

MALAYALAM LITERARY SURVEY

January - March 1983

THE MALAYALAM NOVEL - 1

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And All Regular Features



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Malayalam Literary Survey

Vol. VII

No. I

January-March 1983

Editorial

The Development of the Malayalam Novel

The Malayalam novel will be a hundred years old by the end of this decade. In a comparatively short period it has developed into one of the major branches of our literature and produced a number of significant works by highly talented writers. So we are publishing a survey of the development of the Malayalam novel as a special feature. The early part of the story is printed in this issue; the later part will follow in the next.

Even in world literature as a whole the novel as a distinct literary form is of recent origin. It emerged in Western Europe by the middle of the eighteenth century and came to India a century later under the impact of English education. Attempts to introduce the new form into Malayalam started after two decades and the first novel proper in our language was published in 1889. The three stages of its development from the faint beginnings of 1877-87 upto 1940 are traced in three essays included in this issue.

Three prose narratives are generally regarded as the precursors of the Malayalam novel. These are *Ghatakavadham* (1877), *Pulleli Kunchu* and *Kundalatha* (1887). Of these the first is a rather well - told realistic story with a contemporary Kerala setting, but it is the translation of an English novel *The Slayer Slain* (1864) written in Kerala by a missionary's wife; the second also deals with a segment of contemporary Kerala society, but it has no story interest; the third has a long well-told story, but it is not realistic and shows no sense of characterisation.

The first novel proper published in the language was *Indulekha* (1889) by O. Chandu Menon. This was followed by *Marthanda Varma* (1891) by C. V. Raman Pillai. These two gifted writers were the great pioneers of the Malayalam novel.

Chandu Menon's writing career was brief and he could not complete his second novel. C. V. himself was not prolific, but was able to produce two more major novels. Chandu Menon and C. V. are still the greatest figures in the history of longer fiction in Malayalam. The former was a realist and vividly depicted contemporary society in a conversational style and with a satirical point of view. But the latter had an epic vision and in his three historical novels he portrayed the interplay of elemental human passions against the background of the fortunes of the state of Travancore in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

We were fortunate in having these two highly gifted writers as the pioneers in the field of the novel. But we were not so fortunate about their immediate successors. In the interregnum between the first creative period and the second which came after 1940, the output was remarkable in quantity, but not in quality. A few readable historical novels and at least one good novel of social criticism were written and novelists struck out in other directions — detective, picaresque and political. But no outstanding work was written. The most significant development of the period was the translation of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* which profoundly influenced the next generation of writers.

V T. Bhattathirippad

N K. Seshan

For a mind endowed by birth with a restless spirit of change, a leap from orthodoxy into the fire of revolution is not just a jaunt, but a journey towards the fulfilment of a destiny. It may be a soul born under the canopy of feudalism and rocked long in the cradle of religion: but it will find its way into dreaming of a new world of values divested of their feudalistic smack and religious fervour. This is what happens when a modern social reformer is born. And this is what actually happened when V T. was born more than eight decades ago (26-3-1896) in the lap of a convention - ridden society.

But what is more interesting and to a certain extent more mysterious is that his soul which raised a whirlwind of social revolution relapsad into its original core of religious ethos towards the end.

V T. was born in a decadent Nambudiri society which was bedevilled with harrowing social

disabilities and evils such as early marriage of girls at the age of ten or twelve, taboo on widow-remarriage etc. Those were days when the Nambudiri Brahmins had established their sway over a society which was organised on a feudalistic pattern. The Nambudiri was the overlord of social life, the law-giver and the lord of vast estates of land and other properties. He was the trustee of temples and other social institutions while he enjoyed unfettered freedom in the prescription of social duties and obligations to regulate the conduct of the lower castes of the Hindu fold which owed unquestioned and obsequious homage to him. In short, all religious and moral values of life were attuned to the need for founding an authoritarian, feudalistic social order to perpetuate his unassailed ascendancy. Only the first-born in the family had the right of marriage within the caste and claim of inheritance of ancestral property. Women were denied

all social freedoms including the right to communicate with the members of other communities. It was not for them to be educated or to be nurtured in the tradition of the cultural life of the community. They were nothing more than playthings in the hands of their partners in life, and very often they had to be content with the lot of being submissive to the whims and fancies of their husbands who had a birthright, as it were, to violate the vow of monogamy. Male children were initiated into the lessons of vedic education in the traditional style, but were not allowed to take up the pursuit of English education which had by that time become a sophisticating influence on society. Girls married at the age of ten or twelve to old husbands and widowed early were consigned to the lot of remaining unmarried for the rest of their lives.

It was in such a community that V T. was born in an 'Illam' at Mezathole, Palghat District. He was, of course, initiated into the customary course of education in the conventional manner. Speaking of the days he spent as a teenaged boy in his ancestral home, V T. in his autobiographical reminiscences

under the title *Tears and Dreams* has confessed himself to a growing feeling of uneasiness in his mind which wistfully looked out to the world outside with a yearning for freedom from the strangle-hold of orthodoxy; but that was not to be his lot. At the instance of the elders of the family he had to attend to the duties of a priest in a temple in the locality. Thus the house and the temple became the two points between which his life was swinging during the formative years of his early life. Reading of books was out of the question because though he had learned vedic hymns by rote, he was illiterate. It was at the age of eighteen that this horrible truth came as a revelation. This was the turning point of his life. He began to learn the Malayalam alphabet, and learning became a consuming passion; his youthful mind yearned for things beyond the narrow confines of the family and the temple. The atmosphere outside was filled with echoes of the surging national movement under the leadership of Gandhiji and periodicals and other materials of national propaganda and publicity had invaded the little village of Mezathole too; but it was not for V T. to have access to them.

Days of suffocation in the benumbing atmosphere of the family came to an end when V. T. started reading with an abandon, 'proscribed' books and periodicals clandestinely smuggled into the house. It was the starting point of a new era of hopes and expectations taking wings and flying aloft towards a new region of freedom. His gradual association with companions of his age who shared his outlook on life was a pace-setter in his bid to break away from the citadels of reaction and browse in the pastures of enlightenment. This association paved the way for endless discussions on the need to storm the age-worn fortresses of obscurantism and to surge forward to a new world of fresh values and aspirations. This brought him into the Nambudiri Yogakshema Sabha.

The first shot of revolution was fired by V. T. when he instigated his companions to snap the 'sacred thread' which was the symbol of the social supremacy of the Brahmin. It was no doubt an action which created a flutter in the dovetails of reaction. This symbolic revolution started by him led him on to activities which stormed the citadels of orthodoxy in the Nambudiri

community. But the revolution sparked by it was not to end as a storm in a tea cup, but to go forward in a sweeping avalanche of more drastic steps of social reform that were to follow.

The enactment of a social drama named *From the Kitchen to the Stage* composed by V. T. in 1930 in a bid to expose the inhumanity and callousness of giving teenaged girls in marriage to old Nambudiris took the entire community by storm. It was staged in the front-yard of many a Nambudiri - house in Central Kerala. The age-long suppression of the women-folk who were foredoomed by birth to be content with leading the life of 'kitchen - maids' in Nambudiri house holds was broken and the dawn of a new consciousness of their self-respect and rightful place in society inspired them to step out of the hot-house of traditionalism and come out into the open air of freedom. This awakening led them to a new era of social interaction which in later years helped them to march forward on the path of progress, holding aloft the torch of reform of society. Ere long, women resisted the attempt at being wedded to old men. They paved the way for the remarriage of widows and resisted the practice of husbands choosing their spouses

twice and thrice from even other communities, leaving their legally wedded wives to the limbo of neglect, if not of oblivion. All these spirals of social reform were the outcome of V T.'s determination to create a new social order within the folds of the Nambudiri community.

Born a Brahmin in the dark recesses of orthodoxy, V. T. was deeply pained by such social atrocities as untouchability and unapproachability. He, therefore, did everything in his power to do away with those evil practices which had a corrosive influence on the vedically-illuminated heritage of Hindu society. He organised a team of enthusiastic Nambudiri youths and instigated them to undertake activities like cutting the tuft, resisting worn-out codes of conduct, spreading the idea of inter-communal dining etc. About these revolutionary activities planned and prosecuted by him, V T. has the following defence to offer:

".....Thus I am proud that I have contributed my share to the noble movement of transforming the Nambudiri into a man. Today when I look back - when I look back to acquire more strength to go

forward - I have no regrets. I had not entered the field of educational reform or that of social revolution with any motive of selfish gain. My heart melted with pity when I saw human souls fettered by customs and rites and stifled by the darkness of ignorance. That warmth of my heart enthused me to work for their freedom, or rather for our freedom. To my mind, the history of man is the history of the struggle for freedom. The struggle for independence is not merely a political struggle or economic struggle or social struggle, but the sum total of all these struggles. Mankind which grows with an awakened consciousness will continue to try to shatter everything which does not contribute to total development and to promote anything which accelerates the blossoming of life. It is a continuous process of life; it can never be thwarted by anything. Free development is a joy and the lack of it, sorrow. In this great and sacred endeavour carried forward by our ancestors from time immemorial, I have just made my humble contribution; that is all."

Another aspect of V T.'s public life which has not had its due share of recognition is his

involvement in India's fight for national independence. We have seen how the clarion-call emanating from a new world that was emerging into light brought him out of the confines of Brahminical orthodoxy into the belvedere of social service. The path of social engrossment cut out by the Yogakshemam movement – a movement of the aristocratic section of the Nambudiri community – attracted him. He tried to radicalise it. But his urge to enter a wide sphere of service would not be satisfied by his association with the Yogakshemam. When he looked around and listened, he heard the trumpet – call of service sounded by the Indian National Congress for the emancipation of the country. Consequently he attended the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress as an accredited delegate from Kerala. But on his return to his native village he was refused admission to his school, unless he was prepared for atonement of the sin of performing a journey by sea. His education came to an abrupt end and he became a fulltime worker of the Congress. Among the activities he was called upon to do, he devoted himself to khadi hawking and picketing of liquor shops. Though his political activities

went on for a few years, he was disillusioned by it when he discovered that this was not his field of service. Therefore, he returned once again to social activities concerned with the reformation of the community. V. T.'s vineyard of service remained for the rest of life, the upliftment of society as a whole without identifying himself with any political party.

V. T. as a writer is only second to V. T. as a social reformer. Yet his image as a litterateur in Malayalam is even today as bright as ever. His well-known play named *From the Kitchen to the Stage* is a milestone in the history of Malayalam dramatic literature in as much as it breaks a new ground in the field of socially purposeful plays with a message and a mission. His short stories with the same broad theme are also well known. His *Tears, and Dreams*, is a lovely piece of an unfinished autobiography which blends a tirade against social evils with a thrust for a much-needed reform of the Nambudiri community. The intellectual honesty he brings to bear upon his comments on the community, not sparing even his orthodox father, is a matter for both adulation and

emulation. His style is one that has been neither equalled nor excelled by any other writer in Malayalam. Even those among the 'diehards' of the community who may come to scoff at him will remain to pray on going through this book. His word-pictures of many people who have had something or other to do with his life are monumental in form and sacramental in taste. A large number of articles on various topics written by him, when collected and published, will refurbish his image as a writer in his own right.

Honour and recognition came pouring upon him during the last phase of his life. The activities undertaken by him for six decades to reform the Nambudiri community has unfortunately created an impression in the public mind that he was an atheist. Far from it—he was a great theist, but

not in the conventional sense of the term. The succinct fact is that he was, not a follower of religious practices, but a believer in the ultimate Truth i. e. God. When he lay dying in sick bed at Trichur in a semiconscious condition, he was chanting vedic mantras which must have come to his lips from the treasure-house of his sub-conscious mind. He passed away on 12-2-1982.

V. T. died a disillusioned man - disillusioned by the curse of corruption in our national life which destroyed everything that he stood for and worked for. That was why about a couple of years before his death he bewailed the decay and degeneration that had crept into human society and said that the time had come for him to convert man into a true Brahmin—earlier he had tried to humanise the Nambudiri Brahmin!

Bibliography of Malayalam Works

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“Once Upon a Time Grandpa Kept An Elephant!”

Savithri Shanker

The shadow of her grandfather's elephant looms over Kunjupathumma's childhood. Her mother speaks so often of this status symbol that it becomes as real to Kunjupathumma as the people around. Her mother's feet grace the ground only when shod in clogs with ivory toe-grips. These come from the tusks of the great elephant. She reminds her daughter constantly of past glories. Kunjupathumma cannot mingle with the children of the neighbourhood because she is “Elephant” Makkar's darling daughter's darling daughter! So Kunjupathumma leads a sequestered childhood, shackled by her heavy jewellery and surrounded by adoring and flattering womenfolk. Her parents cannot find a bridegroom splendid enough for her. When Kunjupathumma reaches her twentyfirst year the family fortunes take a tumble. Her father loses all his assets through litigation and is forced to move from the grand tiled

house to a rude hut on a small piece of land near the highway. Gone are the gold, servants and flattering horde of visitors. But for Kunjupathumma the change means freedom and fresh air. Overnight the horizons widen and she gains rapidly in experience of life. Soon she learns to cook, keep house and make her parents as comfortable as she can. Her father takes on mean and strenuous jobs without complaining. But her mother continues in her illusions of grandeur. Her barbed tongue makes life miserable for all around. It seems impossible to get Kunjupathumma married. Who would wed a penniless girl, however pretty? Then Nizaar Ahmed bursts into their lives like a shooting star. Nothing is ever the same again. Nizaar Ahmed's family is modern and educated. His mother and sister move about freely without the taboos of orthodoxy that surround Kunjupathumma. Kunjupathumma and her father

eagerly learn from Nizaar Ahmed and change their ways. But the mother refuses to capitulate. When Kunjupathumma finally becomes Nizaar Ahmed's bride the victory is complete for his ideology. In the background flits a forlorn symbol of the musty past, Kunjupathumma's mother, desperately clutching at her precious elephant myth.

That is what happens in Vaikom Muhammed Basheer's brilliant short novel. The story is rich in texture and woven in multiple layers. Its vitality springs primarily from the tension between the day-to-day world of a young Muslim girl living in twentieth-century Kerala and the Old Testament-like cosmology of Islam. This phantasmagoric account of divine order is real to Kunjupathumma in the beginning. She believes in the Tree of Heaven which carries a leaf for each living creature in the world. When a creature's leaf falls it will die. Kunjupathumma imagines the enormous leaf her darling elephant must have had. An ant will have a teeny weeny leaf. When the sparrow couple fight and the female is injured, Kunjupathumma tries to

visualize the tiny leaf of the bird. Will the leaf fall? The richness of texture and layer within layer effect are enhanced here by presenting two couples. Kunjupathumma's parents quarrel and her father almost chokes her mother to death. Then Kunjupathumma notices the sparrow pair fighting as well. The double conflict shakes her world to its roots. What if her father should kill her mother in a rage? The same anguish expresses itself through her concern for the wounded sparrow.

Even though Kunjupathumma is twentytwo years old she is innocent, in some ways, like a child. This does not make her naive or obtuse. She notices that the sparrow is pregnant. She probably guesses why her father sends her out when he begins to massage and console her mother. She knows why men wink at her and show her money. But there is a freshness about her, a bloom that recalls Sakuntala and Shakespeare's Miranda. She is that rarity, a beauty without self-consciousness. This is what attracts the fastidious and sophisticated Nizaar Ahmed. One imagines him standing above, at the edge of the gully, unseen, observing Kunjupathumma with

the bird and gradually being bewitched by her tenderness and child-like candour. It seems almost inevitable that from the moment he appears in Kunjupathumma's life he takes charge. First he dresses her wound, then leads her out of the gully. Later he fishes the bucket out of the well for her, saves her from the medicine-man's torture, brings light into her confused consciousness, grooms and polishes her through his sister and finally marries her.

Each step that Kunjupathumma takes into Nizaar Ahmed's world takes her away from the dark world of mythology – and from the glories of yesterday – that her mother still inhabits. When he appears the world of mythology fades away and so does the glory of grandpa's elephant. Basheer gently pokes fun at the elephant legend by presenting another grandfather. Nizaar Ahmed's grandfather owned a bullock cart and through inglorious labour made his son a college professor. Both Nizaar Ahmed and his sister are college – educated while Kunjupathumma and all her tribe are illiterate. The story ends with Kunjupathumma being attired and groomed as

a modern-looking woman by Nizaar Ahmed's mother and sister. At the very same moment the death-blow is being dealt to her mother's fantasies. Kunjupathumma's mother is teased mercilessly by the riffraff children around. She is totally crushed when these ragamuffins start shouting that her father's fabled elephant was not real but only an insignificant insect, a 'dust-bug' Not a real 'aana' (elephant) but a mere 'kuzhi-aana' The contrast could not have been greater or the bathos more complete. From mighty tusker who had slain four men to puny insect that burrows backward in its dust-hole! How the mighty have fallen! This fall echoes comically the title of chapter three in the novel, "Where are all the kings who used to boast in their vainglory?"

The theme has a socially relevant strand in it. It is a tale of change, of the decline of an old order, of a transition from yesterday to today. The "message" is very much there but it does not hurt the romance. The social message does not obtrude because the personal interest predominates. The characters are firmly planted in their social setting but they are so well

individualized that we accept them as persons first. Kunjupathumma's mother, for instance, is a symbol of someone living in the past. She refuses to face reality and remains a snob. But she is so alive, with her own voice and idiom, that we accept her as a person in her own right. Similarly, Nizaar Ahmed is a symbol of the modern, enlightened Muslim, obviously Basheer's own definition of what present day Muslims should be. He is civic-minded, aware of ecology and conservation, a born gardener and lover of nature like Basheer. Here again Basheer has used his magic and breathed life into this aggregate of ideals. By making the reader see Nizaar Ahmed through the eager adoring eyes of Kunjupathumma, Basheer has managed to make out of this cool, competent, tough social reformer a Prince Charming who comes to wake the Sleeping Beauty. The story is bathed in a glow of romance. The social content does nothing to dim this glow.

Fantasy and hints of the supernatural predominate in the first part of the novel. Dreaming in the moonlit court of the zenana, Kunjupathumma risks being viewed and desired

by passing 'jins' and 'malaks'. The air seems thronged with supernatural presences. Are there winged creatures hovering above? The landscape of Kunjupathumma's adolescence is starlit, mysterious, filled with yearning. It is a world of dreams, crepuscular, with phantoms of vague and wonderful promises. Nizaar Ahmed's landscape which draws Kunjupathumma later is, by contrast, a landscape of clear strong light, the light in which dreams are actualized. There is fulfilment in this landscape but not of the dreams of glory held by Kunjupathumma's mother. This is the country of the present and the future. The transition is from an illiterate world of hearsay religion and medicine-men to a world of reasoned understanding and sanitary out-houses.

Like Sakuntala and Miranda Kunjupathumma is without coyness or artifice in her love. It is obvious to the reader that Nizaar Ahmed reads her like an open book. Her face is open and adoring like a flower, always turning to the sun. She does not conceal from anyone that she is suffering from "heart-ache". Compare the reaction of the young heiress whose hand was being sought

by many. Her sole observation on the prospect of marriage was that then she'd be allowed to chew betel like grown-ups. She was untouched then, the prospective bride-grooms remained faceless. There is sweet irony in Kunjupathumma's being wed to Nizaar Ahmed. When she was younger and extremely wealthy no birde-groom could be found to match her. Nizaar Ahmed also entertained fabulous if not preposterous ideals about his bride. She was to be a walking encyclopedia of every skill under the sun. His parents give up and ask him to find this "wonderwoman" himself. Nizaar Ahmed chooses the penniless, unsophisticated Kunjupathumma, crude of speech, illiterate, with hardly any skills, not to mention accomplishments.

This is just one of the several touches of fable and fairy tale in the novel. Even the title has the resonance of a fairy tale. The opening sentence goes: "It is as though it happened thousands of years ago." Nizaar Ahmed's first meeting with Kunjupathumma is deeply symbolic. There is also the element of *recognition*, so central to myth and fairy tale. When Nizaar Ahmed's sister

"Lutapi" builds her brother up as a "holy terror", Kuniupathumma foresees violent clashes with her parents. She prays fervently to God to stop "Lutapi's brother" from coming there. Then she discovers through the clue of the missing finger, straight out of a fairy tale again, that this man is none other than he who has already wrought magic in her life. Lo, the Beast is changed into the Prince and the heroine recognizes him. Kujupathumma is also "in disguise", like a princess dressed in rags. Nizaar Ahmed sees through her exterior of childish crude idiom and lack of polish. He has glimpsed the vein of gold in the unworked ore. The episode of the sparrows has revealed to him the sweet, serious child-woman who risks her safety for an injured bird and feeds the ailing mother-to-be with drops of her own blood. Kunjupathumma's falling into the gully, her bleeding, Nizaar Ahmed's binding up of her wound, his assurance that she'll be provided with wings, his leading her up and out of the gully, can all be accepted on the obvious factual level. But they resound with symbolic overtones. This is not to say that Basheer composed this scene with overt crude symbolism, be it Freudian,

Jungian or whatever. But the composition is proof enough that when a genius creates his creation will inevitably have archetypal reverberations and reflect primeval truths. Basheer taps occult psychic centres of being and culls his material from the great collective unconscious where all myths and archetypes are stored. This episode would lend itself superbly to cinematographic treatment by Ingmar Bergman or our own Aravindan. At the touch of a master the scene will spontaneously yield up its truth with an economy and clarity that only visual art can achieve.

What Basheer has achieved with words is a masterpiece of delicate evocative eroticism. The scene leaves the reader tingling in delicious anticipation. The union of Kunjupathumma and Nizaar Ahmed is already consummated here on a mystical plane. Nizaar Ahmed sets out to heal Kunjupathumma's wound. He uses articles closely associated with his person—his handkerchief and tobacco from his cigarette. He has exercised his personal magic, put his seal on her, claimed her for his own. Kunjupathumma feels healed already. The stings and bruises are forgotten as she basks in his strong, sheltering presence. Taking her by the hand Nizaar Ahmed leads her out of the

depths. The formerly treacherous slope becomes smooth and easy. Nizaar Ahmed's magic is working already. Kunjupathumma has come to a parting of ways. She is no longer the same Kunjupathumma who fell into the gully. The Sleeping Beauty is awake.

