to mention here that although orders were issued from time to time for the interception of objectionable articles, the actual interception was only nominal and in order to assist the Postmasters in detecting the interceptable articles, it has been arranged, at the request of the Deputy Inspector General, Criminal Investigation Department, that a Police officer in plain dress should attend those Post Offices, where the chances of such articles being received are great, and to assist the Postmasters in detecting the suspected articles. I

presume there is no objection to this arrangement which has already shown good results.

COPY OF A LETTER NO. E.P.-9[21, 22, DATED THE 20TH JANUARY 1923, FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS, CALCUTTA, TO THE POSTMASTER GENERAL, BIHAR AND ORISSA.

With reference to your letter no. M.-5[Con., dated the 7th December 1922, I am directed to say that only such articles in respect of which the local Government issue orders for interception under section 27-B of the Post Office Act are to be made over to the Deputy Inspector General of Police named by them. Articles intercepted under the Sea Customs Act have to be sent to the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Simia, under rule 186 of the Consolidated Notification.

2. With reference to the 2nd paragraph of your letter, I am to say that the Director General strongly deprecates the presence of Police officers in Post Offices.

COPY OF LETTER NO. M.-5[CON., DATED PATNA, THE 10TH FEBRUARY 1923, FROM THE POSTMASTER GENERAL, BIHAR AND ORISSA, TO THE DEPUTY INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE, C. I. D., BIHAR AND ORISSA, PATNA.

With reference to your letter no. 917-S.B., dated the 3rd February 1923, I have the honour to invite a reference to this office letter no. M.-5[Con., dated the 29th January 1923, and to say that as the Director General, Posts and Telegraphs strongly deprecates the presence of Police officers in Post Offices, the present arrangements may kindly be discontinued.

The D. I. B. complains of the inadequacy of the interception of Bolshevik literature in the post office. This is one of the matters Mr. Bamford will enquire into, and I would therefore await some report from him before issuing orders in the sense suggested by the D. I. B. *Prima facie* they do not seem entirely suitable; the practical censorship of mails by the C. I. D. would create a tremendous stir in the Assembly and in the Press if it were known: and even if the presence of plain clothes policemen at sorting stations does not constitute complete censorship, it would be hard to convince any non-official that it was a harmless and innocent proceeding.

2. It may help if I restate the position as regards interception—for the D. I. B.'s note is not very clear. There are the following powers:—

- (1) Notification under section 19 Sea Customs Act—under which from time to time certain publications are prohibited from entering India. When a notification is issued under this section, action under section 25 Post Office Act—*i.e.*, search for prohibited matter—*becomes automatic*.*
- (2) Section 181-A Sea Customs Act. This reproduces the power conferred on Customs Officers under section 13 of the old Press Act (I of 1910) to detain packages suspected of containing seditious matter.

The section does not mean that the Customs officials must search all packages for such matter, but on information supplied have power to detain them.

- (3) Section 26 Post Office Act provides for the interception of postal articles in a public emergency and in the interests of the public safety and tranquillity.

In practice an order is issued over the signature of a Secretary to a local Government (or the Government of India) and a period is stated.

- (4) Section 27-B Post Office Act gives to postal officials a power similar to that given by section 181-A of the Sea Customs Act to Customs officials. This section reproduces with some modification section 15 of the old Press Act. It embodies the sound principle that the State will not permit its postal machinery to be used for the distribution of seditious matter—but again it does not mean that postal authorities shall search *suo motu* for such matter. In practice information must be supplied by the local Government or some executive authority.

The D. I. B. refers specifically to this section. In paragraph 2 of his note there is a reference to proscription, and in paragraph 3 he advocates what looks extraordinarily like universal censorship. Proscription is of course quite different from interception in the post. It is provided for by section 99-A of the Cr. P. C., and reproduces section 12 of the Press Act of 1910 since repealed. Such literature of Roy's as comes before us is prohibited entry into India under section 19 Sea Customs Act, and action is taken under section 25 Post Office Act. Under that section certain postal packets can be opened and searched. This action is more appropriate in the case of Roy's leaflets than action under section 27-B. Prohibition under the Sea Customs Act is regardless of sedition or proper registration. Section 27-B on the other hand can only be used (1) when the matter is seditious and (2) if it is not seditious when it is not properly registered. Literature sent in from *outside* by Roy cannot come under (2) as the law of registration only applies to books, etc., printed in India. It can only be intercepted under (1) if it falls within section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code. It would be hard to bring a good deal of Bolshevik literature within the meaning of that section; but even so section 27-B should be used *inter alia* to supplement possible failures under section 25 to intercept matter prohibited entry into India under the Sea Customs Act, or any other objectionable matter.