Telling the story from the point of view of Kunjupathumma allows Basheer to make full use of the subtle ironies inherent in it. This use of an unsophisticated narrator is reminiscent of the 'naive observer' in Henry James's stories. Kunjupathumma tells her tale "straight". It is for the reader to infer what those around her think and feel. The reader draws the complex, total picture for himself. Basheer's idiom, at times seemingly simple and pellucid, is a highly sophisticated tool in the hands of an expert. This is why imitators have failed to charm like Basheer. The colloquialism, the tone of jest, the feeling of fun and ease that Basheer has made his distinctive stamp are not artlessness. It is high art. This is not the place to analyse Basheer's style but let me point out one delightful consequence of his style—the brevity of his books. Kunjupathumma's story is only 127 pages. How many classics can one cite, of the same length?

An Early Marxist Play

K. K. N. Kurup

The first half of the 20th century was an epoch in the history of Asia. It saw the emergence of a new nationalism among its nations. The great victory of Japan over the Russian forces, the Chinese Revolution against the Manchus, the First World War among the imperialists and the birth of the U.S.S.R. were some of the major international events which had far-reaching effects on human history. Under the influence of these events Indian nationalism took a new shape and brought the working class and the peasantry into its mainstream. Politically it was marked by the inauguration of Congress Socialist Party in India. The new ideology, a manifesto of political action at the grass - roots level, had significant impact on the creative Indian mind.

Many writers in Malayalam, the humanists and progressives, incorporated in this political context new ideas on social change into their writings. They

believed that literature had a social responsibility and that no writer could escape from this. The result was the development of a new branch known as progressive literature. As a mirror it reflected contemporary society and as a hammer tried to shape its destiny. These aspects resulted in the clarion call for a new social order and a just society. Therefore literature served as a powerful instrument for social change. K. Damodaran (1912-1976) was one among those who were conscious of their role as writers and political activists. As a Congress Socialist in the thirties, he was an active participant in the working class movement in Kerala.

A few reformists like V. T. Bhattathirippad, M. Raman Bhattathirippad and M. P. Bhattathirippad in South Malabar had in a series of dramas portrayed the sufferings of young Brahmin girls who were generally married to old men. These reformists criticised

the old customs and practices which were not supported by reason. In brief it was a cultural movement initiated in a political context in Malabar. Some of these dramas had a great impact and they moulded public opinion against those cruel customs. To rouse the peasant from slumber and make him conscious of his class interest was a difficult task. But once he was awakened, nothing stopped him from his onward march. The use of drama to instil political consciousness into the peasants and workers was initiated by K. Damodaran in the light of the activities of the Brahmin reformists. His play, *Pattabakki* (Arrears of Rent-1937) was staged as an integral part of every peasant conference in Malabar, especially during the organisational work of the All Malabar Karshaka Sangham. The play depicted a realistic picture of the sufferings of peasants and workers during the thirties on account of the great Depression.

As early as 1915, the general difficulties of a cultivating tenant of Malabar had been described by Sir Charles Innes as follows:

- 1) The prevalence of rack-renting and arbitrary

and capricious evictions.

- 2) Inadequacy of compensation paid for the improvements.
- 3) Insecurity of tenure.
- 4) Levy of exorbitant renewal fees.
- 5) The ownership of land being a monopoly of a small landed aristocracy who do not cultivate and who rarely contribute to the improvements of the lands.

[Quoted in Wolf Ladejinsky, *Agrarian Reforms as Unfinished Business* (New York, 1977) P. 176]

There was no great change in that condition even after the enforcement of the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1929. The result was that the landlords became a symbol of typical landlordism in Malabar and they remained unconcerned with the circumstances in which their own tenants and cultivators lived and worked. Actually Damodaran's play highlights such an agrarian situation and the misery of the rural working class.

In this short play, the writer examined the social values, concepts of morality, etc. of two classes viz, the privileged class

consisting of landowners and capitalists and the down trodden class consisting of peasants, workers and petty merchants. The diametrically opposite approaches of these classes towards social values, morality, etc. were analysed in juxtaposition by the writer. The authoritarian state with its force always supported the privileged class and oppressed the working class in the name of the administration of justice. Damodaran expounded in his play a Marxian analysis of economic relations as found in a capitalist state. He gave such an analysis with a didactic purpose to explain how the proletariat was exploited and put to innumerable difficulties in a class society. Therefore his message was to establish a classless society under the leadership of the proletariat.

Kittunni, a member of a peasant family, turned into an industrial labourer after the death of his father who was a tenant under the landlord of Mukkattirimana. His family consisted of the widowed mother the teen-aged sister Kunhimalu and a brother, a small boy. The boy was once crying because of hunger and there was nothing to eat for him. His sister approached the local shopowner

to get some foodgrains on credit. As they had not cleared the previous accounts, she could not get anything. She had also visited the landlord's house for some gruel. There she was told that it was not a 'free feeding centre.' Therefore, the frustrated sister was trying to get some gruel from a nearby house. The boy pointed out to his mother that he had no shirt whereas other boys had good silk shirts. He asked another question: why had they no money with them? This was a fundamental question put forward by the writer, and the mother's explanation was that god had not given them wealth. The boy retorted that he was a false god who had given them starvation alone.

By focussing his attention on such a domestic scene, the writer depicted the unbearable rural poverty during the great Depression. The old generation tried to explain such a situation as the creation of god. But for the new generation represented by that innocent boy, it was a false god. The poet Changampuzha wrote in a poem of those days:

The rich man's baby has milk,
The poor man's boy has only
saliva;

This is not the will of god;
if it is

We may kick that god!

In that situation of abject poverty of that family, Raman Nair, the rent-collector of Mukkattiri mana, approached the mother and demanded the arrears of rent. He threatened her that he would file a suit against her. She stated that she had given the whole produce of her soil to the landlord. As there was a fall in the price of coconuts she could not clear away the arrears. In this way the main theme relating to rural poverty was presented in the first scene.

In the second scene Kittunni was invited for a cup of tea by his friend Muhammad in a tea shop. Kittunni told him that there was a cut in his wages during that week as he was late by a few minutes to attend his work. Muhammed described that it was the true nature of capitalists. They were drinking the blood of the workers. They had no sympathy towards any body and the rich people had no heart at all. Kittunni further stated that he had purchased a blouse for his sister and completely exhausted the money and as such his family was starving. He reported that he could not purchase rice for the family.

In the third scene the local shop-owner threatened Kittunni for not paying the debt. The rent collector also approached them once again to collect the arrears.

The fourth scene portrayed the capitalist. The capitalist had an editor friend, a false Congressman. He complained that the world had changed and even the words of Mahatmaji (Gandhi) had no influence on people. The capitalist explained that there were strikes on account of the enforcement of a cut in the labourers' wages. The trade unions had actually created all sorts of troubles. The editor friend was writing a book full of criticism against the USSR and the political economy of Socialism. He and the Police Inspector received gratifications from the capitalist for promoting the interest of the latter and participating in the anti-working class activities. There were also exchanges of lustful winks between the editor and the wife of the capitalist. The purpose of the writer was to reveal that the upper class had no morality or values of life. Behind the husband's back the wife was ready even for prostitution for her emotional satisfaction. Kittunni approached that capitalist for

some financial assistance, at least a quarter of a rupee, but he was treated as a beggar.

In the subsequent scenes the efforts of Kittunni to get rice on credit were portrayed. Finally he decided to steal rice from the local shop and was caught and sent to the police station. The rent collector had already informed the police that Kittunni was a rowdy. They utilised this occasion to send him to prison.

In the eighth scene Raman Nair, the rent collector, approached Kittunni's family again for rent realisation. As the mother was absent from the house, he tried to molest Kunhimalu who beat him with the broom stick. Here the writer was comparing the morality of a working class woman with that of the capitalist's wife. Kunhimalu scolded Raman Nair:

"In the name of the realisation of arrears of rent you have forcibly taken away all properties belonging to us and made us die due to starvation. Now dog, you have started to humiliate me... (6th impression, p.41).

After that incident Raman

Nair instigated the landlord to evict that family from their homestead and compound. He informed the landlord that there would not be any coconuts in that compound if they were permitted to stay there as the hooligans who came there to make love with Kunhimalu at night used to pluck tender coconut from the garden.

Following that discussion, the family was evicted from their homestead and after a few days the mother died under a tree on the road side. The eviction ended in the destitution of a family. Kunhimalu promised her dying mother that she would look after her brother by doing any job and she would never go to the landlord for any help. Here the writer had the intention to perpetuate class antagonism.

Kunhimalu later became a prostitute to earn her livelihood and to bring up her brother. Once she even complained to a capitalist who came to her as an illicit lover that persons like him were not giving a proper fee for her service. Even in those affairs they were exploiting others without any mercy.

In the thirteenth scene Kittunni appeared as in the jail. There he met his friend

Muhammad. Now Kittunni had already become a Marxist and he criticised the devotees of non-violence who supported the capitalists. Muhammad said that political power already rested with the rich and that the proletariat consisting of peasants and workers should capture that power through agitation. The message of Muhammad was that there should be workers' unions and peasants' associations in all places. There should be agitations against the capitalists and the landlords in every nook and corner. The students' unions and other associations should fight under a strong political party. It would lead to a revolution in which they should capture political power from the oppressors.

The drama ended with the meeting between Kittunni and his beloved sister in the brothel. He was not even ready to speak to his fallen sister. But she stated that in this cruel society she was compelled to sell her body to satisfy her hunger. Her brother had stolen rice not for himself. In the same way she had fallen herself not for her selfish ends. She explained that their mother was actually "killed" by the landlord. On account of the arrears of rent

they had been evicted from their ancestral house. The landlord's oppression had made one of them a thief, the other a prostitute. Kittunni added to his sister's words that prostitution would not be a sin in a society where thousands died of starvation. If they wanted to stop prostitution and theft they should eliminate poverty. If they wanted to remove poverty the existing system of government should be changed. Therefore both of them determined that they should shatter the existing social structure to reshape and remould it. They wanted a new society and a new social order and the united action of the working class was essential for the fulfilment of that ambition. It was the message of the writer to the working class and the peasantry.

As a drama it attracted thousands of workers and peasants. Its message for a united movement of the working class and the peasantry presented a new political ideology. As a result the class-consciousness among them grew to a high water-mark in Malabar. It was the basis of a powerful working class movement in this region. The potency of the anti-landlord

propaganda of this drama could be explained by a contemporary event. When the Vellinezhi Conference of the peasants was convened in Valluvanad this drama was staged. The role of the landlord in the play was acted by one Shivarama Poduval. For this 'wickedness' he was removed from temple work or 'kazhakam' duty by Olappamannamana, one of the big landowning houses in Malabar. *Prabhatam*, the Congress Socialist Party paper commented on this: "Time was when one was evicted only if he

incurred arrears of rent but nowadays even if one played a part in 'Arrears of Rent' eviction follows" (*Prabhatam*. 29 May, 1939).

The author as a devoted Marxist made no compromise even in his play and advocated the need of a continuous struggle against the oppressive state by the united forces of the peasants and workers under a political party organised by them. The drama remains a landmark in the progressive literature of Malayalam.

THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE HANDSOME

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The Grand Condolence

K. Saraswathi Amma

The Headmaster stood at the window of his room on the first floor, hands locked behind, looking towards the gate. His face, serious by nature appeared more solemn because of intense grief.

It was not a working day; but the number of students gathering at the gate was steadily increasing. Even those students who viewed school as the abode of sinners had turned up early enough. Ever since the Headmaster's arrival there, the school had never failed to get directly involved in all the things that affected the country, good and bad.

Besides this was a unique occasion, so unlike anything that had happened before; not only the country, but the whole world was shocked at this loss; the precious light given to the world once in millions of years had been unexpectedly, ruthlessly snuffed out.

There was panic in the centres of power and authority,

darkness all around; in human hearts sorrow too deep and heavy for words or tears. In contrast to the formal state mourning ordered from above and observed for fear of punishment, here was the natural, spontaneous expression of popular sorrow at the loss of their saviour. He was not a born king but he was crowned king in the hearts of his people by his deeds. Selfless dedication instead of selfishness, renunciation instead of indulgence, was the driving force throughout his life.....

The Headmaster wiped his eyes with his coarse homespun khadi shawl.

A little girl who climbed up the staircase noiselessly walked towards him. Seeing him lost in contemplation, she was a bit unnerved and called in a timid whisper: "Father!"

He did not turn; he just grunted "Mm" She said, "All the girls have come. Is it time for the meeting to begin?"

He said nothing: She moved a little closer, touched him and said "Look at this, father."

He turned round to please her. Pointing to a small black badge pinned on to her blouse, she said: "You know where we managed to get this from? From Lalithamma's sari. Decided to discard the fashion of sporting a long palluv. It was a brand new sari; still Lalithamma obliged the moment we suggested it. There's no girl now who hasn't a badge. Isn't it time for the meeting to commence?"

"No. The peon will inform you when it's time. You can go now" he said gently. He was about to turn back when his eye fell on a girl standing on the topmost step of the staircase. Her thin slender hands were busy wiping the tears streaming from her eyes before they fell on her sari. Yet the front of her sari was soaked.

The Headmaster stood for a few minutes looking at her, lost in contemplation. He could read in her face the reason for her inconsolable sorrow and the sense of gratification. The rebuke and the beating that awaited her on her return from school explained the streaming tears; the great sacrifice for the sake of her friends or for the

deceased explained the pride and satisfaction. He recalled the tale of woes her widowed mother had recounted to him when she had come to school to apply for fee concession. How much she must have struggled and suffered to buy that sari for her daughter, to see her smartly dressed! How much would she grieve on knowing that it had been spoilt and rendered useless in this manner?

Couldn't this thoughtless act of his girls be interpreted more as a gesture of disrespect towards the teachings of the Great man than as a token of respect and honour?

The Headmaster's daughter saw that his countenance grew dissatisfied in her presence. So she left him immediately and went downstairs with her friend.

The Headmaster walked to his table and sat down with his head in his hand, eyes closed. He had little energy to think or to act. The sudden shock of the news of death had left him numb; his brain was a vacuum; his body was limp.

Somebody was coming upstairs making a lot more noise than was needed. The Headmaster did not raise his head. The man who walked in

pulled a chair, sat down and in a voice well modulated to express sorrow, sighed: "And so the unexpected has happened! I can't imagine what we should do or what's going to happen."

The Headmaster knew it was the proprietor of the press catering to the printing needs of the school. Besides the press, he was running a hotel, a textile shop, a bookshop, a popular magazine etc. He was a clever guy and made a success of all these. The Headmaster glanced at this man, a distant relative of his—without raising his head or taking off his hands from his face.

The man started singing praises of the dead Mahatma. At length he asked: "Is it enough to sit idle like this? Shouldn't we get the students ready for the silent procession? I came rushing to this place to attend your meeting. That's why I have deliberately chosen to wear khadi" The Headmaster looked at his dress in mild contempt. The man continued in a self-congratulatory tone: "I always reserve a set or two for such emergencies. I have come across many who through sheer carelessness or lack of foresight have been running like mad to secure one. I have never

had such an unpleasant experience."

The Headmaster said nothing. After a brief pause the man continued: "I tried to bring one or two eloquent speakers for the meeting. I was under the impression that they would all be prostrate with grief. Imagine my surprise when I found them all busy like bees! One man was preparing an article, the second was composing a poem, the third licking into shape a talk to be broadcast. Isn't it such a momentous occasion? You can't take time off or afford to sit back or lie down in grief; everybody is running about frantically, parading one's sorrow!"

His tone seemed to betray contempt for insincere demonstrations. The Headmaster said in a tone of self-reproach: "Sorrow shouldn't throw us into inaction. It's a kind of cowardice or weakness. However it is none too easy for people to find mental peace. Still we shouldn't surrender ourselves wholly to grief instead of trying to overcome it."

"Quite true", chipped in the visitor, assuming a different tone. "I think I too should speak today. Shouldn't one acquire that much courage

some day? Today people won't be hyper-critical as they are all overwhelmed by sorrow; that boosts my spirit. There's another thing too. It would be a great credit for the school to have speakers from outside—especially when the report is flashed in the newspapers. I will make arrangements for that."

The Headmaster sat silent, as though he didn't think highly of such advertising gimmicks. The man continued: "This is a fine occasion for the advertisers—to advertise in novel techniques. You know of the sudden boost in the sale of newspapers since to-day. This boom will continue for a few more days. The owners can look forward to an enormous profit what with special editions..."

"Shouldn't one think that all this is inspired by respect for the dead man, rather than by the profit motive?" the Headmaster asked.

"Sure, it is respect; but it is also our duty to the public." A sudden change came over his tone. "I am planning to bring out a biography. Must do it immediately before some one else gets a chance. I have wired for the material, photographs etc. Don't you think it's a good idea?"

The Headmaster nodded assent; he was of opinion that if the outcome of a deed was good, it didn't matter very much even if the motivating intention wasn't flawless or pure. The man went on: "Now we are going to see a change of names for houses, roads, states etc. And the country will be filled with statues!"

"True" said the Headmaster in a low, solemn voice. "After the time of the Buddha who forbade idol worship, didn't we fill the country with his images? Great men strive and struggle for a change of heart, a total change of the values of life. But the enthusiasm of the public will be satisfied only by the sudden momentary change of parades and demonstrations. Else all must rise to the stature of these great souls"

There was the sound of someone frantically rushing up the stairs; it stopped halfway. This was followed by the sound of an altercation, at times low and at times loud. The visitor rose from his chair and went to the head of the staircase. He understood what it was all about. He made a gesture to them to leave and resumed his seat.

"Who was it?" queried the Headmaster.

"Students of this school. One of them committed an offence. Some of them are trying to report the matter and have him punished!"

"Of late quarrelling and fighting amongst them have increased considerably. When people who are older and more experienced kill each other, they should at least indulge in fighting".

"Fighting isn't the problem. It would be correct to say that it is prompted by friendliness", the visitor said as though he were apologizing for the offence of others. "This is the whole story. When I reached the school gate there was an old man showering abuses on the children! And there was a skeleton of an umbrella at his side! No cloth, just the frame" The Headmaster did not understand anything; his head was still dazed.

The visitor explained: "As soon as the old man saw me, he started complaining about the boys. They had destroyed his good umbrella; this was the tenor of his complaint".

"The boys here don't generally tease or harass the wayfarers. Till today....."

"Even now they didn't. They wanted some black material.

Instead of realizing that they could get it from the shop, they appropriated the black cloth from the old man's umbrella!"

The Headmaster suddenly remembered the face of the girl in the black sari-flushed with tears. He stood up and asked:

"Where's the old man?"

"I pacified him and sent him away".

"Without giving him anything?"

"Of course not. The boys scraped together the little they had and gave it to him. He stopped his tirade and I think he left pacified, without complaint."

For a while the Headmaster stood there, his head bowed. He was wondering whether he should punish the offenders. Finally he came to the conclusion that there was no need for lit. First of all they had already atoned for their sin; secondly he was convinced that even the worst of his boys would not be guilty of such an act of injustice, if they had not gone mad with grief.

He walked to the window and looked out towards the gate. What surprised him now was not the larger crowd there but a rustic woman standing in their

midst. Haunted by the fear that they might be upto some further mischief, he pressed the bell for the peon.

"Ask the students there to get inside the campus. Find out what's happening there."

The peon returned in ten minute's time.

"They have all come inside."

The Headmaster who had seen it through the window asked: "Who is that woman?"

"A rice vendor, they stopped her."

"For coming out to work even today, instead of observing hartal eh?" the visitor queried.

"I don't think so. When I saw her she didn't have anything with her," said the Headmaster.

"The boys threw her rice basket down the drains", said the peon, "The old hag of a black - marketeer, demanding fourteen or sixteen 'Panams' for a measure. And that too for rice made heavier by soaking it in water."

"Did she leave without creating a scene?" the visitor asked.

"Oh, she did some crying and whimpering. It seems her eldest daughter had a baby last evening. The old woman was wailing that her daughter would have to starve today as all the rice was gone. Must be a fat lot of lies."

The Headmaster asked in a stern, severe voice: "If by any chance it is true?"

"The boys say: let the mother and child skip food for a day in honour of the great man who is no more", reported the peon. "If I had not gone there, she would have wagged her tongue and messed up the whole matter"

The Headmaster folded his hands across his chest, bowed his head and stood silent for a few seconds. Who was the man that lay dead? The friend of the poor and the down trodden. And this is how they show their grief at his loss, how they pay homage to his memory!.

He raised his head and said to the peon, "Tell the students to go home. They have mourned more than enough. There's no need to hold a meeting now. Let them return home and pray to have the goodness of heart to celebrate the virtue and goodness of another."

Distant Views

Sethu

It was a misty morning with a nip in the air. Bhagyanathan stood looking down from the small balcony of his sixth-floor flat.

Every morning, it had been his practice for years to stand gazing like that for a while before sunrise. Long ago, before the road in front was laid and the huge buildings in the opposite block had come up, he would, standing on the balcony, watch the waves lapping the sea-shore. On rainy mornings, he could see the monsoon sky sagging under the weight of the dark clouds. Later, though the concrete structures that came up over the years stood between him and sea to eclipse his favourite scenes, he continued to stand every morning on the balcony as before, straining his ears to hear the muffled roar of the sea, before the street below woke up.

The usually quiet road seemed a little active that morning. Somebody, it appeared, was lying below, on the verandah of

the beauty parlour opposite. About half a dozen people hovered around the spot.

Was it a female form? He wondered.

Then why the crowd? A faceless woman sleeping on the streets of this faceless city. It shouldn't surprise one even if she were nude.

But, for some reason, he felt a little queer. And a little afraid, for no reason.

"Son" he called, turning his head towards the flat.

"Yes, dad," his college-going son, still in bed, responded.

"Get me the binoculars, please"

"What for? To watch the sea"? that was his wife's voice, a sleepy drawl following a long yawn.

She was also in bed.

He stepped inside slowly, found the binoculars in the cupboard and returned to the balcony.

Has the crowd swollen?

He held up the binoculars against his eyes.

Waves forming and breaking in the sea. Dark shadows cast by the grey clouds crawl in the sea. The waves rise, fall abruptly, squirm in pain, swing their arms, kneel, crawl on the belly, spit a mouthful of froth, touch the shores, retreat and crawl back again to the sea, carrying with them the grains of sand from under the feet.

No, I can't.

He kept the binoculars away and looked with his naked eyes.

Yes, it is a woman. She seems to be clad in a red sari. Is she lying face down? The crowd, covering her like ants, shields most of her from view.

What is the matter? What has happened to that faceless woman in red?

Who is she? A beggar-maid? A mad woman? A street-walker? A village belle trying her luck in the metropolis.....?

Daybreak. The sun has risen. The building casts a shadow on the road. Vehicles begin to roar.

The view is not at all clear.

He returned the binoculars to his eyes.....

Light disperses through the cracks in the blushing day. The red glow that lingers awhile on the crest of the waves that form in mid-sea splits, scatters and melts away. A child in a red frock stands agape at the wave gushing in to consume the sand-castle she painstakingly built on the shore and runs back, crying aloud.

Can't bear it any more.

'Son...' he called helplessly.

No reply.

After a while, his wife in her night dress came out rubbing her eyes.

"Don't disturb him. Poor boy. Let him sleep" She added acidly, "What is it that you want?"

He pointed below, his hands on the banisters.

"What's the commotion there?" he asked.

Looking carefully, she replied "Must be a suicide..." Her voice was bereft of any emotion.

Suicide: He was startled. Why? What for?

"Perhaps—", she added, "somebody must have raped her yesterday."

She had already turned her head and was looking at the

workers, moving ant-like, on the skeleton of the multi-storeyed building coming up at the end of the road.

"Some of those workers from Andhra have pitched tents there. She must be one among them." And, after some time, she added unthinkingly: "S o m e b o d y's daughter."

"Or wife. Or mother. Or an elder sister. Or a younger sister..." he muttered.

"Oh..." she was looking far away.

"I can't see, my girl", he said pitifully, passing on the binoculars to her, "look through these and tell me."

She looked.

"Can you see?" he was anxious.

"Yes" she nodded lazily.

"What do you see?"

"Not what you see"

"Then?"

"What I usually see—my scenes"

"Yeah?"

"The race-course at Mahalaxmi. Horses surging forth in the last lap, with jockeys in caps and striped breeches in the saddle. Horses that gallop forward, leaving behind the turf. The exuberant

crowd. Caps and berets in the air. Ice-cream cups flying. ...there it's fantastic"

"Enough! Stop it" he snatched away the binoculars, closing her windows to the race course.

The sun was up. The shadow of the building was hesitantly withdrawing from the road below.

The number of people on the road, near the beauty parlour, has grown.

Is the person leaving on his bicycle dressed in khaki? Why are the police so late?

"I think it is not a suicide or a rape" he heard his wife murmur.

"Why?" he raised his head.

"All that is so common here, dear. Who has the time for all this here in this city? Local train, bus, company....."

"Then"?

"Has to be a murder. That is why there is such a big crowd."

Murder! Why? Why?

Are the people surrounding the body her relatives and co-workers?

Adjusting his pyjamas, he said, "I'll be back in a moment."

"Where are you going"?

"I'll have a look and return in no time."

"Are you crazy?" His wife could not help laughing. "Do you know what the time is like? You've to have your bath. Don't you have to finish breakfast and go to work?"

"Plenty of time still"

"Remember, the lift is out of order."

"Doesn't matter",

"The doctor had cautioned you against using the stairs"

"That's okay",

"Do you take anything seriously? Come here, son", she called out to her son.

Muttering and rubbing his eyes, her son came drowsily, in his loose sleeping suit.

"Yes mummy"

"See son, Do you see how nutty one can get? He wants to go down, I believe, to see a beggar woman lying dead on the roadside.....How crazy!"

"Ol'man is quite crazy these days" He entered the balcony, irritated that he was not allowed his usual quota of slumber.

Looking down, he growled: "some bloody whore"

He did not feel like checking him for his language. He had, by then, reached the door.

His wife followed him. "Look dear, this is too much. The doctor will blame me." There was a trace of resentment in her voice.

He had already climbed down a few steps.

On the staircase landing of the fourth floor, he stopped panting a little. He looked down into the lift-well. Thick black wire-ropes to the world below. Somewhere up, the lift-can lay dead and frozen. He looked only once. He breathed hard. He was perspiring. Dizzy, feeling weak. Holding firmly on to the binoculars, he looked up hopefully. still panting. His son and wife must still be at the door, on the top floor—stunned. Suddenly, his son came down fast, skipping alternate steps. Holding him by his hand, he said, "Come, dad. Let's go up."

He started climbing up slowly, gasping for breath, one hand around his son's shoulder and the other firmly gripping the banister. "Slowly son" he could hear his wife calling out,

"Be careful" Clinging to his shoulders, like a child—

His shoulders are strong. And warm. My son! My darling who used to swing on these arms of mine.....

He flopped into the sofa. The ceiling fan above started moving with a mild groan.

"Didn't I tell you not to? and you wouldn't listen. Do you think you are still young?"

He wanted to ask her if he was already an old man at fifty-two, but could only sit dazed, staring at the shining head of the ceiling fan.

His son was on the balcony.

"Look mummy, there is a jeep. I think it's the police"

"I told you: it must be a suicide. Or a murder"

"Look son", he called out weakly "Look through the binoculars and tell me," his voice was plaintive.

"Okay, dad"

He opened his mouth wide and hungrily swallowed a few mouthfuls of the cool damp air flowing from the fan. He wet his lips with his tongue.

His son returned, placed the binoculars on the table and started combing his hair.

"Did you see?" He asked anxiously.

"Yes", he grunted lazily.

"What"?

"Sandip Patil he said, "sweeping to mid-wicket, his left leg forward. How stylish! See his muscles and shoulders. If I had his muscles and shoulders, nothing would stop me... "

He was short of breath. He was feeling choked.

He slowly got up, picked up the binoculars and staggered back to the balcony.

He looked through the binoculars.

"What are you up to? Can't you take some rest? The doctor will only scold me."

He did not hear her.

My sea beyond those tall buildings. My scenes—

The darkness has dissolved in the sea and its waves. Gradually the darkness, washed ashore, envelops everything, one by one: tree – tops, lamp – posts, roof – tops casuarina trees.

He, Bhagyanathan, felt like closing his eyes, slowly, ever so very slowly

“No, I Am Changampuzha Krishna Pillai”

A. P. B. Nayar

Those were the days of the Second World War (1939–1945). As the Army mainly, and the Air Force and the Navy to some extent, expanded, there was corresponding expansion of staff in the Defence Accounts Department, then known as Military Accounts. That was a refuge for many hundreds of Indians, mostly well - educated degree-holders, as upper division clerks, and for matriculates as lower division clerks.

One of the graduate clerks on the magnanimous basic salary of Rs. 45/- per month, half the standard pay of a “bearer” to a Sahib, was a young man from the Kerala village, Edapally, serving in the Command Controller’s office in Poona. At that time there was also another young man in his twenties who had got through the All-India Open Competition into what was then popularly known as the F. C. S; he was also from Kerala. Though he

had hardly three years’ service he was holding high responsibility in ‘group charge’ of about a third of the office—numberless files for decision, many interviews to Indian Officers who apparently could not cope with their sudden affluence, and officers of the British Army with their total ignorance of the Indian system of pay accounting;—altogether it was a breathless job for a young man with limited experience but a large capacity for work and ambition. It was me.

One day about noon my peon, a young Muslim, loyal and devoted, with the exterior of a boxer and a heart of gold, came in, surprisingly not with the inevitable burden of files but with a small piece of paper and placed it in front of me. I thought that it was one of the usual visitors’ slips and that it must be some officer with a complaint or request

for elucidation regarding his pay and allowances. It never occurred to me that it could be some one from my own staff because ordinarily they did not have to observe such formalities. My peon said in answer to my unspoken query, "Sir, this man has been waiting for some time. He says he wants only a minute. Just to give you a book." I took it that he must be from the Library Section, come to give me a copy of the Civil Service Rules or the Accounts Manual or the Audit Code with the latest corrections. The peon showed him in, I raised my head and looked at him. Darkish, tallish, with a face that appeared shrunk by grief: lean, suggestive of mal-nutrition or even semi-starvation. He had a dhoti and shirt on, both originally, no doubt, white but now having acquired a yellowish colouration due to constant wear. Despite these signs of poverty and suffering, his eyes had a curious attractiveness. I felt there was some pathetic grace about him.

He straightaway said, with folded hands: "Just to present you with a copy of my book *Ramanan*; kindly accept it" I was surprised, as he added, "I am a humble clerk working under you"

I had come across in my

voracious quest for literary works, this book of pastoral poetry, *Ramanan*; but had not read it with concentration. However, I had heard about the book about the author and some of his other works, and I had learnt that he was a controversial figure in the world of Malayalam Poetry. Books have always had a fascination for me, and this has only grown more as I grow in years. I still have the vanity to say that I have one trait in common with Victor Hugo; of not returning any book taken on loan if it turned out to be a good book.

In those days, class-distinctions in office, and that too, connected with the Forces, were unbelievably rigid. However I heard myself asking him "to take a chair" He did not. It just was not the thing done for an Asst. Controller, and that too a "Competition-Wallah of the Superior Service in the Department", to offer a chair to a mere clerk, just because he was a son of a great author, as I took him to be. Opening the book casually, I said, "Thank you, so your father is the poet, is it not?" The response came out of his smiling lips, unobtrusively and yet triumphantly; "No, I am Changampuzha Krishna Pillai".

I was astounded. I repeated my question, he repeated his answer, and that confirmed the unbelievable fact. That Man there was a great Poet who should be respected. I rose in my chair, and put out my hand to shake his, and asked him again to sit down. He would not. At that particular instant my peon came in and brought another piece of paper where it was indicated that, agreeably to an appointment already made, there were waiting to see me some officers from a unit of the British Army very recently arrived in Poona. They required money urgently and wanted to know the modus operandi for getting quick money. I was obliged to meet them then but in between I hurriedly asked the poet whether he could call on me at my house after office that evening. He agreed and left the room.

As arranged, Changampuzha came to my house that evening. As if in tune with the background of our first meeting in the office I continued to call him always "Krishna Pillai" and never "Changampuzha" At that time my household had only two members. My wife and I. We gave him tea and plenty to eat which I knew would be

something like a godsend to him, and we talked for a long time. His speech was soft, mild, submissive and in a low tone. It was as if he could never never forget the difference in our status. During our conversation he opened out his heart and described the conditions of his living in Poona and he also narrated the story of his life. Owing to the expansion of the army and its ancillary parts including civilians, Poona had burst its accommodation potential. It was a miracle if a low-paid clerk could afford to take on rent a single room, and even if he could afford it, he could only get a portion of the room! His room in his 'lodging' was obviously intended by its architect for not more than four persons. But in his room there were actually accommodated nine persons, each with bare space to spread one's bed. He had always his meals in a nearby Madras Hotel or in the office canteen. Many a day, the number of daily meals was confined to the singular. His Group Officer—that was me in office parlance—was reputed to be a votary of fine arts and also had a sympathetic heart and had "influence" (another word in office parlance) with the

Controller, so he could help if properly approached, – so said some. Some others, however, said just the opposite and discouraged him! In any case the clerk was desperate and decided to seek an interview and present a copy of the book to the officer. That was the story of the afternoon visit. So explained the poet.

I straightaway asked: “Tell me, what is the exact help you are seeking? What is the exact purpose”?

It was then that the poet flashed back to his family life and the other facts of his life. He had a very small house near Ernakulam, specifically in Edappally. The house was situated in a very small plot of land. All the produce of that plot was a small number of coconuts from the few trees. There was no money to manure the trees, so income from the yield of the trees was a very small amount per annum. He was getting altogether sixtytwo rupees (including allowances) as salary per month. Limiting his expenditure to the barest essentials for keeping body and soul together, he would send home as much as he could save, so that his mother, wife and son could make do with that and somehow

live without having to stoop low to borrowing. He wanted to go home once in two years and see the face of his dearest and nearest. Therefore a transfer from Poona to Bangalore, at that time the Defence Accounts Station nearest to Kerala, would be something in the manner of fulfilment of his life's desire. By this time I had collected sufficient information about Changampuzha as man, poet and clerk. I asked myself whether it was morally justifiable that a poet of his calibre who had nourished the strain of mysticism and symbolism, originated by Mahakavi G. Sankara Kurup in Malayalam, should have to struggle even for the traditional three meals a day for himself and his family. I was so upset at this irony of Fate that I would push a genius into a rubbish bin and raise even a disreputable or unlearned mediocrity to fame and wealth, that I apparently spoke out the thought loudly. I knew that he was respected in Kerala, although certain criticisms of his poetry were vehemently destructive. He had many friends and countless admirers. He had deep respect and affection for his mother; deep too was his love for his wife and son. Added to this was his

high sense of duty. I knew that he who was sadly opening out his heart to me was a poet of the highest reach of lyricism, poetry from the heart that flows straight into another heart, a born genius with a heart overflowing with the grace of lyric poetry. I told him that I would do my best; “I shall see that you get a transfer. But, it may take some time” With a show of mischievous humour I added, “But on one condition, on sundays and other holidays you must come to my house and have your breakfast and lunch with me so that in between we can talk on matters like your controversial mysticism, and pessimism” I fashioned my invitation in such a way that I hoped I would not offend the sensibilities of the poet; I did not give any indication that the real purpose of the invitation was to give him enough sustenance at least once a week. The poet accepted this.

My Controller at that time was an Englishman, a very strict disciplinarian and an ‘unholy’ terror. I had necessarily to meet him many times a day because the large burden of my work necessitated consultation and guidance from him, particularly for obtaining certain sanctions, the authority for which

was the Controller and only he. My frequent consultation and discussion disturbing the tranquil time he had in office until the War broke out, used to annoy him, and often he would growl at me. With all that he liked me. It was a habit of the ‘Lion’ as he was known among us, to go once daily on a round of the different sections in the office. One day during his round he came to my room. I was not in my seat; he called out my name and growled, “Where the devil are you?” I came out of my ante-room and said “Well sir, here I am, I was taking my lunch” He stared at me, “Why so late?” I replied, “Could not get time before this; no time to go home for lunch and come back within the half hour recess. Also cannot spare even that much time.” He stood and continued to stare at me. “Is this the usual pattern?” “Yes” “Don’t be under the misapprehension that any one would appreciate your hard work and your sacrifice of lunch. May be it is your fate. Any way, see that you don’t fall ill.”

I thought, “The Controller is in a good mood. This is the best opportunity to plead the

cause of the poet and ask for his transfer." I was also anxious to avoid his transfer up North by some mis chance. As reinforcement to my plea I showed him the book, the poet's gift to me.

I expected him to shout at me, but I knew he was a good man in spite of some gruff manners.

"Is it for this that you are pleading for his transfer? Are there not many many such people, poor and suffering, in this wide world?" I explained at some length, the clerk's indigent circumstances stressing his devotion to duty and love for his family. I ended with a passionate plea: "Without exaggeration and in all sincerity, I want to assure you that when we will be forgotten in months after we are called by our Maker, this man, this poet, this clerk, will be remembered for 2000 years."

He stared at me in some sort of disbelief. Then he said, "All right, all right, I had better tell the Administration Section"

With that he went to his room. A few minutes later he sent for me and said, "I just now had a talk with the Administration Superintendent. There is no

possibility of the clerk being sent to the South for the present. Let us see."

I was not disappointed. Fate intervened. Within a few weeks a vacancy arose. Here I must explain what had happened.

India was in a state of turmoil and the British rulers were frantically raising a very large number of army units. Besides the regular Indian Army there was what was known as the Territorial Army in selected centres, intended as a second line of defence, as a reserve for service in times of emergency. There were three territorial battalions of infantry in Cannanore, where the personnel would usually assemble for training for a limited period of three months in a year. When an emergency arose, such units would be converted into permanent units for regular service. In military parlance, this was known as 'embodying' them as regular army.

Ordinarily the units at Cannanore should have been embodied there itself. Here comes the play of fate in the poet's life; it was decided to embody one of the Infantry battalions at Cochin. Every such

battalion had to have with them a pay-man from the Defence Accounts Department who would look after their accounts and draw their pay. He was known as a Unit Accountant. Ordinarily no one with less than fifteen years of service or so was sent as a Unit Accountant because of the heavy responsibility of cash disbursement. It was unthinkable that a temporary clerk with less than one year's service, and not proficient in this particular work because of inexperience, could be selected to this semi-independent post. There were many Malayalee volunteers and many applicants, some of them on genuine compassionate grounds also and some on the score of merit. Selection was to be from among them.

The Controller sent for me. I knew the position as I was in charge of the Accounts work relating to the embodiment etc. among other things. He asked me, “Well what do you say now? If you were me, would you select your poet to this post?”

I remained adamant, I simply repeated what I had said before: “two minutes, two thousand years”

But there was one factor that was a real obstacle; the clerk had absolutely no experience of this work. I suggested to the Controller that the clerk be trained for some days in this particular work and then posted to Cochin.

The men in Administration were taken aback!

But the Controller seemed to have been impressed by my pleading. “All right” he said, “Send your poet as the Unit Accountant” Accordingly, orders were issued.

The incredible news spread in the office like the monsoon. A junior temporary clerk posted to a semi-independent job! And that too, a man without the requisite experience. And posted, not to any place in Kerala but to his own home town, from where it was only a short ride by bus to his office. And what is more and unbelievable: for the privilege of being snug in his own home, an allowance too! (In those days Rs. 10/- was not a small amount but could produce near miracles).

Sunday next, he came to my house. It seemed to me that an entirely different individual had come; here was a man whose

ambition was to be posted to Bangalore in order to be able to go home once in two years, but now he came with orders in his pocket posting him to his home town and as indicated before, with an extra bounty for enjoying "homelife"! After the orders were out, the clerk's name spread and his genius as poet Changampuzha was unveiled. In his appearance also there was a change; well-dressed, tidy, with fashionably set hair, the inevitable upper cloth (*neriyathu*) of Travancoreans, and a smiling face beaming with joy. All these were the external manifestations of the fulfilment (and more) of what was his ambition at that time. He came with the orders, showed them to me at my house and took leave of me with a deep bow, his forehead almost touching the floor.

Although he had thus taken leave of me I wanted to be present at the Railway Station to see him off repeating my felicitations. I started in time to the station on my vehicle. At that time my mode of conveyance to office was a bicycle. For some reason unknown, the vehicle developed lung-trouble, and on the way, one tyre went flat; so too my

hopes of reaching the station in time. The Bombay-Madras Express was regular in those days in coming late, and that day also it did come late, but alas too early for me to see him off.

Letters between us were few and far between. A year after his transfer, I was posted to New Delhi as Asst. Military Accountant General. It was in those years that the eleventh edition of *Ramanan* was dedicated to me by the poet (without any request for formal permission or even advance information). This was because of the regard and respect that the poet had for me and about which he made no secret. In the dedication he had designated me wrongly as "Military Accountant General" When I later pointed it out to him, he respectfully refused to change it. Plato barred poets from his Republic but Shelley considered poets as the unacknowledged legislators of the world. In the idealistic Republic of Weimar, Goethe, the great German poet, was given the rank and honour of a Minister which he held for more than half a century. Our poet, my clerk, seems to have had a prophetic vision. About a quarter of a century later, I did become what he had

envisioned; I became Military Accountant General, I served in that capacity (then redesignated as Controller-General of Defence Accounts) as the first Keralite to hold that post of Departmental Head, for about two years. I sometimes wonder whether my going up that high was to justify the poet's vision or whether it was the potency of his prophecy that led me there.

In 1944 or so I was on leave, and my wife and I were spending some days in Madras with her family. Her father Shri. K. Kutty Krishna Menon was at that time the Government Pleader of Madras and later he became Advocate-General of Madras. One fine summer morning, unexpectedly Changampuzha appeared there before me. We were happy to meet. He said that *Ramanan* was selling very well and his income from the royalty of the book was more than sufficient for his needs. Therefore, his idea was to give up his clerical job and join the Law College; but the last date for receipt of application by the college was already over and therefore admission was difficult if not impossible; but he added, the Principal had

certain discretionary authority to allot two seats even after the due date and also there might be some drop-outs from the original applicants. He requested me for help again at another crucial point in his life; all that was required was a letter from Shri. Kutty Krishna Menon to the Principal.

My wife's father has all his life been a man of high principles and continues to be so; and it was unbelievable that he would write what is usually known as a recommendation letter and that too for one whom he did not know personally but only through me and the applicant's reputation as poet. Having had the experience in this line (I am referring to my pleading with and persuading my Controller earlier for the poet's transfer), I was able to convince Shri. Menon that this was an exceptional case that required exceptional treatment. Finally in his large-heartedness he wrote a letter to the Principal. A few days later, information was received that Changampuzha was admitted as a student in the Law College.

That day when he came there, it was some one's birthday; there was no elaborate celebration,

but there certainly was a sumptuous feast with typical Kerala menu. My wife and her parents gladly joined me in extending an invitation to Changampuzha to join us in the birth-day lunch. Squatting on the Kerala mattress on the floor in front of a large plantain leaf that seemed to smile in satisfaction with its burden of dishes, Changampuzha had lunch with us as if he were a member of the family.

After that day we never met.

Having been "militarised" in accordance with the terms and conditions of service in Defence Accounts, I was posted for service overseas, first in the Middle East with headquarters at Cairo in Egypt and later concurrently with the Central Mediterranean Forces with an office at Naples in Italy. I was out of India for a year as one of the youngest Lt. Colonels in the Indian Army. Returning to India, I was posted to Mathura and later to Lucknow to take charge of two of the most difficult offices, notorious for strikes and indiscipline. In fact, for the latter office I was selected out of turn on a substantial promotion to succeed a senior of mine, a hefty Punjabi who was a

Cambridge blue in boxing and who was stabbed to death while travelling on duty in a first class compartment in the train. Every morning I was thankful for having survived the previous day and had apprehensions about the possibility of survival that day. In such an atmosphere of tension and in the environments created by the mighty political upheaval known as the Partition that became gruesome by the events that it generated immediately before and after, it was impossible to keep up correspondence with friends.