4. It seems to me therefore that it is clear—

- (1) that it is the Sea Customs Act which we should use as far as possible in order to deal with Bolshevik propaganda leaflets;
- (2) that section 27-B can only be utilized in practice on information supplied by local Governments or some executive authority, whether to supplement section 25, or to search for matter not specifically prohibited but which we have strong reasons to believe is finding its way into India;
- (3) that we ought to find out whether searches under section 25 are effective;
- (4) that if not, we must devise, after Mr. Bamford has reported, and in collaboration with D. G., P. and T. more effective methods:

*My authority for this is Mr. Hamilton, Assistant Secretary in P. W. D. who deals with Post Office cases.—C. W. G.

- (5) that we should ask for a modification of the instructions given in P. W. D. letter of 9th November 1922 in regard to procedure under section 27-B. While not endorsing D. I. B.'s suggestion at this stage, I think too much information is at present required. It should be sufficient to indicate some ground of suspicion. The measures elaborated under (4) above would apply here also, *mutatis mutandis*, except that opening packages is permitted under section 25 and not under section 27-B.

Since writing above I have seen Mr. Rainy's D. O. of the 26th of February. I have amalgamated it with these papers. I have little to add to my note above. I agree entirely with the local Government that section 27-B does not refer to the interception of postal articles described in section 26. Section 27-B, as I have explained above, is merely a reproduction with some modifications of an old section of the repealed Press Act of 1910. It relates to any postal matter in regard to which Government entertains suspicion and all that is required is that local Government should give some information to the Postal Authorities indicating that certain suspicious matter is going through the post. It would cover, *e.g.*, matter which had been prohibited under the Sea Customs Act but which Government suspected had not been intercepted, or, matter of this nature which had not yet been prohibited entry though Government entertained suspicion that it was securing entry. It seems to me that as this is one of the matters Mr. Bamford will enquire into, it is premature to issue general orders now. I would, however, press for a modification of paragraph 8 of the Public Works letter of the 9th November 1922 at once, as too much detailed information is asked for.

C. W. GWYNNE,—6-3-23.

It is of the utmost importance that we should check, by the most rigorous means, not only the entry into India of seditious and communist matter but also its transmission in India. It is by no means the production of foreign agencies only and to deal with matter of this nature from all sources it is necessary to utilise fully not only the Sea Customs Act, but the Post Office Act. There appear good grounds for believing that, neither section 25 nor section 27-B of the Post Office Act is sufficiently rigorously applied. As regards section 25, it is by no means clear that on a notification under section 19 of the Sea Customs Act, action under this section 'becomes automatic'. It is probable that the postal officers require, in respect of this section also, information as precise and detailed as that required by paragraph 8 of the Public Works Department letter in respect of section 27-B. Now under the Sea Customs Act we not infrequently notify all publications from a particular source such as the Third International. It will require unusual vigilance on the part of a postal official to detect such matter from its external appearance without assistance from an expert police officer.

2. The same remarks apply even more strongly to action under section 27-B of the Post Office Act. Paragraph 8 of the Public Works Department letter is seriously defective (i) in assuming that the name and full description of a book or printed periodical can

always be given precisely, and in making such information a *sine qua non*; (ii) in entirely ignoring that section 27-B (a) (ii) covers any seditious document printed or otherwise. It should be amended and amplified in both respects.

3. It may be at once admitted that the postal authorities are entitled to expect from the police and other authorities directly responsible for seditious activity all information necessary to establish reasonable grounds for suspicion. But they also have a definite and separate responsibility under the law for the effective working of these sections. We cannot of course contemplate anything like a general censorship but in respect of both (a) printed matter which is not susceptible of such precise description as the Public Works Department letter lays down and (b) other seditious documents, search can, with proper assistance, be restricted to narrow and likely channels. But expert assistance is necessary if large quantities of objectionable matter are not to escape. In view of the great and increasing gravity of this question I have no doubt that, if the case is properly represented, we shall secure the effective co-operation of the Post Office authorities.

4. I think the immediate action to be taken is to press (i) for the amendment of paragraph 8 of the Public Works Department letter in the sense above indicated; (ii) for the resumption of the assistance of plain clothes officers at post offices where captures are most likely. The alternative will inevitably be a great influx of poisonous matter the more rapid as knowledge of the present relaxation of our control spreads.

Further and more detailed action may await Mr. Bamford's report.