One day, the day's mail contained a post card written in Malayalam without the name of the sender: "Your Changampuzha who dedicated his *Ramanan* to you, is now in a piteous condition, victim of an incurable disease and utter poverty. Please lend a helping hand" Because of the troubled conditions in the country the letter had reached me many days after it was posted. Immediately I wrote to my uncle in Trichur, my literary guide, mentor and teacher (today, unfortunately, he like the poet, has also gone to meet his Maker.) By return post, he wrote: "Your poet—the body is gone, his works remain; his fame continues."

The bell had tolled and then become mute.

The curtain thus fell on the last tragic act of the poet's life. "2 minutes, 2000 years". I realised the full significance of what were my spontaneous words, and at the same time I could see the silver streak, nay, the spreading rainbow of fame.

After his first meeting with me with the book until his transfer to Cochin a few months later, Changampuzha used to come to my house in Poona on holidays and stay for some hours. At my request, which he always accepted as a behest we used to discuss literary topics; my intention and purpose were to make him realise his greatness, especially as a lyric poet, and as a mystic poet, and make him write more and more poetry.

From such literary reminiscences, some stand out in my memory. I wondered how far Changampuzha was justified in introducing in *Ramanan*, modern, western imagery although the background of the Greek pastoral was an enjoyable innovation. 'Coffee' and 'easy chair' wounded me, I declared in no uncertain words. The poet's reply was that the

sophisticated manners and mores of modern life did not vitiate or even lessen the atmosphere and pattern of the classical pastoral; so long as the so-called modern imagery did not overwhelm the pastoral atmosphere there was no incompatibility. I could not agree in toto with the poet's theory. I insisted that such imagery was like attempting to make G. Sankara Kurup's 'Spring Nightingale' (*Vasantha Kokilam*) sing a western tune. We could not come to an agreement, not even agree to disagree. At that time, my recently married life-partner came in with cups of steaming coffee. The poet acknowledged her hospitality by a respectful bow and smile; I too! Methought the poet and I were thinking on similar lines. Chandrika (the heroine of *Ramanan*) and coffee cups! In our appreciation of the well-made coffee the discussion was forgotten!

On one occasion, I suggested in the line of my own experience of frustration and near tragedy, two subjects to the poet with a request to 'embody' them in his own inimitable poetry. I told the poet that I would expatiate on these things later. But we never did;— occasions did not arise.

Once I said, "You are a poet and you are a devotee of Truth and Beauty. As for me, I am a votary of the Fine Arts and in particular of Poetry. In the shadow of the poet I am now illumined with a halo. Therefore, my request, my admonition, even my command to one who, I know, has great respect for me, is that for the sake of Malayalam, or at least, for the sake of one who seeks light in poetry, you should not do anything directly or indirectly, positively or negatively that would dim the flame of the God-given light of your genius." I continued thus with the pretensions of a literary artist and quoted Wordsworth's line "The light that never was on sea or land....." And I concluded thus "Never extinguish this, never even allow it to become dim; make the light brighter and brighter."

When he met me during the episode of the Law College admission at Madras, I happened to be re-reading the romanticised biography of Shelley, entitled *Ariel* by Andre Maurois. During a discussion of the poetic genius of Shelley, I happened to ask the poet:

"For a poet of love singing from the heart, of Truth and

Beauty, is it possible, even by conscious attempt, to be a devil of love, a destroyer of love?"

"No, certainly not, not possible;" affirmed the poet.

I raised another question: to be a minstrel of love, has he not to be a lover of love itself for the fulfilment of his genius? (I now wonder whether this was a plain question or a conundrum) The poet nodded, not in negation but in manifest affirmation.

Once when I was giving him suggestions of his future poetic output, he expressed his desire to translate into Malayalam from great English and other foreign poets. My response was quick:—"A very laudable idea indeed, but you should not allow your time (already curtailed by long hours in office) intended naturally by your inborn genius to produce independent original work to be subjected to any intrusion by translating other men's poems" No doubt, being blessed with a rich poetic vocabulary in Malayalam and a sufficient knowledge of English, he could be a success as a translator but it would be a tragedy if such God-given genius was frittered

away, by using it for a reflection of other people's ideas, thoughts and feelings. "You must adhere to your originality." In this vein I continued my admonition, and advice.

Later I met Mahakavi G. for the first time in New Delhi and thereafter, we met several times. Although he was ailing, I recounted at length my advice to Changampuzha; he agreed with me and revealed that Changampuzha had borrowed from him when he was in College the book entitled "*Anthology of Word Poetry*". That book certainly helped in Changampuzha's progress as a poet. He translated several poems from that book; curiously (perhaps, I should say, naturally) his translations added to his originality. The poet himself has explained his approach in his *Mayukhamala*.

The scene is Cairo, the year 1945. I was in the uniform of a Lt. Colonel serving with the Middle East Forces with an office in Cairo and later in Naples. In Cairo, office hours were from 7 to 11 in the morning and 5 to 8 in the evening. This was because of the unbearable sweltering heat of the desert land. I had started an office Recreation

Club. One evening there was a literary symposium with recitation of poetry. At the end the poem selected as the best of the whole programme, the poem that played on the listeners' heart-strings was Changampuzha's *Vazahakkula* (A bunch of Bananas)

Drawing out a poem from the simple primary emotions of the heart-break of the starving urchins of *Vazhakkula* is an example par excellence of Changampuzha's poetic genius. Literary critics who seek social content in poetry cannot but admit that Changampuzha has not just wept in helpless grief but he has roared in active protest against social injustice. No doubt he has shed tears, no doubt he has identified himself with a pessimistic attitude to life, but at the same time he has called for a social revolution, for liberation from Social Injustice. His protest is not the growl of the tiger but the roar of a lion.

Destructive critics are not rare who point out that the social content of literature is not strengthened by loud cries, gnashing of teeth and growls and roars. They also argue that the lyrical grace of *Vazhakkula* would have been greater if the

poet had observed 'moderation' I feel that those who are aware of the significance of this element (social content) in world literature are not likely to agree with the aforesaid critics. I have hopes that an impartial evaluation of the social content in Changampuzha's poetry would be undertaken by unprejudiced critics. Such a study, I am sure, will reveal Changampuzha's greatness in this respect also.

The purport of this essay is not a critical evaluation; it is only a record of reminiscences of those few years of our mutual regard and respect. If critical remarks have crept in, it is only for the sake of paying a tribute to the lyric cry that flows out of his heart and fills his poems. The fact is that he was a man of poverty, a poet singing about the poor, singing with hope and prayer for the poor man's relief from poverty.... He sang with his heart and from his heart. He was the poet of their unfulfilled dream, nay the poet of his own unfulfilled dream. As such, he will live in the hearts of those that ask and are denied; of those who pray but are not blessed; those who seek the red, red roses from a well-kept garden but bleed from the pricks of thorns; in their

hearts he lives and will live for ever. As long as poetry continues to be accepted as the outpouring of a sensitive heart, so long he will remain a great poet, among the greatest of the world.

In 1968 I took over as the head of the Defence Accounts Department with the designation of Controller-General. Letters and telegrams made a big heap on my table in office and at home. Among the many to felicitate me personally was a Malayalee member of my staff who came with a copy of *Ramanan* and requested my autograph on the title page. I have already mentioned the poet's omission of the word "Assistant" from my designation and his refusal to correct it in the dedication of the eleventh edition of *Ramanan* to me about a quarter century before that. That day when I "autographed" the book, the poet's error became a fulfilment. But as fate would have it, the poet was not there to stand witness to the allround euphoria. Cruel fate had broken into the banana garden of Kerala and cut the sweetest plant. As in a vision I saw the poet standing in front of me as he did years ago, with a copy of the same poem, and I heard

myself asking the question, "Your father is the poet, isn't it so?" "No, I am Changampuzha Krishna Pillai"

Next year I went to Secunderabad to inspect my offices there. There the Recreation Club kindly arranged a programme of entertainment. The Malayalee members produced *Ramanan* as a shadow play. Is it anything to be wondered at that I was the most affected by that item?

Before the shadow play, the poet's dedicatory poem was sung in chorus. I heard the lines; my head bowed; tears welled up in my eyes. Reflected light for me from the poet's glory!

Echoes resound: A question and an answer: "Your father is the poet, isn't it so?" "No, I am Changampuzha Krishna Pillai."

More than a decade has passed after my retirement from service. At night after the household has gone to sleep, I am usually alone in my shadowed study lit by a single lamp, reading or thinking or just contemplating; then, many a figure, many an incident from the past seems to float in,

inducing memories of old far-off unhappy things of my early life; battles of not very long ago; and the present worries of an ageing house-holder having to grapple with the vagaries of fate that tend to make retirement an unpleasant concluding chapter to life. Often during that crowded loneliness, I find myself back in time when the world and I were younger, in my office at Poona, looking at a unique speck of humanity standing before me in the conventional subservience of a subordinate—darkish, tallish, lean, obviously ill-nourished, unkempt, ill-dressed, and despite all, his face lit by the humility of pride and by the pride of poverty;—contrary traits that can blend into a grace of pathos, only in a genius. I hear, across the distance of decades, my young self asking what was meant as a rhetorical query, "Your father is the poet; is n't it so?" And I hear words smiling out of his lips in humble unobtrusive triumph, "No, I am Changampuzha Krishna Pillai"

The vision lingers; the words linger..... Vision fades, Words fade..... Night closes in...

—Translated by the author

Six Poems

M. Govindan

Prayer

Ere the threat
Knocks at my door
And confronts me with the question:
“Your quill or your life?”
Oh God,
If you really be,
Despatch me from here—
To hell—if nowhere else.

What Could You Do?

If the fingers that hold the pen
Tremble with fear,
When the brain teems with lice.
And howls out mad,
What could you do?
Drooping fingers cannot scratch
Nor kill the lice.

When words die of strangulation
At the tip of the pen
Something else also dies, my son—
Freedom - mine and also yours.

The Swordsman Cometh

He who takes the sword shall perish by it. Well,
Name just one in heaven or earth
Who achieved immortality
By not touching the sword.
I dare thee, show me just one specimen.

Or, why this rotten philosophy?
Correct your texts:
Not the sword but the word nailed Jesus on the cross.

He who carried the cross died on the cross.
Did we break it then and consign it to the dust bin?
I ask the custodians of the scripture:
Is pedantic dichotomy its core too?
Behold, this is the time of the Lord of the Sword,
Kalki appears,
With the sword drawn from its sheath,
Spreading terror,
On his mission of purification.

The Cricket and the Humans

On the banks of a river
A cricket built a mansion,
Scooping out grains of sand
With care and diligence
And she made it her home.

And the rains came
The rains came
The rains came.
The river was in flood,
The mansion was submerged.
Her young ones were all washed away.
The cricket--
She cried
She cried
And she cried

Bright or dull
A chick or a chuck
To the mother who gave it birth
A child is a darling.

The village folk heard the cricket wail
 But knew nothing of her woe.
 They said:
 The tiny cricket — she makes so much noise
 That none is left with a moment of peace.

What You Need

What you need is a long stick
 To beat you with — *in his hand*.

What you need is a long- spiked boot
 To kick you with — *on his foot*.

What you need is a sharp iron pen
 To chart your course — *in his pouch*.

What you need is a fistful of power—
 For him to rule, for others to die.

—Translated by Madhavan Ayyappath

The Confession of a Martyr

Who killed Gandhi? Nathuram Godse?
 What a blatant blasphemy!
 The one ever born to perform the act
 Was none else but Gandhi himself.
 The mode and design of the death
 Of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
 Were perfected by the moral code
 He had followed all through out his life.
 Death is never an accident;
 For it is born in the womb of the living
 Long long before you are taken to the tomb.

All those who are deeply engaged
 In the dangerous profession entitled:
 The Experiment with Truth
 Do have a covenant and tryst with death.
 The hemlock, the cross, the gun
 Are all mere effects, not the cause.
 History enacted this drama
 In Greece, Golgotha and in New Delhi.

Enough of quibbles or quotations
 From court-proceedings
 And legal vocabularies, dear advocates!
 Though I stood always in the defendant's box
 In your exalted temple of justice,
 Forget not in the frenzy of arguments
 The fact that the half-naked fakir Gandhi
 Was also a Bar-at-Law, well-qualified
 From the Inner Temple.
 Take this message in long-hand
 To pass it on to posterity.

—Translated by the author

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Kunjunni

1

With dust on the sixth day
God created Man;
With stone on the seventh day
Man created God.

2

Brahman is the truth,
The world a make-believe—
Like “bra” and breast.

3

The world wasn't space enough
For me and God
Together to dwell
In concrete form;
He therefore turned abstract.

4

I have a world,
You have a world,
We haven't a world.

5

I made a sea
And I made a land;
But a seashore—
No; that I cannot make.

6

The stream that flows like a stream
 The worm that creeps like a worm
 And I who stray like myself—
 Isn't this world a wonder!

7

There's bus in this world
 There's craze in this world
 Excellent this world is!
 Come and see
 There is turtle in this world
 And atom bomb
 And me too,
 Come, all of you,
 Take a look and go.

8

What if Mummy is wanting in breast,
 Hasn't the babe its thumb?

9

A small tree,
 A big jungle on it—
 That's my mind.

—Translated by R. Viswanathan

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The Malayalam Novel: The Precursors

Dr. George Irumbayam

There are three major peculiarities that distinguish the novel from other literary forms. They are realism, causality and comprehensiveness of theme. ⁽¹⁾ All the factors of the novel such as plot, characters, action, social background, style etc should be realistic and have a cause and effect relationship. The theme should be broad and extensive.

As David Goldknopf says, "Novel was realistic at its inception. It came into existence when authors and new audience began to find the lived-in-world deserving of their imaginative involvement" ⁽²⁾ Use of prose, the common man's language, close affinity of social background to that of the novelist, characters and incidents taken from real life etc. are some of the aspects that make the novel realistic and probable.

Causality is an important mark that differentiates the novel from other narratives like the epic and romance. Ford Madox Ford puts it in a different and beautiful way when he says about the story of the novel: "Before everything a story must convey a sense of inevitability; that which happens in it must seem to be the only thing that could have happened". ⁽³⁾ Such a story (plot) makes the novel a work of art.

Comprehensiveness of theme, the third factor, distinguishes the novel from the short story. The novel, like the epic requires a broad and extensive theme. The short story may be having the other two peculiarities of the novel. But this one does not suit the short story.

See the second chapter of *Nineteenth Century Malayalam Novel* (unpublished thesis, Calicut University, 1980) by this writer.

2 *The Life of the Novel*, Chicago, 1972, P. 191

3 Miriam Allot (ed) *Novelists on the Novel*, P. 245

Causality is a later finding of the human intellect and hence the novel's later origin is natural. Compared to poetry and drama, the novel has only a very short history, say of about two and a half centuries. (4) It originated in India still later, having a history of less than one and a half centuries. (5)

As in the West the origin and development of the novel in India owe much to the Renaissance. Though the eighteenth century marked the beginning of the Indian Renaissance, the rapid transition from medievalism to modernism took place in the 19th century and hence that is the significant period of our Renaissance.

(6) As the term denotes, 'renaissance' was a rebirth in the west—rebirth of Greek culture, the essence being humanism. "The leaders of Indian renaissance did not find the seeds of humanism in the ancient literature but in the new learning they sought to import from the West" (7) It is the discovery of western culture

that paved the way for the above-said transition in India. The work of Christian missionaries, British rule and English education gave birth to such a discovery and the resultant transition. Radical changes took place in the social, political, economic and literary fields. New movements were started. New personalities with modern outlook and ideas came up. It was the learning of English, science, history and geography, started in the first half of the 19th century in different parts of India, that gave momentum to all these changes.

Kerala is always in the forefront to welcome a change. Any religion is at home here. Western missionaries from the Portuguese period onwards came in battalions to Kerala. They started educating, printing, publishing and propagating Christianity. It is believed that printing in India had its start in Kerala. Though not the first, at least the second place can be claimed by Kerala in the beginning of English education.

4 *Pamela* (1740) by Richardson is considered to be the first novel, though opinions differ.

5 The Bengali novel '*Phulmoni O Karunar Bibaran*' (The History of Phulmoni and Karuna, 1852) by Catherine Hannah Mullens is the first novel in any Indian language—See Meenakshi Mukherjee's papers on Mrs. Mullens and Mrs. Collins.

6 *Studies in Bengali Renaissance*, Jadavpur, P. 8

7 Ibid, p. 68.

When started, English education spread rapidly in the middle class and as noted by most of the historians of literature, the novel originated as a literary form of, for and by the middle class (8) As a result of the British rule and the missionary work, the upper class in Kerala, especially the Nambudiris lost their superiority and divine splendour. Educated youth questioned the actions and the authority of the old and the upper class. Either Europeans or the English-educated people from the middle or lower classes came up as top officials. The upper class which was against social change and the new type of education had to lag behind. Everybody was made equal before law. Slavery was abolished. A new criminal procedure code was implemented. The Nambudirist and other land-lords could not punish or killo thers as before. Kottayam and Calicut were the nerve-centres of these changes.

The first novel of Kerala (*The Slayer Slain*) was written at and with the locale of Kottayam and was serialised in the Kottayam College (C. M. S) quarterly magazine from July 1864 onwards. The first

Malayalam novel was written at Parappanangadi (near Calicut) and was published from Calicut in 1889. A good number of early Malayalam novels were written in Malabar and published at Calicut. This upper hand of Malabar in this connection may be due to the conquest of the region by Tippu during the second half of the 18th century by which the landlords either ran away or were cut to size and the middle-class came up. When, defeating Tippu, the British started ruling over Malabar in 1792, socio-economic and cultural changes got momentum. The rule of kings in Cochin and Travancore, though under British control, could not afford to have that much of rapid change as in Malabar. Prose fiction in Malayalam started as a mirror of and initiation into all these changes.

So far as I have been able to trace, *The Slayer Slain* is the first realistic work of prose fiction produced in Kerala. It was written by Mrs. Collins, though a few paragraphs were added by her husband Richard Collins, as she could not complete the novel before her death in 1862. Mr. Collins,

8. See David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature*, Vol. III, London, 1972, P, 700

who was a missionary and the Principal of the C. M. S. College, Kottayam, completed and published it in the College magazine with a note of hope that some one would translate it into Malayalam.⁽⁹⁾ Of course it was translated and published as a book, called *Ghatakavadham* in 1877 and was reprinted in 1976.

The story, characters and background of *The Slayer Slain* are of Kerala. It is based on the conflict between Syrian Christians and Anglicans in 19th century Kerala. Koshy Kurian a wealthy and arrogant landowner, was educated by the Anglicans and had joined them in faith, but returns to the indigenous Syrian Church. The newly converted Anglican Pulayas are treated by him very harshly. Since they leave work to attend church on a Sunday, Kurian beats them up. The small son of Poulouse, an elderly Pulaya, dies on the spot. Poulouse is chained in water to suffer the cold water down and the hot sun above. He is set free by a missionary. Mariam, the kind-hearted daughter of Kurian goes to his hut and nurses him. Kurian comes to fetch her.

While returning home, their boat capsizes in the river. Poulouse rescues Mariam and disappears. This striking difference between himself who killed Poulouse's child and Poulouse who rescued his daughter makes Kurian repent. The slayer in him is being slain. He goes in search of Poulouse, finds him in a distant place and brings him back giving him due respect. He permits his daughter to marry an Anglican lay preacher, instead of a stupid moneyed Syrian, according to her will and pleasure. On the marriage-day a Brahmin turns up and reveals that Kurian's wife was really his brother's daughter and therefore of the upper caste.

"The story is not without its amusing weaknesses. While it attacks caste, the social ambience has insidiously influenced the author with the prestige of caste; that is why the Brahmin comes on the scene to donate a pedigree to the heroine"⁽¹⁰⁾ Such pitfalls connected with causality are not very rare. Yet in a broad sense it keeps the cause and effect relationship. It is not unnatural that Pulayas who

⁹ The Kottayam College Quarterly Magazine, July 1864, P. 35

¹⁰ Krishna Chaitanya, *A History of Malayalam Literature*, New Delhi, 1971, P. 260

were slaves were treated by the proud, arrogant Koshy Kurian, so badly that a boy was killed. The boat accident is almost artificial. But the idea is to depict the goodness of Poulouse by which Kurian is moved to repent. It may be remembered that when Poulouse comes to the rescue of Mariam at the risk of his own life, it is in keeping with his character. Further, the development of the story also bears such justification. Meanwhile the prejudice of the authoress against Syrians cannot be forgotten.

From the very outset it is clear that the authoress has taken the plot and characters from the world around her. Thus she not only made it realistic but also taught Malayalees how to make a literary work using the lived-in-world. *The Slayer Slain* is the story of a sinner's transformation in the context of Syro-Anglican conflict, together with the reflection of a rapidly changing social life of 19th century Kerala. The fact that Mrs. Collins preferred telling the story of day-to-day life to re-telling some story from the Bible, is a clue to her knowledge of the fundamentals of the novel. The theme is comprehensive as well. The

characters are well developed and the reader's interest is kept up. Yet as *Ghatakavadham* is a translation from English it will not be right to call it the first Malayalam novel. It might have inspired the fiction writers and readers of Kerala and hence it is definitely a precursor of the Malayalam novel.

Pulleli Kunchu also was written by a C. M. S. missionary called Archdeacon Koshy. He was perhaps inspired by *The Slayer Slain* in depicting the pitiable condition of the Pulayas. Pulleli Kunchu Pillai, the hero, is a bitter critic of Hindu customs and worship. He argues with Rama Panicker and a Nambudiri, both orthodox Hindus, and tries to establish the meaninglessness of caste and idol-worship. He is an advocate of the Christian faith. It is clear that he is the representative of the author.

The first two parts of *Pulleli Kunchu* contain the above mentioned arguments. In the third and last part of this small book, some bible-sellers come, sing and make a long speech on the life and miracles of Christ, at the end of which Kunchu Pillai, Rama Panicker etc. purchase a copy each of the book.

The story bears no cause and effect relationship. The discussion in the first part leads neither the story nor the reader to the second part. No part of the book is inevitable. The life of Christ given in the third part never invokes the reader's emotional involvement. The first two parts have some traits of a novel. The words and actions of a Tamil Brahmin in the first part and of a Kerala Brahmin (Nambudiri) in the second part are realistic and attractive. They are characters suited for a novel. The character sketch of Rama Panicker is also commendable. But Kunchu, the hero, being the mouthpiece of the author, is a bit artificial. The arguments in the first two parts have a basis of reality. "By the 1850s the C. M. S. had produced a generation of well-educated English speaking Syrian clergy who were constantly on the move throughout north and central Travancore.....The journals of Oommen Mammen, Jacob Chandy, Sr. and K. Koshy chronicle many encounters with high castes on paths, in paddy fields and under wayside trees. In the course of such conversations the clergymen would condemn idol-worship,

ridiculous Nayar marriage-customs, distribute tracts, emphasize the exploitative nature of Brahmins and offer a few words about the hell-fire to come".¹¹ K. Koshy is none other than the author of *Pulleli Kunchu*. He wrote the story, it seems, from his own experience. The pitiable condition of Pulayas described in this work is more effective than that of *The Slayer Slain*. The realistic aspect of *Pulleli Kunchu* is praiseworthy. But the lack of causality and of comprehensiveness withhold us from calling it a novel. It is only a religious tract worth considering as a forerunner of the Malayalam novel.

Kundalatha, the third one to be discussed, is considered by some writers as the first Malayalam novel. Its author Appu Nedungadi has imitated Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and Scott's *Ivanhoe* in writing it. Belarius escapes from Cymbeline's court with the king's two children while Kapilanath escapes with Kundalatha, the daughter of the King of Kalinga. After much turn of events Kapila comes back to fight for the king who is attacked by the king of Kuntala, just as Belarius returns to the help of his

11. Robin Jeffrey, *Decline of the Nayar Dominance*, 1976, p. 52

master in war. The marriage of Kundalatha with Taranath, the son of the former minister (Kapilanath) takes place; and thus the story ends.

There is much to say about the drawback of the plot with regard to causality. It is funny that the king, who has lost faith in Kapilanath, makes his brother the new minister. Again, Kapila who is worried to save his own life takes the trouble of stealing away the king's daughter! Instead he could have taken his own children who were left in the court. How can he be sure that they are safe there? In this kidnapping business the author imitates *Cymbeline*. But Belarius does it as he wants to take revenge upon the king. Kapila has no such aim and hence it is improper. It is not clear why Kapila, Taranath etc., are in disguise. The father and son are not even permitted to recognise each other! Such fancy dress competitions may be suited for romance but not for a novel. The post-war part of *Kundalatha* drags on to four chapters unnecessarily.

Appu Nedungadi has denied all possibilities of *Kundalatha* becoming realistic. He has made it clear in the introduction that

the characters and the locale have nothing to do with any place in India or abroad. Not only the characters and background but the plot, language etc. also are unrealistic. When the story resembles that of *Cymbeline*, the names make one remember the old characters like Tarapeeda of *Kadambari*. Everything in *Kundalatha* has an old look. We are not aware to which period its atmosphere belongs. E. M. Forster sees the portrayal of "life by time" as the distinctive role which the novel has added to literature's more ancient pre-occupation with portraying "life by values" ¹² What we see in *Kundalatha* is the portrayal of life by values rather than by time. The faultless should not be punished – a good old value is maintained through the life of Kapilanath. Hence it is a piece of feudalistic fiction – a prose romance. As in western romances war and love are the chief items and the major characters belong to the upper class. Therefore it is not a novel. But as there is an earnest endeavour on the part of the author to make the story probable and comprehensive, it may be called a precursor of the Malayalam novel. There is a

realistic incident as well. Ramadas, the servant of Kapilanath meets his mother and sister while going to fight against the king of Kuntala. There the conversation and expression of feelings are quite natural and realistic.

In addition to *Pulleli Kunchu* and *Kundalatha* translations of tales from Shakespeare called *Kamakshee Charitham (As You Like It)* and *Varshakalakatha (Winter's Tale)*, novel translations called

Padminiyum Karunayum (Phulmoni and Karuna) and *Ghatakavadham* were published during 1877-'87. This shows that Malayalam writers and readers were more and more interested in prose fiction. As we have seen, *Pulleli Kunchu* and *Kundalatha* have some traits of the novel while *The Slayer Slain* is a typical novel. These three works are the important precursors which made the origin of the novel in Malayalam imminent.

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The Malayalam Novel: The Great Pioneers

M. K. Sanoo

"Since Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* it has become customary to speak of the novel as the product of an intellectual milieu shaped by Descartes and Locke. It is a milieu which contains an insistence upon the importance of individual experience, a distrust of universals, and an elevation of the data of the senses as the necessary means by which ideas are formed." (Philip Stevick—*Theory of the Novel*). The evolution of an intellectual milieu of this kind took place in Kerala in the latter half of the nineteenth century. And under the impact of English education, the novel naturally emerged in Malayalam. O. Chandu Menon and C. V. Raman Pillai were the great pioneers in this field.

These pioneers still remain the greatest novelists in Malayalam. None of the myriad novels which appeared later has attained the stature of their works. New critics share this view with the old critics.

O. Chandu Menon (1846-1899) was born and brought up in North Kerala (Malabar) which was at that time under direct British rule. He joined the English school run by the Basel Mission at Tellicherry and passed the Uncovenanted Civil Service Examination; later he became a matriculate. At the age of eighteen he was appointed as a clerk in the Small Cause Court at Tellicherry and rose steadily in the official hierarchy until he reached the position of a sub-judge. During his official career he came into close contact with many Englishmen. He also spent a lot of his leisure time in reading English fiction. He came to like the novels of Jane Austen, W. M. Thackeray and T. L. Peacock though he was not impressed by the works of Sir Walter Scott. It was this close contact with English fiction that prompted him, when pressed by his wife, to translate Lord Beaconsfield's *Henrietta*

Temple. As he proceeded a little forward, he gave up the attempt to translate and began to write an original novel which was completed in three months. Thus our first novel proper was published under the title *Indulekha* in 1889. Its popularity was such that a second edition became necessary in four months' time.

What differentiated *Indulekha* from the numerous verse tales and the few prose tales in the language may be broadly indicated as follows:

1. The language used for narration is conversational and the dialogue as well as the narration sounds natural.
2. The customs and manners of contemporary society are depicted realistically and critically. There are no incidents in it which violate our sense of probability.
3. The author takes the readers into his confidence and does not depend on the device of surprise.
4. The characters have individuality and they are taken from actual life.
5. The author's liberal outlook on life seems to have influenced the structure of the novel.

In 1891 Chandu Menon published his second novel *Sarada*. It was only the first part of a long novel planned in three parts. He was not able to write the other two parts. The salient features of *Indulekha* which have been summarized above are to be found in *Sarada* also.

In both the novels the central theme is life in the matriarchal joint families of the Nair community of Malabar. Each family was headed by the eldest male member who managed the affairs in an autocratic manner. These novels are set in a period when the younger members had begun to question these ways of the elders. *Indulekha* starts with a reference to such an incident. Against the dictates of the 'reigning' uncle Panchu Menon, one of his nephews, Madhavan, declares that he will send up Sinnan, one of his younger cousins, for English education. Madhavan's sweet heart Indulekha, Panchu Menon's granddaughter, sticks to her lover and refuses to accept a husband of her grandfather's choice. She even goes to the extent of snubbing and discomfiting the high caste Nambudiri Brahmin who comes as her suitor with the old man's blessing. All these were things

unheard of in those days. Thus the hero and heroine appear as rebels. It is also hinted that their independence of mind is due to English education. The other characters are also typical men and women from contemporary society. It is also noteworthy that there is not a single irrelevant character. Chandu Menon has, however, done something unusual in the novel; the eighteenth of its twenty chapters is a long ideological discussion. In a mansion at Bombay, Madhavan, his father Govinda Paniker and the hero's friend, Govindankutty Menon hold this discussion which ranges over topics like English education, faith in God, religious practices, atheism, evolution, liberalism and contemporary politics including the work of the Indian National Congress. Readers who are interested only in a well-told story will find this chapter boring and critical opinion about it is divided. But it is doubtless that this chapter contributes to the revelation of the novelist's total vision. At any rate there is in it an attempt to bring in a daring innovation.

In *Sarada* Chandu Menon portrays in a larger canvas certain incidents leading to a law suit in another joint family.

The intrigues within the family, the machinations of domestic servants and minor legal advisers of a parasitical nature and the condition of the regular legal profession are among the elements out of which the fabric of the novel is made. When Chandu Menon leaves off at the end of Part One, he has just taken the plot to the field with which he is most familiar, i. e., the court room. Another factor also sets *Sarada* apart from *Indulekha*; this is the novelist's insight into the core of human nature. Chandu Menon has placed at the centre of the plot the demon of evil that lurks inside man. In the succeeding parts of the novel he would have given it a philosophical dimension – but he was not to complete it. The greater variety of the characters of *Sarada* also shows the author's development as a novelist. An outstanding quality of the two novels is Chandu Menon's mastery over satire.

Marthanda Varma was published in the same year as *Sarada* i. e., 1981. Its author C. V Raman Pillai (1857–1922) was born in South Kerala which then constituted the native state of Travancore. He was an officer in the State Government

service. His parents were employees of the royal palace and his patron was a courtier. As he was thus born and brought up in the premises of the palace and spent his adult life as a Government official at Trivandrum, allegiance to the princely house and admiration for the glory of royalty became an integral part of his mental set-up. His interest in *kathakali* was almost a mania; and his love of *kathakali* literature and early Malayalam poetry was very deep. He was taught at College by British Professors whom he revered. He was an enthusiastic student of English literature and the range of his reading was wide. In fiction he became an admirer of such European masters as Sir Walter Scott and Alexander Dumas. Their influence is evident in his novels. His first literary works were not novels but light comedies and they were successful on the stage. But his genius found its full expression in the novel.

When C. V's first novel, *Marthanda Varma* was brought out in 1891 he called it a historical romance. Its plot is centred on the royal builder of modern Travancore, Marthanda Varma. What the novelist portrays is the conflict between

those who overtly and covertly opposed the royal family and those who were ready to sacrifice anything for their prince. In the novelist's hands it becomes something like the mighty struggle between the Devas and the Asuras. The characteristic features of this novel are different from those of *Indulekha*. 1. The language of narration is often far different from common speech. The technique of narration also uses artificial devices. Even the language of the dialogue is only seemingly natural. 2. As the incidents are those of the distant past, contemporary life is not reflected in it. Further many incidents are those of heroic exploits which are not within the frontiers of probability. 3. The devices of suspense and surprise are central to the construction of the plot. 4. The characters are individualized, but some of them are larger than life and the ruling prince is pictured as a divine incarnation. 5. The structure of the novel is directed by an outlook which may be described as religious.

C. V Raman Pillai's second novel *Dharmaraja* (1913) came out 22 years after the publication of *Marthanda Varma*. Six years later *Ramaraja*

Bahadur (in two parts) was published. In addition to these historical novels, he also wrote in 1914 a novel dealing with contemporary society, but it is regarded as a failure. By the time he wrote his later novels C. V. had attained maturity both in his outlook and his technique. He continued to use an artificial style and to employ the devices of suspense and surprise. These may appear to be signs of immaturity; but when we pass through the world created by the author we feel that these are inevitable. It is indeed a strange world. But in it we come across the deeper elements of human nature which are pictured in epic dimensions. In fact it reaches the level of a cosmic struggle between good and evil.

When we consider C. V. Raman Pillai's novels as a whole five of its aspects stand out 1. The main theme is the struggle for power between royalists and their adversaries. 2. Romantic love is introduced as a subsidiary theme. 3. The main characters are larger than life and typify particular elements in human nature. 4. The style is often complex and cannot be followed by the common reader 5. An inscrutable power seems to control human life.

The novels of these two great contemporaries prompt us to compare and to contrast them. What strikes us first is the similarity between the two masters. They differed basically in personality and taste and they lived in strikingly different circumstances. And yet both were admirers of men and women of strong character and this admiration was guided by a deep moral sense. Chandu Menon chose as his protagonists members of the new generation who may be described as rebels; and he ridiculed those who opposed change and clung to outmoded ways of life. In his farces C. V. also poked fun at the follies and foibles of contemporary life. His novels deal with the past and in this world of long ago he found his models for heroic character who challenged not only the world around them but even fate. In two different ways the two novelists created men and women who were out of the ordinary. And their conception of superiority chimed with that of the Indian Renaissance.

But in their writing self they were very different from each other. Chandu Menon confined himself to that segment of contemporary life which he knew well. But what C. V. did was just the opposite. He

re-created the past in all its romantic splendour. Chandu Menon was a realist while C. V. was a romantic. The former accepted the good elements of westernisation and depicted the life around him realistically. The latter was fascinated by the glories of the past. But unknowingly he embodied in his novels a quality which we find striking. He was a professed royalist and yet what he regarded as the greatest human virtue—manliness—shines more brilliantly in the leading rebels. It is again these rebels who captivate us by the complexity of their character. Hence it may not be wrong to say that C. V. Raman Pillai too was a rebel at heart.

Rationalism and the scientific temper were essential factors of Chandu Menon's mental make-up. We don't find in his novels situations or developments which we cannot explain. What he does is to narrate in a simple manner things which can happen in our day-to-day life. But many of the crucial incidents in C. V.'s novels are inexplicable or miraculous. In characters like Chanthrakkaran and Perinchakkodan he portrays even subhuman layers of character. C. V. could lend credibility even to the

miraculous and he knew human nature in greater depth than Chandu Menon.

Rationalism and social consciousness made the structure of Chandu Menon's genius that of a novelist. But C. V.'s genius was enriched by his imagination which transcended rationalism. Once Tagore stated that he could not imagine a shoreless sea. When C. V. read this he observed that he could visualise not only a shoreless sea, but even a shoreless sea of fire. This creative imagination was the dominant trait in C. V.'s genius. So he described in his novels dark forests, raging fires, swirling currents and single combats between formidable rivals. And the alchemy of his imagination often brought a philosophical dimension to many of the situations in his novels. The giant-like Chanthrakkaran who swims across the swift currents of the river at Alwaye with Savithri on his back is a symbol of the irrepressible will of man that challenges death and doom. Hence the modernist mind may find C. V. more congenial while satirically inclined minds may prefer Chandu Menon.

C. V. Raman Pillai and Chandu Menon were both eminent children of the Indian

Renaissance. In the core of their culture and their national background their novels show an essential Indianness. And the scene of action in them is not confined to Kerala; it extends to Tamil Nadu, Mysore, Bombay and beyond. So it is appropriate to regard them as two gifted men who wrote Indian novels through the medium of Malayalam.

Malayalam Literary Survey

Quarterly in English

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The Malayalam Novel: The Interregnum

I. Isthak

In the year 1880 the ruling Maharaja of Travancore sent the English version of a Dutch novel to the Chairman of the State Textbook Committee, with the following instruction: "The book *Akbar* sent together with this letter is a novel about India. The character of Akbar the Great is interestingly delineated in this story. If the life of Akbar is not included in the *Mahatcharitha Samgraham*, it may be added, furnishing the historical facts from Indian history and character points from here. The whole of this novel deserves to be translated" The recipient of this letter was none other than the then uncrowned king of Malayalam literature, Kerala Varma Valiakoil Thampuran, who was prolific as author and translator both in prose and verse. Kerala Varma was slow to oblige. He kept it for fourteen years, before the royal wish could be fulfilled in 1894. By this time successful novels by Chandu

Menon and C. V. Raman Pillai had been published. Why did Thampuran take such a long time? While *Akbar* was waiting for completion, Thampuran took up the translation of *Sakuntalam* and several poetical works in Sanskrit. This prolonged negligence on the part of Thampuran only reveals the general attitude to the novel as a literary form prevalent among creative writers of the time.

The story of the Malayalam novel in the interregnum between Chandu Menon and Basheer tells us only about the sad betrayal of geniuses, by which the genre forfeited any vital achievement for more than half a century. Chandu Menon and C. V. Raman Pillai brought out their maiden titles *Indulekha* and *Marthanda Varma* in 1889 and 1891 respectively. None before them could accept the concept of the novel as a new form of literature.

Immediate posterity also failed to uphold their well-renowned tradition in novel-writing. Then it took another half a century to witness again the creative resurgence of powerful Malayalam prose in the works of Basheer, Thakazhi and Dev, who led the second generation of novelists. What happened to our creative prose during this period?

Of course there is more than one answer to this question. The potentials of Malayalam prose in creative writing could be actualised only if talented persons came forward expressing themselves in that form. This did not materialise. Even though Chandu Menon and C. V. excelled as pioneers in the field of the novel, real literary geniuses after them generally did not turn to it. May be they could not appreciate this new form of literature, since it never appealed to their sensibility which was already defined and directed by traditional norms of literature. Anyhow they still continued to be in the line of poetry. When they entered new vistas of romanticism, they still clung ardently to the time-honoured form of rhyme, rhythm and metre.

Asan was merely sixteen years of age, Ulloor twelve, Vallathol

ten, Nalappattu two and V. C. Balakrishna Panicker just born, when *Indulekha* had twice gone successfully into the press within a short span of four months. Even A. R. Rajaraja Varma was only twenty-six then. Kerala Varma, after introducing *Akbar* did not make a similar venture. That means, the success of *Indulekha* and *Marthanda Varma* and the later works of these authors could not awaken the traditional poetic sensibility into the art form of the future.

Before the traditional aversion to prose went on for long, the dent made by modern education on the sensibility of the time began widening, though not deepening enough. The novel itself was originally a product of the renaissance and individualistic capitalism. A large reading public is necessary for its flourishing in any language. With the advent of modern education in our country an enthusiastic reading public was emerging here with a different taste and outlook and free from tradition. A renaissance in all walks of life was also being felt slowly. Its immediate manifestation was an apparent revaluation of feudal concepts and institutions of life as reflected in *Indulekha*. This line was however arrested

abruptly. What followed next may be summed up as follows.

The thirst for new reading material increased among the newly educated people. For them what mattered was not the artistic values of the novel, but the narration of an interesting story. They were fascinated by the story of *Indulekha* and they preferred stories like it to poetry. To cater to their needs there developed a mushroom growth of short-lived novels in Malayalam. The sensibility of this aimless reading public would have been deepened and the history of Malayalam novel would have been different if talented craftsmen saw in the novel an acceptable outlet for their creativity.

The interregnum between the first and the second creative periods was not altogether barren. The output was indeed remarkable in quantity and included imitations, adaptations, translations etc. But the purple patches are just a few.

Indulekha really created a craze for the novel among the reading public. Some of the English-educated people took to writing in its manner. Within two years a number of social or more exactly caste novels

looking like the apparitions of *Indulekha* were released, which shocked even Chandu Menon. In *Sarada* part I (1891) he was severely critical of the tendency. The same critical spirit directed against the trivialities of imitation is observable in the satirical novel *Parangodee Parinayam* (1892) by Kizhakeppattu Ramankutty Menon. It is the first of its type in Malayalam. Very soon another satirical novel *Naluperiloruthan or Natakadyam Kavithvam* (1893), wrongly identified later on as a farce, was written by C. Anthappai. It lashes out against the similar decadence in Malayalam drama.

In 1891, Kunnukuzhiyil Kochuthommen released his *Parishkharappathi* (The Fashionmonger) which minutely described the social customs and effects of modern education among Christians of Central Kerala.

Saraswathivijayam (1892) was a daring contribution by Potheri Kunjampu. In line with its precursor, it reveals the liberating magic of modern education working especially on the down-trodden and the socially ostracised classes. It anticipates the progressive novels of later years.

Viruthan Sanku (Sanku the Smart - 1911) by Karat Achutha

Menon struck a different note. Vikramanunni the hero is compelled to leave his matriarchal joint family out of its usual internal strife and disharmony. He then joins a team of bandits as their leader and makes a lot of mischief. While in that company he is known as Viruthan Sanku. The story with its social, detective and comic mixture of events attracted readers. Romance also was not left out.

Compared to these minor novels of the period, *Apphante Makal* (The Paternal Uncle's Daughter 1933) by Muthiringottu Bhavathrathan Nampoothiripad deserves high esteem. Though it was essentially a pathetic love-story, the emancipation of the Nampoothiri women-folk from the tyranny in their house-hold and the general reform of the Brahmin community which was paralysed by formalism were aimed at. Bhavathrathan Nampoothiripad was a writer of higher artistic talents. His style of narration and manner of description were qualitatively different from those of his contemporaries.

Meenakshi by C. Chathu Nair
Balिकासadanam by Kocheppan Tharakan and *Dorassini* (The Westernised Lady) by Sardar

K. M. Panikker are a few of the other notable contributions in the category of social novels.

The class of historical novels also presents the same features of decadence. *Marthanda Varma* was characterised as a historical romance by its author. The life of Akbar the Great and his faithful friends which forms an important epoch in the history of India is well narrated in *Akbar*, though the veteran translator was severely criticised for the highly Sanskritised style of prose seen in the opening parts of the book. These works also inspired others to dive into the past.

Eighteen years after *Akbar*, Appan Thampuran made an effort to re-create the socio-political conditions which existed in Kerala, under the rule of the Perumals. The result was *Bhootharayar*. Its plot is based on a legend. Its words and the structure of its language echo the culture of a remote past. The historicity of the theme and the artistic merit of the novel are doubtful. *Kerala Puthran* (1924) of Narayana Pothuval also dwells on the days of the Perumals.

Keraleswaran (1928) by T. Raman Nambeesan is a comparatively bigger and better

piece. Its story is developed from a selection of memorable events and glorious personalities in the history of Kerala in the 10th century M. E. It concentrates on the vicissitudes in the fortunes of Vettathunadu, a principality in Central Kerala. The charming presentation in good style of the strategic moves made by intelligent princes and skilful soldiers, is not at the expense of the individuality of the characters. According to some critics, this is one of the best among the historical novels ever written in Malayalam.