J. CREER, —7-3-23.

Colonel Kaye's note was sent up at my request as the result of information which I had received regarding the operation of the measures taken to intercept Third International and similar literature. I attach the very greatest importance to stemming the flow of such literature into India; and on this occasion at all events I am thoroughly in accord with the Secretary of State in asking for a full measure of activity. Experience shows that we cannot rely on the operation of the Sea Customs Act, for much of the literature is well concealed. Again, the International has Indian Agents in the French Settlements and it is necessary to intercept on the land post literature disseminated by them.

2. We do not require a general censorship, but it is obviously impossible for a local Government to give precise information regarding suspected packets. Instructions which seem to desiderate such information* must therefore I think be withdrawn. It was I assume influenced by Mr. G. Clarke, who has resented the use of the Postal Staff in these operations. Further, we should be in a position to give expert assistance to the Postal officials by means of police experts; I agree that this should be unobtrusive, and in such form as not to destroy public confidence in the post; but unless such assistance can be given I see no chance of stopping the delivery of this pernicious literature. The matter is one for amicable arrangement between the P. O. and local police; and I see no insuperable difficulty in this being done if the Government of India agrees to the principle.

*Para. 8 P. W. D. letter.

3. I should be glad if Secretary will take H. E.'s orders as soon as possible.

W. M. H[AILEY],—7-3-23.

I have discussed this case with Mr. Crerar before noting, and pressed on him the view that this Department regards itself as trustee to the public for the safety and integrity of the mails, and is in accord with Mr. Clarke in his anxiety not to allow any random interference with them on the off-chance that seditious matter may be found. Mr. Crerar emphasised that Home Department did not suggest that the police should be given anything like a roving commission to "fish" in the mails, or that letters should be tampered with without sufficient *prima facie* grounds for suspicion. As a result of this discussion I would suggest the following action in order to meet the requirements of Home Department:—

(a) When notifications proscribing seditious literature are published under section 19 of the Sea Customs Act, I understand that they are reproduced in the departmental circulars of the P. and T. Department, which are supplied to all post offices. The officers empowered to search for such publications are those stated in rule 186 of the Consolidated Notification (Appendix II of the Post Office Manual, Vol. V). I understand from Mr. Stephen that postal officers do not as a rule take their responsibilities under this section very seriously, and that such searches as may be made are more or less perfunctory. We may ask the D. G. to issue a circular laying great stress on the importance of using this section more effectively, and requiring inspecting officers to satisfy themselves that suitable registers of proscribed literature are maintained in post offices and that an effective watch for such literature is maintained by the staff. The staff has, however, to deal rapidly with a large volume of mails, and unless they are given, by the police or other authorities, some adequate indication of what the packets look like, hauls of seditious literature under this section are likely to be infrequent. If the D. G. thinks it desirable, Home Department would be willing to discuss the advisability of instituting rewards for action under this section.

(b) Paragraph 8 of our letter dated November 9th, 1922, was drafted in accordance with the views of Mr. O'Donnell, and the draft was accepted by Home Department. It is true, however, that it is defective on the two points indicated by Mr. Crerar. We may issue a circular letter in modification of the existing orders asking local Governments to assist the Post Office in the discharge of their responsibilities under section 27 (b) of the Act by communicating such description as may be possible of any postal articles which are to be detained,

including documents. The description must, however, be such as afford a postal officer reasonable *prima facie* grounds for suspecting that any particular article passing under his hand is the article which the local Government desires to be intercepted under section 27-B (1) (a) of the Act. The reference to documents was omitted because it was assumed that they would ordinarily be dealt with under section 26 and would be particularly difficult to identify under this section. I fear that their inclusion will not add much to the effectiveness of our check; but there is no objection to our agreeing specifically to mention them.

(c) With regard to the resumption of the assistance of plain clothes police officers at post offices, we may ask the D. G. to be so good as to withdraw his objection to their admission. At the same time, it should be understood that these police officers are admitted to post offices in an advisory capacity only, *i.e.*, if they suspect some article, they must bring the grounds of suspicion to the notice of a postal officer, who will decide, without himself opening the packet, whether it should be detained and handed over to the authority named in this behalf or not. We may take the opportunity of asking the D. G. what officers have been authorised by the P. M. G. to take action under this section, and whether the authorization can be more widely extended than at present.

R. B. EW BANK,—8-3-23.

As per marginal notes, I have discussed the case with the officers concerned and mentioned it to H. E. There is no doubt that some definite line of action must be adopted and steps formulated to meet the danger which is a pressing one, but the Department cannot agree to a general access to the police and for an indefinite period into their offices. H. E. directed that the question should be considered in the Executive Council, after the papers are circulated among members. The Home Department may be informed, as they would have to deal with the subject.