Sardar K. M. Panikker, who excelled as a historian, made valuable contributions to the species of historical novel in Malayalam. His *Kerala Simham* is about Pazhassi Raja and *Kalyana Mal* is based on historical facts about the period of Akbar the Great. *Paranki Padayali* (1934) is considered his best. It is a story of revenge. The social situation in Kerala at the time of the Portuguese domination is reflected in this novel. Other notable contributions are *Cheraman Perumal* (1939) by Kappana Krishna Menon, *Amrithapulinam* by Pallathu Raman and *Valluva Kammaraman* (1927) by M. R. K. C.

The third type of Malayalam novel was political. Contributions made to this field are not many. Two political allegories *Parappuram* (1904) and *Udayabhanu* (1906) by Narayana Kurukal cannot be overlooked. In *Udayabhanu* a new battle of Kurukshethra is supposed to be waged in Travancore. The location and characters are named after the Maha Bharatha. Both the works aim at rousing the people against governmental corruption and in developing a sense of people's rights. It is worth remembering that these two novels were published by the great journalist, Swadesabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai, with his introductions. The author was compelled to quit government service, as he entered the bad books of the king of Travancore.

The genre of the detective novel also made its appearance in Malayalam as early as 1904. The credit goes to *Bhaskara Menon* written by Appan Thampuran. Moorkothu Kumaran and O. M. Cheriyan wrote *Kanakam Moolam* and *Kalante Kolayara* in 1905 and 1928 respectively.

Among the translations from other Indian languages, *Durgesa Nundini* was rated

high by contemporaries. It is a novel by Bankim Chandra Chatterji in Bengali. After C. S. Subrahmanyam Potti rendered it into Malayalam in 1911, there was a flow of Bengali novels into Malayalam. Bengali names also gained wide prevalence in Malayalam novels.

Translations or adaptations formed the bulk of the novels in the interregnum. Most of them were mere trash. But a few books turned out to be different. Translations by Kesari A. Balakrishna Pillai and Nalappattu Narayana Menon paved the way for new attempts which finally ushered in a new creative period. In

1921 Kesari rendered Balzac's *Eugenie Grandet* into Malayalam. He continued this inspiring mission in later years also and thus opened up the high gates of western literature for Malayalam. *Pavangal*-1925- (Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*) by Nalappattu stands head and shoulders above all other contributions we received by way of translation. The heightened humanism it presented before the readers and the young writers lasted long as an influence. Its influence on progressive writers of the second generation consisting of Basheer, Thakazhi, and Dev is undoubted. There begins another story.

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Translated by Dr. K. T. Rama Varma

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Kumaran Asan

M. Prabha

[*Kumaran Asan: Profile of a Poet's Vision*. Dr. K. Sreenivasan, Jayasree Publications, Kawdiar, Trivandrum-3 Rs. 60/- (Hard Cover) Rs. 40/- (Paper back) Printed at S. B. Press Trivandrum-1]

Dr. Sreenivasan's book on Kumaran Asan eminently deserves to be enthusiastically welcomed. The author, out of his humility, would say in his preface that this brief study of the life and works of Mahakavi Kumaran Asan is meant mainly for non - Malayalee readers. But, I would at the very outset point out that it is much more than that. It is a very arresting book written by a scholar-critic intimately familiar with the numerous literary creations of Asan; he is no blind admirer of the poet; he has a stance that makes him sure of his ground, and he wields a literary yard-stick the worth of which no one can challenge. I would at once say that the author has successfully attempted to highlight the major

facets of the poetic genius of Asan; he has also thrown a flood of light over Asan's significant works to help the readers to keenly appreciate their literary excellence and also to confidently traverse the various halls, chambers, and corridors of the magnificent literary mansion built by one of the greatest poets of Malayalam.

In Kerala, the name of Asan is, indeed a household word. But the sad fact remains, he is not known outside as he should have been known. The main reason is that there is a regrettable dearth of books on Asan in English.

The other day, I happened to come across a book in English entitled *A Guide to Eastern Literatures* edited by David Marshall Lang. It contains a chapter on Indian and Pakistani literature written by I. M. P. Racsides and R. Russel. I anxiously went through the portion dealing with Indian literature and was rather dismayed to find that Malayalam had not been given due

importance. I do concede that it may not be possible to give a comprehensive resume of Malayalam literature in a few pages; but I noticed that nothing worthwhile had been referred to herein. To the chapter was annexed a list giving the names of the important literary men. I went through it and was rudely shocked to find that the following names alone appeared, in the list – O. Chandu Menon, Vallathol Narayana Menon, Cherusseri Nampoothiri, Rama Panikker, Madhava Panikker, Kavalam Madhava Panikker (K. M. Panikker) Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, as also Thunchath Ezhuthachan. Of course, the writers of the chapter are not Malayalees, and that may be one of the reasons for the omission of some important names.

There is another book published by the Bharatiya Vidyabhavan entitled *The History of Culture of the Indian People* which has to be considered rather authoritative. In Vol. X Part II at page 20 Malayalam literature is dealt with, and under the sub-title "Drama and Poetry" there is a reference to Kumaran Asan in these words: "Raja Raja Varma's example inspired younger poets like Kumaran Asan and Vallathol and helped

the speedy development of the new romantic poetry". Again in Vol. XI at page 915 under the sub-title "Poetry" we find another reference to Asan. I am quoting it here: "Reference has been made above to A. R. Raja Raja Varma. Some of the earliest of the younger poets to be inspired by him were Kumaran Asan, V. C. Balakrishna Panikar, Vallathol Narayana Menon... Kumaran Asan's celebrated poem, 'Vina Poova' (The Fallen Flower) depicts in a symbolic manner the tragedy of human life in a moving and thought provoking manner."

Further at page 958 we come across another passage: "The three more or less contemporary poets, Asan, Vallathol and Ulloor considerably enriched Malayalam poetry. Some of their later works reflect social and political movements of the time. Asan's 'Chandalabhikshuki' and 'Duravastha,' for instance, were written with the object of exposing in an artistic and critical manner the evils of untouchability prevalent in Kerala" Of course, these references are there; however, can it be said that their contributions have been properly evaluated? And no wonder even our outstanding poets are not sufficiently known outside.

These circumstances help us to see that Dr. Sreenivasan's service is of considerable consequence. The genius of Asan was of a rare magnitude; his association with Narayana Guru was a unique experience; and his deep knowledge of Indian philosophy, his proficiency in Sanskrit, and his mastery over literary criticism, poetics and allied disciplines helped him, to formulate a view of life which strongly influenced his literary career. The pattern of social structure that he saw around him, the agony of human life which moved him deeply and the varied and complex problems which human beings were put to the necessity of confronting made him develop a predominantly humanist attitude, which made him espouse the cause of social justice and wield his facile pen to achieve that objective.

On going through the book under review, it can be clearly seen that the author has handled the more important works of Asan in quite a masterly manner. Dr. Sreenivasan's equipment and attainments do qualify him to discharge the duty of introducing Asan to non-Malayalees with unerring perspective. Asan's works, no doubt, fall into the category of

'great poetry' as T. S. Eliot would define it. Every one of the works of Asan was composed with a deliberate and conscious purpose. He valued life very much, and wanted to see that man's life was transformed so that it might become sublime, perfectly pure and magnificently meaningful. He did not write a line which does not stir the heart and inspire the mind so as to make the individual shed his imperfections; every word that he wrote is ennobling. His poems seek to interpret and evaluate life for us, to console, purify and sustain us. He pulled down crude and outmoded creeds, challenged even accredited dogmas, and questioned traditions which were dividing mankind into narrow and sectarian groups. His creations were philosophic, didactic and humane; he was passionately devoted to all values, human, social and cultural which according to him should inspire mankind so that a new social structure could be brought into existence wherein inhere truth, equality, love and freedom in their fullest measure (vide *The Song of Freedom*).

Dr. Sreenivasan, well-versed in the *techné* (to use the Aristotelian word) of criticism

and the engineering of literary craft has placed before the reader a skilful analysis of all the works of Kumaran Asan. His handling of the literary works is brilliant and *interalia* shows how the poetic art in Malayalam is in no way inferior to that in other languages; what an intense, and salubrious ferment is taking place in the sphere of Malayalam literature; and what a significant role Asan has played in emancipating Malayalam poetry from its decadence and perversion while tending nourishing and preserving its inherent potentialities. The poetic works of Asan, on account of their manysidedness universality and humanist moorings can be appraised from different perspectives – philosophical, sociological, cultural or purely literary. Dr. Sreenivasan has with the ease and dexterity of an experienced critic; having a discerning eye traversed the works of Asan, highlighting those aspects which deserve to be so highlighted and at the same time tracing the significant stages and incidents of the life of the poet. The author has also taken great pains to translate into English numerous poems of Asan in order to help the non-Malayalee reader imbibe and appreciate the

spirit and charm of the original works.

Let me here pause a minute to briefly comment on the translations. Every language has its genius which accounts for its individuality and distinctiveness. The poetic flavour, the literary cadences, the metaphors and images, the subtleties and nuances really refuse to submit to the specifications of an alien language. And this is the case of poetry in particular as it is the essence of culture, inextricably intertwined with human emotions, dreams and aspirations. That is why Robert Frost has said that “poetry is that which is lost in translation”. And Eliot says (*On Poetry and Poets*): “We lose much less in reading a novel in translation than in reading a poem” When we translate poems we translate only the ideas; the charm, music, rhythm and sound of the language are entirely lost. Further, every language has untranslatable elements. Asan’s style is inimitable, it is carefully and adroitly chiselled. That being so, Dr. Sreenivasan deserves to be heartily felicitated for the translations he has made; true, nobody can claim perfection; but he has attained a high level of success.

With what little familiarity I have with the works of Asan, I can say that the labour of reading study and research Dr. Sreenivasan has put in to bring out this treatise is phenomenal. I am in fact struck by his meticulous care in dealing with the diverse topics under consideration; but paucity of space and my own limitations, of which I am painfully conscious, deter me from venturing to do so.

As has been mentioned in the opening paragraph of this review, the author considers this volume a brief study of the life and works of Asan meant mainly for non-Malayalee readers. But I would say that Malayalee readers who can read English will find this a monumental study of Asan and his works.

The worth of this book is greatly enhanced by the scholarly introduction written by Dr. Amalendu Bose, Professor Emeritus, and formerly Head of the Department of English, Calcutta University. The fact that Dr. Sreenivasan could easily earn the unstinted admiration

and munificent blessings of Dr. Bose would indeed go a long way to prove the value of his book. Dr. Bose's comparative study of Tagore's verse tale about Vasavadatha included in *Katha o Kahani* (In Bengali) and Asan's *Karuna* is particularly interesting.

I feel that I will be fully justified in respectfully echoing what Dr. Bose has said towards the close of his introduction: "Dr. K. Sreenivasan's highly sensitive study of the distinguished Malayalam poet, I am sure, will encourage scholars and critics from Kerala as well as from other areas of India (and perhaps some scholars from beyond India too) to translate Asan into English and the various Indian languages so that in course of time, we shall acquire the right perspective both wide and deep, against which to evaluate the works of Mahakavi Kumaran Asan".

The get-up and printing are good.

And will not a Malayalam translation of this book be a substantial addition to Malayalam literature as well?

Akademi News and Literary Notes

Fellowship to Dr. R. E. Asher

The Kerala Sahitya Akademi has honoured Dr. R. E. Asher by conferring a Fellowship on him. Dr. Asher, the famous linguist and scholar is now working as Professor of Linguistics in the Edinburgh University. He has done signal service in introducing Malayalam language and literature among the English-speaking people. It is for the first time that the Kerala Sahitya Akademi is conferring its fellowship on a non-Malayalee. The function was held at the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Hall on 2nd January 1983.

A k a d e m i P r e s i d e n t Shri. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai presided; Dr. Sukumar Azhicode introduced the distinguished guest to the audience. Professor G. Kumara Pillai read the citation. Dr. Asher in his reply thanked the Akademi for conferring the honour on him. **A k a d e m i S e c r e t a r y** Shri Pavanan proposed a vote of thanks. (Dr. Asher's speech and

the citation will be published in the next issue)

Birth Centenary of Changaram Kotha Krishnan Kartha

The birth centenary of the late Changaramkotha Krishnan Kartha, a renowned poet, was celebrated at Parappookara near Trichur on January 1st and 2nd 1983, under the joint auspices of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi and the Centenary Celebration Committee. Dr. James Pazhayattil, Bishop of Irinjalakuda, inaugurated the celebrations. Shri C. Achutha Menon presided over the function. Akademi Secretary Shri. Pavanan, Shri. Lonappan Nampadan M. L. A, Municipal Chairman Shri. V. K. Raman, B. D. C. Chairman Shri C. T. Sebastian, Shri C. R. Kesavan Vaidyar and others spoke on the occasion. A symposium, poets' meet and cultural programmes were also held in connection with the celebration.

**V. K. Gokak and
B. K. Bhattacharya**

Professor V. K. Gokak has

been elected President of the (Central) Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, for five years. Professor Gokak, currently Vice-Chancellor of Shri Satyasai Institute of Higher Learning, is an eminent writer in English and Kannada and a recipient of the Padmashri title and Sahitya Akademi Awards.

The famous Assamiya novelist and Jnanpith Award winner Dr. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya was elected Vice-President of the Akademi.

Sahitya Akademi Award For V. K. N. and Dr. P. K.

Twentytwo writers of various Indian languages including Shri V. K. N. (Malayalam short story) and Dr. P. K. Narayana Pillai (Sanskrit poetry) from Kerala received the (Central) Sahitya Akademi Awards for the year 1982 at a meeting held in New Delhi on Feb. 22, 1983.

Cultural Centre

It has been decided to institute a cultural centre at Calicut as a memorial to the late S. K. Pottekkatt, Jnanpith award winning Malayalam novelist. The Project Committee has estimated an amount of Rs. 15 lakhs for the construction of the memorial.

Pulimana Memorial Committee

The Pulimana Memorial Committee was formed at Kallada in Quilon District to honour the memory of the late Pulimana Parameswaran Pillai, Malayalam play-wright and story writer. Professor O. N. V. Kurup, Professor G. Sankara Pillai, Shri Kavalam Narayana Panikker and Shri P. K. Venukuttan Nair were elected as members of the Advisory Board. Shri D. Vinayachandran and Shri Chavara K. S. Pillai are the President and Secretary of the Committee respectively.

Puthezhan Award

Shri Sidhinathananda Swami has won the Puthezhan Award for 1982 for his collection of essays *Kodiyettu* and Shri Puzhankara Balanarayanan has won the same Award for 1983 for his book *Chalanam Thapas Chalanam*. The awards will be distributed on October 2.

NBS at Kalpetta

The 11th branch of the National Book Stall was inaugurated at Kalpetta in Wynad District by Smt. M. Kamalam, Minister for Co-operation, Govt of Kerala.

Kavalam Narayana Panikker

Shri Kavalam Narayana Panikker has been nominated

to the Executive Committee of the (Central) Sangeetha Nataka Akademi.

T. K. G. Nair

Shri T. K. G. Nair was elected as the President of the Kerala Working Journalists' Union for a third time. He is also the Chairman of the Kerala Press Akademi.

Edasseri Memorial

The Kerala Sahitya Akademi has decided to give Rs.2500/- as financial assistance towards the endowment instituted by the Edasseri Memorial Committee in the name of the late Edasseri Govindan Nair, the well-known Malayalam poet. The construction of the Edasseri Memorial Building was inaugurated on Januar 2.

B. N. Pande

Shri B. N. Pande M. P. was elected National President of the Indian Writers' Union. The Writers' Union has decided to publish a book on the contribution of Indian writers to the freedom struggle. Shri N. V. Krishna Warriar has been nominated as the director of the Editorial Board.

Akademi at Kavarathi.

The Lakshadweep (Laccadives) Administration has decided to institute an Akademi

of Literature and Fine Arts at Kavarathi. It is for the first time that an Akademi of this type is being formed in a Union Territory.

History of Malayalam Literature

The Publication Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has brought out a book entitled *History of Malayalam Literature*.

Bengali Akademi in Bihar

The Bihar Government has decided to institute an Akademi for the development of Bengali language and literature in Bihar State.

Shanker's Painting Competition

Shanker's International Painting Competition was held at Delhi in March under the auspices of the Children's Book Trust. About 16000 children participated in the Competition.

Kannadasan Memorial

The Tamil Nadu Government has decided to construct a memorial to the late Kannadasan the poet laureate of Tamil Nadu at Karakkudi, his birth place.

Classical Arts Museum

A Classical Arts Museum under the State Archaeological Department was inaugurated at Kottarakkara during the second

week of March by Shri P. Ramachandran, Governor of Kerala.

Financial Assistance for Book Publishing

The Government of Kerala has given financial assistance to 64 authors in Malayalam to publish their books during the financial year 1982-83.

Asan Prize

The International Award in the name of Mahakavi Kumaran Asan for 1982 was given to the Cuban poet Nicholas Guillen in January, 1983 at a meeting held at Havana. Cuban President Mr. Fidel Castro was present on the occasion. Shri R. Prakasam and Dr. K. Ayyappa Panikker represented the Asan Memorial Association in the meeting. Nobel prize winner Mr. Gabriel Garcia Marcuez, Cuban Cultural Minister Armenta Heart and Indian Ambassador Vinod Khanna also participated in the function.

Kerala History Association

The office-bearers of the Kerala History Association were elected at a general body meeting of the Association held at Cochin in January. They are Professor P. S. Velayudhan (President) Professor

A. V. Paulson (Secretary) and Shri T. K. C. Vaduthala (Treasurer)

Indian History Congress

Mrs. Romila Thapper (President) Professor M.G.S. Narayanan (Secretary) and Professor M. P. Sreedharan (Treasurer) were elected office bearers of the Indian History Congress at a meeting held at Kurukshetra in January.

P. Bhaskaran

Poet and film director Shri P. Bhaskaran has been appointed as the Executive Producer of Documentary Films under the Kerala Film Development Corporation, for three years.

Pottekatt's Short Stories

Lokabharathi Prakasan of Allahabad has published a collection of short stories by S. K. Pottekatt in Hindi. The stories were translated from Malayalam by Professors P. Krishnan and Balakrishnan.

A Book on Srinarayana Guru

The Publication Division of the Govt. of India has brought out a book on Srinarayana Guru written by Shri Murkoth Kunhappa.

Odakkuzhal Award

The Odakkuzhal award for 1982 was presented to the well known poetess Sugathakumari for her collection of poems *Ambalamanikal* (Temple Bells). The award was instituted by Mahakavi G. Sankara Kurup.

M. K. Sanoo

Professor M. K. Sanoo and Professor Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai were elected as President and General Secretary respectively of Purogamana Kala Sahitya Samgham, an association for progressive arts and literature.

Obituary

Dr. A. V. Varghese, Kerala University Vice-Chancellor, passed away on January 18, 1983 at Trivandrum. His published works include *A Study of Shakespeare's Early and Late Comedies*, *Sweet Silent Thought* etc.

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Our Contributors

[Biographical notes on some of the contributors have appeared in previous issues and in such cases details are not repeated.]

N. K. Seshan (b. 1927): Teacher, writer and political activist, he was for sometime a member of the State cabinet. He publishes essays and reviews both in English and Malayalam. His book *The Poetic Trinity of Kerala* was recently published by the Government of Kerala. Currently he heads the Department of English in St. Thomas College, Trichur, and is Dean of Languages, University of Calicut.



Savithri Shanker (b. 1934) who has settled down in Canada, formerly taught English at Government College for Women, Trivandrum. She occasionally publishes essays stories and poems in English and Malayalam.



Dr. K. K. N. Kurup (b. 1939) w h o teaches history in the University of Calicut is the author of many research papers in English and Malayalam. His best - known English work is his study of the folk art form, *Theyyam*.



K. Saraswathi Amma (1919-1975): One of our more important women writers, she published about a dozen works of fiction and made a mark as a short story writer. She was a feminist and viewed life from an unsentimental point of view. Unfortunately her works are now out of print.

S. Santhakumary who has translated the story is Professor and Head of the Department of English, Government College for Women, Trivandrum.



Sethu: A. Sethumadhavan (b. 1942) who writes under the name Sethu is a major figure among our younger writers of fiction and he is mainly concerned with the inscrutable deeper levels of existence. He has won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award both for the short story and the novel. He is an officer in the State Bank of Travancore and at present works at Kottayam.

K. T. Rajagopalan who has translated the story is an officer in the senior management cadre of the State Bank of Travancore and is currently stationed at Trivandrum. He occasionally writes in English.



A. P. B. Nayar: A. P. Balakrishnan Nayar (b. 1913) who joined the F. C. S. in 1939 retired as Controller General of Defence Accounts in 1971. A devoted student of literature, he writes very rarely. The essay on Changampuzha which he himself has translated for us is a fascinating piece of work. His book *Randu Prema Gayakar* (Two Minstrels of Love), a comparative study of Changampuzha and the German poet Heine, was published in 1978.

M. Govindan (b. 1919) Outstanding intellectual and versatile writer, M. Govindan, who lives in Madras, is one of the leaders of the modernist movement in Malayalam poetry.

Madhavan Ayyappath who has translated most of the poems is himself a well-known Malayalam poet of the modernist school. He also lives in Madras.



Kunjunni (b. 1927) who recently retired as a high school teacher is a class by himself among contemporary Malayalam poets. His typical poems which are invariably short, combine brilliant wit and deep wisdom though sometimes they are just nonsense verse.

R. Viswanathan who has translated the poems teaches English at the University of Calicut. He is himself a Malayalam poet.

Dr. George Irumbayam (b. 1938) who is Professor of Malayalam at the Government College, Calicut, is a scholarly critic.



M. K. Sanoo (b. 1927) who retired recently as Professor of Malayalam from Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, is a well-known literary critic and biographer in our language. Besides a few volumes of critical essays, he has published definitive biographies of the social revolutionaries Sree Narayana Guru and K. Ayyappan.

I. Isthak: (b. 1946) who teaches Malayalam in St. Berchmans' College Changanacherry, is a young intellectual who writes occasionally in English and in Malayalam.



M. Prabha (b. 1913) A lawyer by profession and an activist of the rationalist movement, M. Prabha started his career as a freedom fighter. He did meritorious work as Chairman of the State Official Language (Legislative) Commission. A voracious reader and a champion of every liberal cause, he has written a lot in Malayalam journals on various subjects. His best-known work is a book on constitutions. A great lover of poetry, he has translated many Malayalam poems into English.

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Malayalam Literary Survey

Vol. VII

No. II

April - June 1983

Editorial

The Development of the Malayalam Novel

In our last issue we published the first half of a symposium on the development of the Malayalam novel. The second half of the symposium is included in this issue. The survey in the last issue dealt with the precursors, the two great pioneers, O. Chandu Menon and C. V. Raman Pillai and the writers of the interregnum between the first and the second creative periods. It traced the story from 1877 to 1940.

The three essays in this issue sketch the development of the Malayalam novel from 1940 to the present day. The survey highlights some thirty authors and more than sixty of their interesting works, indicating the steady development of the Malayalam novel during the past four decades. It also reveals the rich variety in the creative response of four generations of our sensitive literary artist to the experience of life.

The fourth decade of this century saw the beginning of a brilliant period in the history of our short story. It was the short story writers of this period who ushered the second creative period in the history of our novel in the next decade. It started with P. Kesava Dev's *From the Gutter* (1942) and Vaikom Muhammed Basheer's *Childhood Sweetheart* (1944). Both were moving human documents cast in the form of novelettes. Other excellent short novels followed - S. K. Pottekkatt's *Poison Damsel* (1948), Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Two Measures of Paddy* (1949) and *Chemmeen* (1956) and Basheer's *My Grandpa Had an Elephant* (1951). Gradually our novelists turned to the longer novel and in this the trend was set by P. C. Kuttikrishnan's *Ummachu* (1955) and *Belles and Beaux* (1958). Long novels by Dev, Thakazhi and Pottekkatt followed and *The Story of a Village* won for Pottekkatt the Jnanpith Award for 1980.

Three novelists of the next generation - Parappurath, Kovilan and Nanthanar - began to write while they were serving in the defence forces, though all their novels do not deal with military

life. Works like *Wives* by Kovilan and *The House Unfinished* by Parappurath show a subtle understanding of the human heart under the pressure of tragic circumstance. Ponjikkara Raphy's exploration of the psychology of childhood in *The Angel* and Malayattoor Ramakrishnan's search after identity in *The Roots* are memorable.

M. T. Vasudevan Nair's portrayal of the social rebel, Rajalekshmi's revelation of the depths of the feminine heart, V.K. N's sharp social and political satire and Vilasini's depiction of the intricacies of human relationships gave new meanings to the Malayalam novel. Vilasini's *Inheritors* (1980) is one of the longest novels in the world. Later writers like Kakkanadan, M. Mukundan, Anand, O. V. Vijayan, Sethu, Kunjabdulla and M. Sukumaran have brought a new sensibility to bear upon their delineation of life. The impact of movements like existentialism and surrealism, the influence of masters like Kafka, the personal experience of political disillusionment – these are some of the factors that prompted these writers to experiment with new themes and patterns and new dimensions of style.

The Genesis Of A Novel

Vilasini

Unlike other Malayalam novelists I have written almost exclusively about Malayalees living abroad, particularly in Singapore and Malaysia. This is because I spent most of my adult life in South East Asia, and the Malayalees who have settled there are the people I know best.

Every immigrant community has its quota of problems, and the overseas Malayalees are no exception. Initially, I tried to focus my attention on these problems, mainly on those of adjustment and assimilation faced by our people in the countries of their adoption. Continued scrutiny of their social, moral, ethical, psychological and spiritual predicaments led me to basic existential questions such as death and destiny, the meaning of life, man's *raison d'être* and his role in the universe. And soon I realised that in writing about others, I was actually writing about myself - my passions, my

dreams, my hopes, my aspirations, my joys, my sorrows and my disappointments. Perhaps it couldn't have been otherwise.

To me, a novel is basically a tale about human relationships. These relationships are shaped by the inner lives of the people involved. I therefore concentrated less on external events and more on the reactions they set off in the minds of men and women caught in the web of life. I tried to draw verbal maps of human emotions extending from the specific feeling of a moment to the powerful urges behind vital decisions and actions. In this manner, I hoped to combine man and his world in an inward, yet aesthetically objective form and meet the challenge of reconciling inner life and outer life with each other and with the demands of art.

The apex of my efforts so far is to be found in my latest novel, *Avakasikal*, published in

1980. (*Avakasikal* means 'inheritors' or 'claimants'.) The book, which took ten years to complete, runs into nearly four thousand pages (3,958 pages to be exact), and is one of the longest novels in the world. I am not so naive as to confuse length with excellence; I only wish to indicate what a sustained effort it has involved.

I had always been fascinated by the long, great European novels that vividly portray life and delve into its depths, and it had been my secret ambition to write a 'big' novel one day. I made my first attempt some thirty years ago, and failed miserably. I was too young and inexperienced, and of course, lacked patience. With two or three published novels behind me, the urge came back in the late sixties. The story of *Avakasikal* begins there.

It is not possible to say with any precision when the idea of writing *Avakasikal* germinated. My head is for ever full of plots for unwritten novels. They come and go. Occasionally one remains behind or returns again and again and becomes the seed for a novel that may ultimately be written. This is what happened in the case of *Avakasikal* too. A plot of a sort had already been formed in my mind before

I realised that the nucleus of a novel was taking shape. At the centre of that nucleus were a few men and women whom I had known at different periods in my life: an old school-mate who once confessed to me that he couldn't father a child because he had no sperms in his semen, a woman whose husband had deserted her a day after their marriage, an American hippie with whom I had made friends in San Francisco, a beautiful young girl who went from Singapore to Madras in search of a film career and ruined her life, a university teacher who used to camp in Malaysian jungles to look for biological specimens, and so on. As I took a closer look at them and the mutual bonds they had already established before emerging out of my subconscious mind, I realised, with a shock, that it would take a book of extraordinary length to give them life. The 'big' book that I had always wanted to write was staring at me!

I was excited, but unnerved as well. For a long time I could not make up my mind whether to proceed or not, but with the encouragement and reassurances of close friends, I finally decided to take the plunge. One morning I sat down and wrote an outline of the plot and a few random

notes on the characters. Fuller preparations followed in the next few days. I filled a thick notebook with details of locales, events and dates and background information. I drew a street map of Tanjong Besar, an imaginary town in Malaysia where the main action was to take place. I even readied index cards on the various characters. It is not my habit to make such extensive preparations when writing novels, but since *Avakasikal* was likely to run into two or three thousand pages, I thought it prudent to do so in order to avoid errors caused by lapses of memory.

Then, at long last, on New Year Day 1970, I sat down to write the book I had been dreaming about for so long, and quickly filled six or seven pages. *Avakasikal* had got off to a flying start. From then onwards, I devoted an hour or so every morning to the new work. As days went by, however, an uneasy feeling began to grow within me that the book was not shaping up the way I had planned—in fact, it was not shaping up in any manner at all. I stopped writing after having covered 146 pages in a month and a half, and shoved the whole thing into my cupboard, there to gather dust. Strange to

say, I had no feeling of regret or disappointment. If anything at all, I was feeling a little relieved!

Now that I knew for certain that I was not destined to write the 'big' book that I had always wanted to write, I turned my attention to a smaller work *Chundeli* (The Mouse) that I had abandoned half-way. But the 'big one' wouldn't leave me so easily. The moment I had finished *Chundeli* and sent it to the press, *Avakasikal* forced its way back into my mind and occupied it so fully that it soon became an obsession. The only way to get rid of it was to make a second attempt at writing. So I went over all the material once again, turned the theme over and over in my mind and took apart the earlier fragment sentence by sentence to find out where I had gone wrong. Finally, after a great deal of thought, I arrived at a new angle of approach that I thought would be adequate to deal with the subject matter. In other words, I recast the whole novel in my mind. And then, when I was sure there was nothing more I could do in the way of preparations, I rolled up my sleeves and sat down to write. It was May Day, 1971. This time I did not falter. Page by page the

novel grew until, four and a half years and 7,275 pages later, I wrote the word 'finis' on October four 1975. As I sat looking at the stack of notebooks that stood a foot and a half high, I couldn't hold back my tears.

I have never found writing an easy job. Each novel has been a struggle. In the case of *Avakasikal*, the difficulties were manifold. Its length called for steady and uninterrupted work. But as a journalist obliged to keep odd working hours and travel very often, I could hardly be regular at my writing. There were several occasions when I was unable to put pen and paper together for weeks and months. Also, unlike in the case of my previous books, doubts began to gnaw at my heart—doubts if I could complete the work at all, doubts whether anyone would undertake to publish such a huge book, doubts whether the published work would be bought and read by anybody. Sneering comments from sceptical friends did not make matters any easier. Physical illness, including a severe case of 'tennis elbow' which made writing quite painful, took its toll.

These were, however, minor irritations compared to the problems of composition that I

had to face and the recurring 'writer's block' that I had to surmount. I was aware that the task I had set myself was not an easy one, but I hadn't realised that it would be so immense and complex. My ambition was to give a concrete form to reality that remains in flux even while one seeks to perceive it. To this end, I tried to depict conflicting voices of varied significance and present in-depth portrayals of the seething minds of men and women caught in emotional and existential crises. The strategy I chose was to shift the point of view of narration from one character to another, thus offering a series of partial but intimate views of events which, taken together, would give a coherent and comprehensive picture. This meant that I had to step into the shoes of more than a dozen men and women and feel their feelings and think their thoughts—a process which was as exacting as it was exciting. Thus, in turn, I became an old sick man who had amassed a large fortune by questionable means and was trying to ease his conscience through philanthropy, a beautiful young film starlet caught in one unhappy love affair after another, a company executive who ruined himself through

infatuation for another man's mistress, an American hippie who came to the East in search of peace and faith, a scheming, spineless miser who was a cross between a Shylock and an Iago, a middle-aged recluse caught between his principles and his predilections, and half a dozen other people as well. This was a crippling job; it left me totally exhausted, mentally, emotionally and intellectually. However, I didn't mind it; it was a great experience.

When I finish writing a book, my usual practice is to get a couple of close friends to read it and obtain their frank comments. In the absence of professional editing of manuscripts, which is unheard of in our country, I have found this to be extremely useful. In the case of *Avakasikal*, I could not follow this practice for several reasons, not the least among them being my reluctance to impose such a bulky manuscript on friends who wouldn't say 'no' I now realise that I should have done so. In that case, I could have surely avoided a few errors and contradictions that have survived my own editing and have since been pointed out by alert readers.

A careful reading of the completed draft made one thing

clear to me—an extensive re-working and total rewriting would be necessary to get the book into proper shape. Another thing was also equally clear—I couldn't hope to do it satisfactorily unless I did it on a full-time basis. Which meant that I would have to give up my job as a journalist. After careful thought, I did so and returned to India in April 1977, and started work on the final draft after three or four months. In less than two years – by March 1979—I had the final draft ready. In the process of re-writing, the original lay-out of volumes, parts and chapters was completely overhauled. Originally the book was divided into seven volumes; in the new version it was divided into fifteen parts, each part dealing with the events of a single day. Incidentally, *Avakasikal*, despite its length, does not cover the lives of several generations as is the case with the great saga type of novels; its period of action is less than five months. The book deals with the attempts, covert as well as overt, made by the relatives of an old, ailing and childless millionaire to grab his fortune. Woven into this main theme is the tale of a romance between a middle-aged recluse and a young, disillusioned film

actress. The two complement each other.

What now remained was to get it published. Although some problems were encountered, they were solved without great difficulty and the book came out of the press in four volumes in February, 1980. My fears about reader-response proved

totally unfounded. More than two-thirds of the copies were sold before publication and the balance did not remain on the shelves too long after publication. And, the virtual rain of letters that I continue to receive from readers can mean only one thing: that, despite sneering and sniping from expected quarters, my effort has not been in vain.

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A Tribute to Dr. R. E. Asher

The Kerala Sahitya Akademi deems it a great privilege to confer a Fellowship on Dr. R. E. Asher as a token of its love, respect and admiration for him as a great lover of the Malayalam language and its literature.

Dr. Asher belongs to the illustrious line of Western scholars who, from the days of Arnose Padre of hallowed memory, have made a signal contribution to Malayalam studies in manifold ways.

Born in Nottinghamshire, England, in 1926 and educated at the University of London, Dr. Ronald E. Asher, currently Professor of Linguistics in the University of Edinburgh, is a scholar of high academic distinction. Well-known both as a perceptive linguist and as a scholarly critic of literature, he has specialised in South Asian Studies and his favourite areas in this field have been Tamil and Malayalam studies.

Dr. Asher has devoted more than two decades to the intensive study and interpretation of Malayalam. He has done linguistic field work on Malayalam

in Kerala, published numerous essays on our language and literature, translated some of our significant literary works into English and established warm personal relationships with many of our writers, especially Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and Vaikom Muhammad Basheer.

His important publications include general essays like 'Malayalam Literature' contributed to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1967) and 'Malayalam' contributed to *Cassell's Encyclopaedia of World Literature* (1973); special studies like 'Three Novelists of Kerala' (1970) and 'Vaikom Muhammad Basheer' (1973) and 'The Social and Political Content of the Novels of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai' (1974) included in prestigious anthologies of Indian and South Asian Studies; and articles on our literary genres like 'Thullal' and 'Kathakali' and on some twenty of our writers from Ezhuthachan to Changampuzha, from Chandu Menon to M. T. Vasudevan Nair, written for the *Penguin Companion to Literature*

(1969) and the *Dictionary of Oriental Literature* (1975). But his greatest achievement is to be found in the sensitive translation of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Thottiyute Makan* entitled *Scavenger's Son* and of three short novels of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer under the title *Me Grandad 'ad an Elephant: Three Stories of Muslim Life in South India*.

A Fellowship is the highest honour in the Akademi's power to give, an honour which can be held only by a select few, i.e., not more than ten at a time and it

is being conferred on a non-Malayali for the first time.

The Kerala Sahitya Akademi has great pleasure in hereby investing Dr. Ronald E. Asher with a Fellowship in recognition of the meritorious services rendered by him to the Malayalam-speaking people by his luminous interpretation of our culture, language and literature to the West, in particular to the English-speaking world.

This is the citation in connection with the conferment of the Akademi Fellowship on Dr. Asher on 22nd January, 1983.

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In Praise of Malayalam

Dr. R. E. Asher

I remember some two years ago receiving a letter from Mr. Vaikom Muhammad Basheer saying that that day was the happiest day in his life, in that he had at one and the same time had the news of the birth of his grandson and received the copies of the British edition of the translation of three of his books in a very attractive publication by the Edinburgh University Press. Now I am myself not in a position to become a grandfather, since the elder of my two sons is only sixteen. This is nevertheless a particularly happy day in my life. In fact 1983 has had a very auspicious beginning for me. I was able yesterday to visit the Sultan of Beypore and had the pleasure of enjoying along with a number of friends not only his company but also an excellent *biryani*. As always, I felt uplifted by the warmth of his presence.

Now, on the second day of the year, I find myself receiving this very special award. Part of the particular pleasure stems

from the fact that this honour comes my way when my good friend, Sri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, is President of the Sahitya Akademi, a happy reminder of the fact that I have known him for almost two decades, that is to say for most of the time that I have been seriously interested in the culture of Kerala.

I am conscious of my unworthiness of being grouped with that select body of writers in Malayalam who are Fellows, for I lack their creative gifts. I have no claim to a similar distinction. However, what I have done is the best I can, using my modest talents to make better known outside India a literature that, it was clear to me, was abundantly deserving of being better known.

The events of the last two days take me back to my first stay in Kerala—the first half of 1964, when I was spending a year's leave from the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London doing linguistic research on the

Dravidian languages. Believing, as I do, that theoretical linguistics has shown far too little interest in the most creative use of language and that no study of language is complete without a study of its literature and particularly, if I may say so, of the contemporary literature, I set about learning something of the literary scene, cherishing the hope that it might also be possible to meet some of the better known writers. By a happy coincidence, a friend who was helping me lived in the same street as G. Sankara Kurup. So a good start was made, for he agreed I could call on him. And this is something I shall always be grateful for: the willingness of writers here to give time to discuss their work and their craft with a humble foreigner.

Naturally I also wanted to meet prose writers. Having read *Chemmeen* in Narayana Menon's excellent translation, I was aware that here was a writer of genius. I therefore wrote asking for an interview. There was a reply by return of post and I made my way to the village of Thakazhi by a succession of buses, to my surprise arriving there without getting lost even once. This really began my education in the ways of Kerala.

After seeing something of the village and of Kerala agriculture, I found myself in a car with three great men—Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai, Joseph Mundassery and, of course, Thakazhi. In Kottayam I remember being introduced to D. C. Kizhakemuri, Karoor, Ponkunnam Varkey and S. K. Pottekatt. It was altogether a very intoxicating experience, even apart from the fact that on the trip I had my first taste of toddy.

Basheer was perhaps a little more elusive, but contact was eventually established. I wrote to him that, though, unlike Suhasini, I could not claim to have read *all* his books, I had read and greatly enjoyed *Pattumma's Goat* (in which he tells of her request for his autograph) and would like to know more of his work. So began a most valued friendship.

This leads me to the main point of what I want to say: if I have been able to make a contribution to the dissemination of knowledge of a great literature, it is largely because of my good fortune in the help I have received from a number of sources. Firstly, I could not have developed such a keen interest if it had not been for the universal kindness of those who belong to the world of

letters in Kerala. The two writers I have been most involved with have always been ready to help me to solve my problems, whether I have asked questions in writing, or on visits to see them. As far as I know, there is only one mistake in the translation of Basheer's novels published in Edinburgh. This is where I have Kunjupattumma falling into a "stream" instead of into a "dry ditch". This error is there because I mislaid a letter from the author commenting on the text of a lecture I had given about him in America, and so forgot a necessary correction he had drawn my attention to. Of the numerous questions I troubled Thakazhi with, the one that always sticks in my mind is the one relating to the expression *Kaalu vallathumundo*? used on the occasion of the birth of Chudalamuttu's son.

Secondly, I have received constant help from Malayali friends in my attempts to improve my knowledge of their language, notably C. K. Nalina Babu and Unnikrishnan Nair in Ernakulam and Dr. P. Somasekharan Nair in Trivandrum. Professor K. M. Prabhakara Variar has acted as my guide to things

Malayalam in many places (including Annamalai-nagar, Madras and Edinburgh). Writers and scholars such as Dr. K. M. George have always been ready to comment constructively on what I have written.

Thirdly, I must make special mention of my co-translator of the Basheer stories, Miss Achamma Coilparampil when we worked on the translation and Mrs A. C. Chandrasekaran when the book came out. The translation is very much a joint effort, especially as regards *Me Grandad 'ad an Elephant* (after reading today's papers, I almost said *Me grandad 'ad a chicken!*), which I would have found almost impossible to translate on my own, given the complexity of the frequently occurring dialect forms. Happily I shall be seeing her and her family again, for the first time for several years, when I go south to Trivandrum from here.

I find some pleasure in the fact that one of the first things I published on Malayalam literature was a short note in the NBS Bulletin with the title *Malayalam Literature in the Forefront* for it is this fact that developed my interest. Malayalam literature, it seems to me, is very much like a number of

the national literatures of India in having a corpus of really great classical literature. With the literary renaissance that spread through the whole of India in the nineteenth century, Malayalam began to show some signs of being one of a small group that would outstrip the rest. Then came the extraordinary flourishing of the last three-quarters of the twentieth century. The richness of the contribution made by writers born in the first or second decade of the century must be unparalleled anywhere. (Here I should add in parentheses a note of my sadness of reading in a newspaper cutting that reached me late last year of the death of one of the great ones among these, S. K. Pottekatt.) The remarkable thing is that the standard was maintained by the next generation—which I myself think of as that of M. T. Vasudevan Nair, he being the one whose work I know best and much admire. I remember well the occasion when Basheer introduced him to me in Calicut and said that he (M. T.) wrote books about Nair families, any one of which was longer than all of his (Basheer's) writings put together! Then, equally remark-

ably, the standard is being maintained by the youngest generation, writers who will be active beyond the end of the century, and I feel happy with a prediction I made in 1968: "Contemporary Malayalam will continue to hold its high place in the literature of India."

It is this point that makes this award such a pleasurable one for me. Because the writers of Malayalam have not been content to glory in the past but have wanted to renew these glories in the present and to produce a really dynamic and living literature, the Kerala Sahitya Akademi really means something. It is therefore especially gratifying to me to be permitted to enjoy the honorary status of belonging to this distinguished company, and I thank you.

If I have done some modest service to Malayalam language and literature, it is a very small and inadequate recompense for the good that has come into my life from the many friendships I have formed with Malayalis, both men of genius and ordinary people like myself; and for the enrichment of my life through being involved in a great literature.

KalyanaSaugandhikam

Dr. V. S. Sharma

Kalakkath Kunchan Nampiar, one of the most popular poets of Kerala, was born early in the eighteenth century at Killikurissimangalam in the Palghat District in central Kerala in an aristocratic family with a good cultural heritage. His mother belonged to the Kalakkath Nampiar family very close to the Siva temple at Killikurissimangalam. Some scholars say that Kunchan's father was a Namboodiri Brahmin who belonged to a village near Kottayam while some others believe that he was a Nampiar himself. Nampiar is the name of a subcaste which traditionally depended for its livelihood on temple arts like *kuthu* and *kutiyattam*. The specific duty of Nampiar was to play the *mizhav* (a musical instrument) in the performance of these arts by Chakyars in the temples.