B. N. S[ARMA],—29-3-23.

I place below 2 drafts. Draft no. I may issue.

R. B. EW BANK,—3-4-23.

TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS, NO. 598[A.-P.W.], DATED THE 3RD APRIL 1923.

The file may be dealt with further in the Home Department with reference to paragraph 2 of the D. G.'s letter dated the 20th January 1923, read with the Hon'ble the Home Member's note dated the 7th March 1923 (para. 2) and

* I agree.
R. N. S.
† I agree.
R. N. S.

‡ Appendix I.

the last portion (A) of the Hon'ble Mr. Sarma's note, dated the 29th March 1923.

S. D'A. CROOKSHANK,—5-4-23.

TO ALL *LOCAL GOVTS. AND ADMINISTRATIONS,
No. 6168-W., DATED THE 6TH APRIL 1923.

Home Deptt.

The file may now be circulated with the brief summary which is subtd. for approval.

2. The point at 'A' in Mr. Ewbank's note of 8th March may be taken up later.

E. H. F.,—9-4-23.

G. H. W. DAVIES,—9-4-23.

SUMMARY.

It is considered of very great importance that the flow of seditious and communist literature into India should be checked and transmission in India prevented. The legal power for interception is contained in the Sea Customs Act (section 19) and in the Post Office Act, but the Home Department have good grounds for holding that neither section 25 nor section 27-B of the Post Office Act is sufficiently rigorously applied.

2. Section 25 of the Post Office Act gives authority for the interception of all matter proscribed under section 19 of the Sea Customs Act ; but it is extremely difficult for postal officials to detect all proscribed literature not only because of their unfamiliarity with the outward appearance of the packets or wrappers, etc., which are designedly disguised, but because it is not infrequently necessary to proscribe in general terms, all literature from a particular source, *e.g.*, the Third International. For the same reasons, action under section 27-B of the Act is even less effective. The ineffectiveness of these sections in intercepting Bolshevik literature has been recently demonstrated in Bihar and Orissa where the Postmaster General permitted selected police officers to assist postal officials—in a purely advisory capacity—in examining the Foreign Mail at certain post offices. The results were at once apparent as the volume of seditious literature intercepted largely increased. The Director General of Posts and Telegraphs has however directed the discontinuance of police officers at the post offices for the reasons given in his letter of the 20th January, and the local Government now point out that section 27-B. of the Act must become a dead letter.

3. As a result of examination by the Home and Public Works Departments, certain executive instructions have been issued by the latter department to insure that section 25 of the Act is more effectively observed by postal officials, and local Governments have been addressed regarding the necessity of supplying postal officials with particulars to facilitate effective interception under section 27-B ; but the Home Department consider that these measures in themselves are not sufficient, as it is obviously impossible to specify adequately all proscribed papers and local Governments cannot give precise information regarding suspected packets. The Home Deptt. are therefore of opinion that

the only means of stopping the delivery of pernicious literature is to give postal officials expert assistance by means of police agents. It is considered that the matter could be arranged between the Post Office and the local police in such a way as not to destroy public confidence in the post. The view of the Public Works Department is stated in the Hon'ble Mr. Sarma's note of the 29th March, from which it will be seen that His Excellency considers that the question should be taken in Council. The papers are accordingly circulated to Hon'ble Members.

Seen.

B. N. S[ARMA],—12-4-23.

Seen.

A. C. C[HATTERJEE],—12-4-23.

M. M. S[HAFI],—16-4-23.

Received to-day.

Unless the P. and T. Dept. can suggest any other way of making section 27-B of the Post Office Act effective, I consider that Home Department proposals may be accepted.

C. A. I[NNES],—17-4-23.

I agree with Mr. Innes but with great reluctance and trust that the Posts and Telegraphs Department will be able to suggest some reasonable alternative.

B. B[LACKETT],—18-4-23.

Returned with thanks.

A. C. C[HATTERJEE],—19-4-23.

Order in Council.

The proposals of the Home Department are approved, *viz.*, that, in order to provide more effectively for the detection of matter liable to interception or detention under sections 25 and 27-B of the Post Office Act (VI of 1898), the postal authorities should receive and avail themselves, in such manner as may be best calculated for the object in view, of the assistance of police or other officers of Government having special knowledge relating to matter of this description. The manner in which this assistance should be rendered, as, for example, the attendance of plain clothes police officers to advise the post masters of selected post offices, or otherwise, should be arranged in consultation between the local postal and executive authorities concerned. The expedients employed should as far as possible be unobtrusive and the undesirability of imparring confidence in the post as a public service should be kept carefully in view. Orders to this effect should issue as expeditiously as possible from the Department of Industries and Labour.

READING,—27-4-23.

Seen and returned with thanks. I have issued orders on the subject. A copy is placed below.

G. R. CLARKE,—21-5-23,

Director-General, Posts and Telegraphs.

Home Department.

* Appendix.

COPY OF A DEMI-OFFICIAL LETTER NO. E.P.-9, DATED THE 16TH MAY 1923, FROM THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS, TO ALL HEADS OF POSTAL CIRCLES (INCLUDING DEPUTY POSTMASTER-GENERAL, SIND AND BALUCHISTAN AND ALL DEPUTY POSTMASTERS-GENERAL, RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE.)

I enclose a copy of an Order in Council, dated 27th April 1923 regarding the assistance which the Post Office should obtain in detecting postal articles liable to interception or detention. It is obviously undesirable to admit strangers into post offices and the presence of detectives in plain clothes is very quickly noticed by the staff. Heads of Circles should therefore use great discretion in obtaining the services of such men for the purpose of examining the mail. In certain cases it will undoubtedly be useful to obtain the help of well trained detectives, but before doing so Heads of Circles should discuss the matter with the local Government authorities concerned.

2. For the scrutiny of foreign mails from Europe and Egypt an organisation already exists in the Foreign Mail Sorting Office, Bombay, but if a local Government requires a special look out to be kept for any particular class of articles, it would be as well for them to depute an officer to Bombay after consultation with the Bombay Government.

3. I shall be much obliged if you will give the whole matter very serious consideration and render whatever assistance is possible to local authorities in order to prevent the dissemination of objectionable articles through the post.

I think it would be worth our while, in order to stimulate vigilance on the part of postal officials, to finance from funds at the disposal of D. I. B. the grant of rewards for activity and good results in this direction, if the proposal commends itself to the Dept. of Industries and Labour. I should be glad of D. I. B.'s remarks. The amount involved would not be large : we might earmark Rs. 500 for expenditure during the current year as an experimental measure.

J. CRERAR,—23-5-23.

D. I. B.

A. { I have no objection to agreeing to find a reasonable amount of money to stimulate activity and reward good work, in the directions under discussion, if this is held to be permissible. I may, however, perhaps be permitted to remark that I expect neither activity nor good work, in this particular direction, to follow from the circular of the Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs. The Order in Council says that postal authorities should receive, and avail themselves of, the assistance of police or other officers of Government. The Director-General's circular will certainly be read to mean that postal authorities are not to do this unless absolutely forced to do so—the wording is practically as follows : "It is obviously undesirable to admit detectives into post offices, and Heads of Circles should therefore 'exercise great discretion' in doing so : " i.e., quite plainly, should not do so. The suggestion that local Governments should depute officers to Bombay is one that is practically

impossible of acceptance ; because local Governments, at any rate as things are at present, cannot possibly spare men for permanent deputation on such duty : and, in addition, would be quite unnecessary. The scrutiny of foreign mails at Bombay is only partial, and is already done quite reasonably efficiently for the purpose that we have in view : the desire for assistance at other postal centres—which can only be effectively given by the police—is due to the fact that a considerable portion of the foreign mail arrives in Bombay in closed bags addressed to other centres—which are not examined at Bombay.

C. KAYE,—25-5-23.

Home Department.

I agree with D. I. B. that the gloss on the Order in Council contained in the circular of the Dir.-Gen. of P. and T. is calculated to dilute the effect of the order. The terms of the order should be communicated to local Govts. who have definite responsibilities under it. We may then observe the effect of the orders in the number of detections. As regards rewards to vigilant postal officials, an O. M. (Confl.) in accordance with my note of 23rd May 1923 may be addressed to the Dept. of I. & L. } B.

J. CRERAR,—26-5-23.

We should now communicate to local Govts. the decision of Government of India (as such—not as an Order in Council as D. G., P. O. has done) and point out the great importance of this question. The impetus must come from local Govts. and we must endeavour to get them to apply it. } A.

I agree as regards rewards but the Administrative Dept. must be consulted. (I think we should ask them not to send noting on a confidential case like this outside the Department if it can be helped). } B.

W. M. H[AILEY],—27-5-23.

Issue on A. Let me see draft. As regards B. the following extracts may be sent to the Dept. of I. & L. : my notes of 27th April 1923 and 13th May 1923.

A. of D. I. B.'s note of 25th May 1923.

B. of my note of 26th May 1923.

B. SUPRA.

J. CRERAR,—28-5-23.

A draft to local Governments and Admns. is submitted for approval. D. I. B. and the Dept. of Industries and Labour may see after issue.

2. As directed a copy of the notes cited by Secy. has been sent to the Dept. of Industries and Labour.

J. McD.,—5-6-23.

G. H. W. DAVIES,—8-6-23.

J. CRERAR,—9-6-23.

Serial no. 1.—LETTER TO ALL LOCAL GOVTS. AND ADMNS. AND ENDT. TO THE DEPTT. OF INDUSTRIES AND LABOUR, NO. D-363, DATED THE 12TH JUNE 1923.

Seen and returned with thanks. I understand that the passage at "B" in the Hon. Home Member's note of the 27th May refers

to the communications of the actual Order in Council by the D. G. P. T. to the heads of postal circles. We owe an apology to the Home Department for this, and instructions have been given to the D. G. P. T. which will prevent a recurrence of such an incident. I understand that the question of rewards to postal officials has been taken up on a separate file.

A. H. LEY,—19-6-23.

Home Department.

Resubmitted. The question of granting rewards to postal officials is under separate consideration. For this purpose relevant passages of the notes, as directed by Secretary, were sent to the Dept. of Industries and Labour to which was subsequently attached a demi-official addressed to the D. G. P. and Tels. by the P. M. G., Bombay (Mr. Rogers). These papers are with D. I. B. who is to discuss the matter with the D. G. P. and Tels.

J. McD.,—19-6-23.

G. H. W. DAVIES,—20-6-23.

Strictly Confidential.

LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY, HOME DEPARTMENT (SPECIAL), TO THE HONOURABLE MR. J. CREERAR, C.S.I., C.I.E., SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, HOME DEPARTMENT (POLITICAL), NO. S.D.-1162, DATED POONA, THE 5TH JULY 1923.

I forward herewith, for the information of the Government of India, a copy of a demi-official Circular no. S.D.-1028, dated the 18th June 1923, which has been issued by the Government of Bombay with a view to supplementing the existing postal arrangements at Bombay for the interception of proscribed literature by a further scrutiny of the foreign mails arriving at headquarters of districts in the Presidency. The Circular which was under issue when your official letter no. D-363, dated the 12th June 1923, was received, disposes of the main points raised in your letter.

Strictly Confidential.

No. S.D.-1028.

HOME DEPARTMENT (SPECIAL).

Poona, 18th June 1923.

CIRCULAR.

Demi-official.

There is evidence that a considerable volume of Communist and Bolshevist literature is getting into India as the result of the campaign of propaganda referred to in the recent note of the British Government to Russia. As will be seen from the Weekly Abstract, a good deal of it is caught at Bombay but it is certain that much gets up-country as appears from the general tone of some sections of the press and more particularly from the appearance of individual articles adapted from foreign Communist organs. The principal of these organs is the "Vanguard" or "Advance Guard" edited by the well-known Indian Communist, Roy, in Berlin. Another is the "International

Press Correspondence", the organ of the Third International; and occasional copies of the "Communist", the "Communist Review" and "Workers Dreadnought" are also received. The entry into British India of all Communist literature wherever printed abroad has been prohibited under section 19 of the Sea Customs Act and such matter is liable to interception in the post under section 25 of the Indian Post Office Act and should be forwarded to the Director, Intelligence Bureau of the Home Department of the Government of India. Other seditious matter should be dealt with under section 27-B of the said Act.

The difficulty of dealing with such matter in the districts is that the ordinary mofussil postal authorities do not know what to look for. Furthermore, such stuff is usually forwarded in an effective disguise. It may be wrapped, for instance, in an outer sheet of the *London Times* or other respectable journal with the regular printed postal wrapper of that particular journal. I append a note of the most recent methods of disguise and the Postmaster-General will keep the mofussil postal authorities up to date in such matters. But it is evident that rather more direction is wanted if the check is to be effective. The postal authorities should have their attention directed towards the individual addressees to whom such matter is likely to be sent. After consultation with the Postmaster-General, I think the best way would be for all District Magistrates to have a consultation with the local Superintendent of Post Offices and the Postmasters at District headquarters and let them know what it is we are looking for. Then give them a list of those who are, in the opinions of the District Magistrates, likely to be the recipients of such material. I enclose a list showing addresses to which Communist literature seems to be forwarded regularly. Newspaper editors and well-known agitators should be included in the list given to the postal authorities. The Superintendent will know where in transit it is most convenient to scrutinise any individual's post. Ordinarily, postal packets from Germany, Belgium or Switzerland appearing to contain printed matter may be looked on as suspect and such as to give *prima facie* grounds for an examination of its contents—*vide* Government Resolution, no. 940-Poll., dated the 11th May 1923. By a working arrangement with the Superintendent of Post Offices such matter should be submitted for inspection to the District Magistrate who can decide for himself whether it is worthwhile examining.

District Magistrates should report through their weekly letters the result of the scrutiny bringing to the notice of Government at once any matter of importance disclosed in the censorship.

A. MONTGOMERIE,

Secy. to the Govt. of Bombay,
Home Dept. (Special).

To

The Commissioner in Sind,

All Divisional Commissioners,

All District Magistrates,

The Commissioner of Police, Bombay;

HOME DEPARTMENT.

FILE NO. 387-POLITICAL SERIAL NOS. 1-3.

Examination and interception of seditious literature in the post.**EXAMINATION AND INTERCEPTION OF SEDITIOUS LITERATURE IN THE POST.***Secret.*

Serial no. 1.—LETTER TO ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS, NO. D-363, DATED THE 12TH JUNE 1923.

I am directed to address the Government of ^{Madras} etc. on the subject of the examination and interception of seditious literature through the post.

2. The legal power of interception is contained in section 19 of the Sea Customs Act, 1878 and in the Indian Post Office Act, 1898. It has, however, been found that the provisions of section 25 and 27-B of the latter Act are not sufficiently effective, not merely because of the difficulty experienced by postal officials in detecting proscribed literature by the external appearance of the packet, wrapper, etc., but because it has not infrequently been considered necessary to proscribe in general terms all literature received from a particular source. As it was known, however, that fairly large quantities of such matter were passing through the post undetected, it was deemed expedient on the arrival of the foreign mail at certain post offices to employ selected police officers in an advisory capacity only, with the result that there was an appreciable increase in the number of interceptions. It is understood, however, that this practice was discontinued with the result that the number of interceptions was appreciably affected.

3. In April 1923 the Government of India caused instructions to be issued to the Director General, Posts and Telegraphs to render more effective the use of section 25 of the Post Office Act; at the same time local Governments and Administrations were requested in the letter from the Government of India in the Public Works Department no. 616-P. W., dated the 6th April 1923 to furnish the postal officials with the necessary particulars to facilitate the effective application of section 27-B of the Act.

4. The Government of India have recently given their careful consideration to the question, in view of the great importance of preventing the dissemination of seditious literature, particularly that proceeding from Bolsheviki sources. They do not think that the measures in force are in themselves sufficient. They have therefore decided that the postal authorities should receive and avail themselves, in such manner as may be best calculated for the object in view, of the assistance of police or other officers of Government having special knowledge relating to matters of this description. The manner in which this assistance should be rendered as, for example, the attendance of plain clothes police officers to advise the Postmasters of selected Post Offices or otherwise should be arranged in consultation between the local postal and executive authorities concerned. The expedients employed should as far as possible be unobtrusive and the undesirability of impairing confidence in the post as a public service should be kept carefully in view.

5. I am directed to bring to the attention of the Government of ^{Madras} etc. the importance of taking active measures on the lines indicated and endeavouring to enforce an effective check on the dissemination of seditious literature.

No. D-363, dated the 12th June 1923.

A copy is forwarded to the (Department of Industries and Labour) for information with reference to the letter to local Governments and Administrations from the Government of India in the Public Works Department

() To the Department of Industries and Labour only. for information.
D. I. B.

Secret.

Serial no. 2.—LETTER FROM E. S. LLOYD, ESQ., I.C.S., ACTING CHIEF SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS, PUBLIC DEPARTMENT, NO. 277-S., DATED 20TH JULY 1923.

SUBJECT.—*Seditious literature—examination and interception through the post.*
Home Department letter no. D-363, dated June 12th, 1923.

(1) To the Department of Industries and Labour only.
No. 616-P.W., dated the 6th April 1923. D. I. B. for information.
Lc54:LD

The matter referred to in the above letter has received the careful attention of this Government and I am directed to say that, although they realise that a considerable amount of seditious literature does manage at present to escape detection, they do not see what steps they can take themselves to improve matters.

The chief difficulties are in the first place that the senders are continually altering their methods of sending literature every week, and in the second place that, though the Post Office authorities are willing to co-operate as far as they can, the large majority of interception that is effected can only be done in the city of Madras, whereas large quantities of seditious literature must leave the Postal Special *en route* for Madras from Bombay at various junctions such as Raichur, Guntakal and Arkonam, and even more is probably contained in the special bags which are consigned to such papers as the Hindu and Swarajya and which are sealed in Bombay or on the journey from Bombay to Madras are not opened by the Postal authorities in Madras. It is understood that the local Criminal Investigation Department have already pointed out these difficulties to Mr. Bamford in connection with his special duty under the Director, Intelligence Bureau, and it has been suggested that a police officer should be detailed to travel in the Postal Special from Bombay to help to detect suspicious packets. This Government recommend that this suggestion might be tried if possible.

They also consider that something might be done by the Customs authorities, if instructions could be issued to ensure that all lascars and similar employees were carefully searched before being allowed to land at ports. It seems to be beyond doubt that a considerable amount of objectionable literature finds its way into India by this and similar agencies and they would recommend that the Government of India should issue instructions accordingly.

They do not consider that the proposal to depute police officers to attend Post Offices to assist the Postmasters would be productive of any very useful results. Further the practice would soon become known and would provoke a great deal of criticism ; and it would be a matter of considerable difficulty to spare the men for the work.

Finally I am to suggest that the most effective solution of the difficulty as regards papers posted in the United Kingdom would be to enlist the assistance of the British police and take such action as might be possible at the source. It should certainly be possible for them to send information by cable as to the methods employed of concealing each particular batch of papers and it might also be possible in some cases for them to suppress the senders themselves.

Serial no. 3.—LETTER TO THE CHIEF SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS, NO. D. 1940-POLL., DATED SIMLA, THE 14TH SEPT. 1923.

I am directed to invite a reference to your letter no. 277-S., dated the 20th July 1923, and to say that the Govt. of India understand that under the existing arrangements the special postal bags despatched for places in the Madras Presidency are not sorted at Bombay but all other matter addressed to places in that Presidency is sorted there. Letters, etc., which are consigned in sealed bags from Bombay to certain newspaper offices in Madras are sorted in Bombay and censorship is done there before the bags are sealed. It may be assumed that no further examination of such bags is needed. The difficulty of dealing with matter taken out of the Postal Special before it reaches Madras could be largely surmounted by deciding at what local post offices an examination of the mails should be made and by giving the postal authorities at those places the assistance of police or other Govt. officials who have special knowledge of such matters, as proposed in para. 4 of the H. D. letter no. D. 363, dated the 12th June 1923. It is understood that when the foreign mail is received at Bombay the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Bombay, informs other provincial C. I. Depts. by telegram of any new disguise in which seditious literature is detected in the censorship conducted at Bombay. This information might then be communicated by the Madras C. I. D. to postal authorities at the places where mails are to be examined.

2. As regards the difficulty of sparing police officers to help the postmasters in examining foreign mails I am to observe that the assistance of police officers would be needed only once a week and for a very brief time when the mail is received, and in these circumstances H. E. the G. in Council will no doubt agree that the deputation of police officers will not present an insuperable difficulty. This mode of rendering assistance to the postal authorities has already been

tried with success in at least one province, and is being tried in others, and the Govt. of India suggest, for His Excellency's consideration, that it should be given a trial in Madras. The suggestion that a police officer should be deputed to work on the Postal Special does not appear to be practicable, as almost all postal authorities whom Mr. Bamford consulted in the matter were of opinion that owing to lack of space and time it was impossible to do any censorship while sorting in the railway mail vans. The Govt. of India are however considering whether it is possible to arrange for specially selected postal employees to supervise the sorting in the railway mail vans.

3. The proposal that customs officials should be authorised to search all lascars on incoming vessels has already been considered by the Govt. of India and negatived on the ground that it was unlikely that the lascar members of ships' crews would submit to such general examination of their persons unless the British members of crews were similarly treated—a proceeding which would involve the entertainment of special police or preventive staff. As a matter of fact, however, the customs officers already have power to search persons who are suspected of carrying prohibited goods and they would no doubt confiscate prohibited literature found during the conduct of such searches.

4. As regards the final suggestion made in your letter, I am to say that a large proportion of the objectionable literature sent to India is posted outside the United Kingdom. It is hardly practicable to stiffen up the censorship of the Indian mails in the U. K., as on account of the bulk of the material that has to be handled in a limited time, the difficulties in examining outgoing mails are much greater than those to be encountered in dealing with inward mails. As far as possible, the Home authorities do warn the Govt. of India of any specially objectionable matter which they have reason to believe has been, or is likely to be, despatched to India, and the Govt. of India doubt whether more can be usefully done by the Home authorities in this direction.