After his childhood days, Kunchan was brought south to Kutamalur near Kottayam where the original house of the Raja of Chempakasserri or

Ambalapuzha was situated. Kunchan seems to have been encouraged by the then Chempakasserri Raja, Deva Narayana, who brought the poet in his youth to Ambalapuzha and patronised him in all respects. There he came into contact with great scholars and distinguished personalities like Nandikatt Unni Ravi Kurup, Dronampally Acharyar, Mathur Panicker etc., who were close to the Raja. Kunchan could flourish in their shade. He progressed in the academic field and proved his poetical and artistic merit before them. Ambalapuzha was famed for its cultural wealth and there Kunchan could develop his artistic taste. Classical art-forms like *kuthu*, *kathakali* etc. and folk arts like *patayani* gave a sufficient background for his creative venture. In those days, the classical arts were performed exclusively for the refined and sophisticated section of society while the folk arts were not permitted to enter the temple theatre. Thakazhi, a village near

Ambalapuzha was famed for *patayani*, a form of folk art. Kunchan assimilated both the classical or *margi* tradition and the folk or *desi* tradition. He felt the need of the time to create a new form of art enjoyable to both the upper and lower strata of society. As a result he took the crude folk art form *thullal* and made it refined in its performance as well as in its poetry.

In Ambalapuzha, Kunchan lived under the protection of Raja Deva Narayana and other distinguished artistocrats, till the dynasty was defeated by Raja Marthanda Varma of Travancore in 1746 A. D. Encouraged by Marthanda Varma, Kunchan shifted to Trivandrum, the capital city of the then Travancore state and lived there for more than a decade. In his old age he returned to Ambalapuzha, stayed there for about ten years and died of rabies, it is believed.

Kunchan lived for about sixty to seventy years and the major portion his later life was spent at Ambalapuzha and Trivandrum. Naturally he composed his poetical works at these places. There is little clear evidence for any biographical facts about him except legends and certain remarks made by literary histo-

rians. There are many unsolved problems regarding the life and work of the poet; some of them are pointed out below:-

1. Was the poet's father a Namboodiri, a Nampiar or a Chakyar?
2. What was the poet's name- Rama, Krishna or Kunchan?
3. Was Kunchan Nampiar the same as the Sanskrit poet Ramapanivada?
4. What are the works of Kunchan Nampiar? How many *thullal* poems were written by him? In this article these questions are not being discussed in detail. The only work to be dealt with here is his *KalyanaSaugandhikam* which is a masterpiece in many respects.

Kunchan Nampiar was staying in the royal capital at Ambalapuzha, famous for its temple dedicated to ShriKrishna. *Kuthu* was regularly performed there during festival seasons. One day while playing *mizhav* Kunchan happened to sleep and the Chakyar who was performing *kuthu* made fun of Kunchan publicly for his dereliction of duty during the performance. Kunchan immediately left the stage. On the same day he planned to introduce his own art-form and not to assist in the performance

of the Chakyar any more. The authenticity of this incident has not been established.

The next day at the time of *kuthu*, Kunchan appeared at another part of the temple premises with his own newly invented art-form, *thullal*. All the people went to him, leaving the Chakyar's *kuthu*. Kunchan had composed a poem for presentation and he had formulated a new type of dance form to accompany it. It was the refined form of *thullal* which he had already seen in *kolam thullal*, *patayani* etc. *Ottan*, *parayan* and *sithankan* are the three forms of *thullal*, which existed earlier in crude forms. They were modified and at the first instance Kunchan presented a *sithankan thullal*. It is firmly believed that the first *thullal* was *KalyanaSaugandhikam* based on the puranic characters Bhima and Hanuman. The story reads as follows.

Panchali, the spouse of the Pandavas, one day requested Bhima to get her some of the fragrant *kalyanasaugandhika* flowers. Bhima started to the northern forest to collect the flowers. On the way lay an old monkey obstructing his path. Bhima wanted to get rid of the monkey from the road and

asked him to move away. The monkey refused to move. They quarrelled and fought fiercely. At last Bhima was defeated and he realised the fact that his opponent was not a mere old monkey, but his own elder brother, Hanuman. Bhima apologised and he was given way to go into the forest. Searching and searching, Bhima reached the garden-lake of Kubera, in the valley of the Gandhamadana mountain where the *saugandhika* was in full bloom. The Pandava jumped into the lake to get the flowers. Then he was attacked by Krodhavaśa, the demon guard whom Kubera had appointed to keep his garden lake. Again Bhima had to fight with him and at last he won the battle. He plucked enough flowers and returned. On the way he paid homage to Hanuman and came back to the abode of Panchali. The word 'kalyana' means happiness, well-being, gold etc. Panchali was filled with happiness when her desire was fulfilled.

The story is told by Kunchan Nampiar in his *thullal* with wonderful narrative skill, characteristic sarcasm, immense poetic beauty and metrical charm. It is learned that Kunchan Nampiar wrote about fifty *thullal* poems

and out of them *Kalyana-Saugandhikam* has proved to be the most mature. In the dramatic moment of Bhima's meeting with Hanuman, the Pandava says in a satirical tone:-

Oh look here, damned monkey
 who blocks my way, get away hence!
 What is your reason for lying
 Here to obstruct my passage?
 You are a wild old monkey,
 You don't know how to behave towards men of status.
 You were born in a species that lacks discrimination;
 Did your jump go wrong and make you fall?
 Why is there no companion for you?
 Immediately clear the way, or
 You will have to pay the penalty

But the arrogant giant of a man is humiliated and tamed when he finds that his famous club cannot so much as move the old monkey's feeble tail.

It is a very interesting passage; in fact the whole dialogue is written with great poetic skill and a rare sense of humour which is the hall-mark of Nampiar's work. A brief portion to prove the beauty of description is being shown below. In the valley of Gandhamadana mountain is a banana garden which is protected by Hanuman. Bhimasena witnesses the beauty of the banana - garden as follows:—

The sacred place where Shri Hanuman resides
 Is most pleasant and beautiful;
 Bananas raw and ripe
 Are found shining like corals and green stones
 Interlinked as in a necklace.
 Those who see it will feel a thrill of delight.
 Banana plants stand thick and dark
 And the leaves dance and murmur
 As the fresh breeze touches them.
 Bhimasena is excited
 To find the ground
 Bright with fallen fruits
 Spread out like a silken carpet.

Many similar passages can be quoted in this way, but any translation will fail to convey the subtle music of the *thullal* poetry.

A wonderful mastery over vocabulary, an inborn sense of humour and a dramatic vision along with great metrical skill are all clearly felt in the lines he composed for this *thullal*; *KalyanaSaugandhikam* contains about 1300 lines written in various Dravidian metres and metrical variations form one of the sources of its abiding charm.

It will take one to two hours to perform this *thullal*. *KalyanaSaugandhikam* is perhaps the longest *sithankan thullal* out of a dozen or more. *Sithankan thullal* has definite 'aharya' (costumes) as in *ottan thullal* and *parayan thullal*. In *sithankan thullal* the 'kataka' 'kankana' and other

decorations are made of tender palm leaves. A closely pleated and coloured cotton cloth is worn round the waist like a skirt, and the head is covered by a coloured cotton piece, and this is called 'konta' The dancer, the mridanga player and the cymbal player make the troupe. The whole performance produces the effects of simple movements, subtle folk rhythms, sharp social satire and deep puranic discourse. *Thullal* poetry owes much to the *kuthu* and as an art form it has collected many aspects from classical as well as folk traditions. Whether *KalyanaSaugandhikam* is the first *thullal* work of the poet or not, it brings out the maturity of the poet and the performing artist in Kunchan Nampiar. Out of the whole wealth of *thullal* literature *KalyanaSaugandhikam* remains outstanding in many respects.

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The Development of Malayalam Literature: A Sociological Survey

G. Kumara Pillai

No literature can claim to be the literature of an entire people unless certain broad conditions are fulfilled. One of these conditions is external—the universal opportunity for the enjoyment of literature which in modern times is linked with universal literacy. The other conditions are internal. The language used must be the common language of the people and not a classical language or a foreign language patronized by the few. In a fragmented society like ours literature has also to deal with the life of the various segments of the people. Nor is this enough. The sense of belonging can be complete only if significant contributions to literature come from different sections of society. The evolution of a common literary culture is a very important aspect of the protracted process of social integration.

Though the happy consummation of a common literary culture has not yet been reached

in Kerala, Malayalam literature has gradually been developing into the literature of the whole Malayalam-speaking people. Malayalam must have begun to develop its separate identity as a spoken language and as a medium of literary expression by about 1200 A. D. But for at least three more centuries Sanskrit dominated the literary scene. Education itself was confined to the small minority of the upper castes and hence Sanskrit held its sway in this field also until a century-and-a-half ago. But though English took the place of Sanskrit in the field of education, Malayalam has of late slowly emerged into a dominant position. The level of literacy has reached seventy percent and the reading habit has become extensive. Universal literacy is still a distant goal; but more than that a deep interest in literature is not sufficiently wide-spread. With twenty million Malayalam-speaking people, the number of books printed in the language

is not more than a thousand a year and the normal print-order of a book is just a thousand copies.

The choice of Malayalam instead of Sanskrit as the main medium of literary expression in Kerala became final by the middle of the sixteenth century. The credit for this goes to Thunchath Ezhuthacchan who is revered as the father of modern Malayalam. Ezhuthacchan was not the first major poet in the language. But the tendency to move away from Sanskrit and to fuse the Sanskrit and Dravidian elements into a common language transcending dialect and slang culminated in his *Addhyatma Ramayana* and *Maha Bharatha*. Ezhuthacchan's problem was similar to the one faced by Dante in Italy at the beginning of the fourteenth century and set forth by him in the treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. We have to remember that Melputhur Narayana Bhattathiri, the author of the famous Sanskrit poem *Narayaneeyam*, was Ezhuthacchan's contemporary and that they belonged to the same district. Even a century and a half later Kunchan Nambiar who ranks next to Ezhuthacchan among Malayalam poets thought it

necessary to justify his preference for Malayalam and declare in one of his poems that Sanskrit was too hard a nut to crack for the common man and that for his entertainment the fittest medium was the "shapely, lovely language of Kerala"

The Malayalam-speaking people were divided into different administrative units until the states were reorganized in 1956. More important from the cultural point of view were divisions based on religion, caste and class. Kerala is the only state in India where we have large communities owing allegiance to three different religions. Our Christians who trace their origin to 52 A. D., form more than twenty percent of the population and our Muslims who have a history beginning with the first century of Islam constitute a little less than twenty percent. Sixty percent of the people are Hindus; but as elsewhere in India they belong to various castes and sub-castes and the caste system has been rather rigid here. At the top of the caste hierarchy we have Brahmins, Kshatriyas and *Ambalavasis* or temple assistants who form less than five percent of Hindus and at the

base scheduled castes and tribes who form between fifteen and twenty per cent. The rest is divided mainly into two large intermediate castes the Nairs and Eazhavas (Thiyyas), the former just above the basic untouchability line and the latter just below it. Culturally there have been four broad groups almost exclusive of one another—upper caste Hindus, lower caste Hindus, Christians and Muslims even though among the Hindus subdivisions have been more marked. Until about a century ago literary activity was more or less confined to the first group and literature dealt more or less with Hindu mythology and philosophy which had little appeal to the other groups. The other groups and even subdivisions among them had vibrant art forms and songs and ballads associated with rituals and festivals but did not develop any large body of sophisticated written literature.

Until the impact of the European Renaissance was felt, Malayalam literature was the literature of upper caste Hindus, for the upper caste Hindus. Even in this group the numerous and powerful Nair community did not have an adequate share in creative writing. For some

three hundred and fifty years i.e., till the time of Ezhuthacchan in the sixteenth century the only poets who emerged from this community were Ayyippillai Asan who wrote *Ramakathapattu* and the poets of the Kannassa Panikar family who wrote their versions of the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* and *Maha Bharatha*. We know little about Ezhuthacchan the man, but according to tradition he belonged to one of the lower subdivisions of the Nair community and if this is true, it is of some sociological significance. In the three centuries between the time of Ezhuthacchan and the last quarter of the nineteenth century the only important writer to come from the Nair community was Irayimman Thampi (1783–1856) who wrote some of our best kathakalis. But though the contribution of the Nair community was small, Hindu mythology and philosophy which formed the main theme of the literature was something to which the entire range of upper castes including the Nairs could respond. This literature did percolate to small sections of the Eazhava and the Christian communities, but those outside the upper castes had nothing to do with

its creation and little to do with its appreciation.

Things began to change with the new awareness brought by modern education which was introduced in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Other communities began to come into the field, contemporary experience came to be depicted in all its variety, and interest in literature began to spread cutting across the barriers of religion, caste and class. Though the small group consisting of Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Ambalavasis lost their pre-eminent position, they have continued to make their contribution in the changed context. In fact one of the leading lights of the Romantic Revival was A. R. Raja Raja Varma (1863-1918), a member of a prominent Kshatriya family. And Brahmins themselves began to take a critical look at their community in plays like *From the Kitchen to the Front Stage* (1929) by V. T. Bhattathirippad and novels like *The Paternal Uncle's Daughter* (1930) by M. Bhavathrathan Nambudirippad.

The Nair community came into its own in the literary field with the emergence of the first two major novelists in Malayalam,

O. Chandu Menon whose *Indulekha* was published in 1889 and C. V Raman Pillai who published his *Marthanda Varma* in 1890. Chandu Menon was the first significant writer in Malayalam to deal with a contemporary theme. He was mainly concerned with the conflict between tradition and modernity in the Nair community. C. V Raman Pillai was more interested in the glory of the past and in a series of three historical novels he recreated an exciting period in the history of Travancore. Neither Chandu Menon nor C. V Raman Pillai has been regarded as a Nair writer. In fact no writer mentioned in this paper is a sectarian writer. What is set forth here is the blurring of cultural barriers among the Malayalam-speaking people with the emergence of writers of universal appeal from various segments of society and with the projection of the composite patterns of our life in our literature as a whole.

Kumaran Asan (1873-1924) the oldest of the grand trinity of modern Malayalam poetry inaugurated a new era in our literature in more ways than one. From the purely literary point of view, his poem *The Fallen Flower* (1907) ushered

in the Romantic Revival in Malayalam poetry. But sociologically what was significant about him was that he was the first writer to come from below the untouchability line. An Eazhava by birth Asan became a crusader for social equality under the inspiration of his mentor, Sri Narayana Guru (1854-1928) and one of the dominant themes of his poetry was the eradication of caste. But even if he had not sung about social freedom, he would have been regarded as a sociological phenomenon of great import. The very fact that a poet of his stature arose from a backward class like the Eazhava community was a declaration of the claim of this underprivileged community to equality. And from the days of Asan the involvement of the Eazhava community in the fortunes of Malayalam has been growing stronger.

One of Kumaran Asan's major works was the long narrative poem, *Duravastha* (The Tragic Plight). Published in 1922, this was the first of our longer poems with a contemporary setting and a revolutionary social theme. It tells the story of a Nambudiri girl, Savithri, who providentially escapes the holocaust of the

Moplah Revolt in Malabar, takes refuge in the hut of an untouchable, a Pulaya, and finally invites him to share her life. Thus a Pulaya, regarded as one of the lowest of the low, made his first appearance in a literary work in Malayalam. The publication of this poem which was a fervent plea for the immediate recognition of the essential humanity of even those at the very base of the social ladder sent a thrill through the scheduled castes. But though the life of this segment of our society found further expression in powerful literary works like Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's novels *The Scavenger's Son* (1946) and *Two Measures of Paddy* (1949), it is regrettable that no major writer has arisen from the scheduled castes. Tribal life also has received the attention of our writers and *The Epic of Khasak* (1969) by O. V. Vijayan is one of the first novels inviting us to this strange world. But our tribal population is very small and a writer from the tribes is perhaps a distant dream.

From the days of the Hungarian missionary Arnose Padre (Fr. Johnan Ernestus Haxledon), who died in 1732 the Christian missionaries and our own Christian community have rendered a signal service to the

development of Malayalam. They introduced printing, helped the development of prose and produced dictionaries and text-books of grammar. But their work received little recognition outside the community and they entered the mainstream of Malayalam literature only by the end of the nineteenth century. The credit for this development should go to Kandathil Varughese Mappillai the founder of the newspaper *Malayala Manorama* (1890) the literary club Bhashaposhini Sabha (1892) and the literary journal *Bhashaposhini* (1893) which were responsible for bringing together writers of various regions and communities. But the first significant literary work on a Christian theme in Malayalam was written by a non-Christian. This was the beautiful narrative poem *Mary Magdalene* (1921) by Vallathol Narayana Menon (1878-1958) the youngest of the grand trinity of the Romantic Revival in Malayalam. It was hailed as the beginning of a real Christian trend in Malayalam. This was followed by two long poems on Biblical themes by Christian poets. These were the epics *Sreeyesuvijayam* by Kattakkayam Cherian Mappillai and *Vedaviharam* by K. V. Simon, which did not reach a very high standard. In 1934 came *The*

Celestial Tree of Calvary a popular drama on Christ's life by a non-Christian, Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai. With the emergence of M. P. Paul in the thirties and Joseph Mundasseri in the forties as leading critics, a new era of Christian contribution to Malayalam literature was started-Ponkunnam Varkey in the short story, C. J. Thomas in drama and Parappuram in the novel established the trend of Christian writers using Christian mythology and contemporary Christian social life as the material for their creative work.

Until a few decades ago the Muslim community was culturally more isolated than the Christians or the lower caste Hindus. In fact the Muslims of Malabar developed a literature of their own in a mixed language known as Arabic-Malayalam, though this was not known outside the community until recently. Muslims came into the mainstream of Malayalam literature when Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, a highly gifted literary artist began to publish his stories. His novelette *Balyakalasakhi* (Childhood Sweet heart—1944) with its Muslim social background was noteworthy not only for its literary value but its sociological

value also. In Basheer's later novel *My Grandpa Had an Elephant* (1951), in the plays of K. T. Muhammad and the stories and novels of N. P. Muhammad the new trend was strengthened. The perceptive portrayal of the life of the Malabar Muslim with his colourful idiom was undertaken by non-Muslim writers also and chief among them was Uroob (P.C. Kuttikrishnan) who did it on a grand scale in his novel *Ummachu* (1955).

I don't think we have any major writer who has come up from the working class. But as one of the first regions of India to come under the influence of socialist thought and action, Kerala has had from the thirties writers inspired by socialist humanism. P. Kesava Dev who began as a short story writer can be regarded as the pioneer of this movement. One of the early works of this category was K. Damodaran's play *Arrears of Rent* (1938). But Kesava Dev's novel *From the Gutter* (1942) which tells the moving story of a rickshaw-puller is the first great landmark in this direction. Reference has already been made to Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's novels, *The Scavenger's Son* and *Two Measures of Paddy* as works dealing

with the life of the scheduled castes. But caste and class are co-terminous in the case of these communities and Thakazhi himself viewed their problem broadly from the point of view of class-consciousness. In the late forties and the early fifties poets like P. Bhaskaran, Vayalar Rama Varma and O. N. V. Kurup also wrote under the influence of socialist humanism.

Kerala is regarded by outsiders as the land of women's domination. There is little truth in this, though some of our major communities have traditionally conceded some freedom to women and followed the matrilineal system of inheritance. At any rate, we had no major woman writer until 1930. Two women who began to publish in the thirties developed into major writers and their creative powers are still unimpaired. One of them is the poet Balamani Amma and the other the short story writer and novelist Lalithambika Antharjanam. The latter comes from the Nambudiri Brahmin community which would not until some five decades ago allow even the elements to gaze on its women. Two other women poets who emerged in the same period belonged to the Christian community - these are Mary John

Thottam (now Sr.Mary Benigna) and Mary John Koothattukulam. Women have continued in the succeeding generations to follow in the footsteps of these pioneers.

The process of cultural integration as reflected in the development of our literature

is a subject which demands deep study. Only an indication of the main trends has been attempted in this brief paper; The process is not yet complete. but the broad outline is clearly discernible under the richly variegated pattern of creative writing which has emerged in Malayalam over the centuries.

ASURAVITHU

By M. T. Vasudevan Nair

Translated by V. Abdulla

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Don't Kill, Brother, Don't Kill

P. Kesava Dev

Putting the pen down on the table, I leant back on the chair. The spirit races, the imagination soars up into the vast expanses of the sky and there is so much to write. But my hand is tired, my back aches and the weak flesh imperiously demands rest.

The third watch of the night is drawing to a close. The town is still plunged in sleep. These are the few short hours when forgetting the diversities and disharmonies of life man is lost in the eternal unity of sleep, his only consolation in life.

The electric light shines over my head. The light streaming out through the open door has blazed a trail into the darkness. The bars of the window although only one inch thick, cast shadows that look like iron pillars ranged side by side in the courtyard. I stood up and stretched myself. My shadow on the wall almost made me laugh. So hideous I looked!

In the next room my wife and daughter were sleeping. For a

fleeting moment my mind lingered on their bed. Do we love each other? I have harassed them a lot and they me. But I love them and they love me. There are incongruities in our nature. But love has forged a link between these incongruities. Shared sorrows and shared struggles are indissoluble bonds uniting us. The pain we have inflicted on each other means only love's conflict.

I sat down and took up my pen. As though lighting a torch at a wick I read the sentence I had written. My pen began to move.

My daughter burst out laughing in her sleep. She must be dreaming of some mischief she had played. The naughty little darling!

The pen races along the page. Suddenly there is some noise outside. Like someone jumping in or something falling. I looked out through the window, watched intently. Yes, there is something moving in the

plantain grove. There's some rustling! It is drawing near. Like somebody creeping up! In any case I would make sure. I got up and going up to the window, looked out. Is there somebody standing in the shadow? My doubt grew stronger.

"Who is there?" I asked softly to rid myself of doubt. There was no answer. But the shape moved. It withdrew behind a plantain tree.

"Who is it?" My voice rose. In the next room there was a sigh and a groan.

"Who is it?" I asked loudly, sternly.

"What is it?" My wife asked from the next room.

Torch-light in hand I stepped outside the room. Opening the door, my wife also came out. "Who is it?"

"Let us find out."

We went down into the courtyard. I flashed the light into the plantain grove. There was certainly somebody behind the plantains. "Who is it?" I asked again; and again there was no answer.

"It could be a thief." My wife said.

"Could be."

"Let us go in. He would now make his escape.

I turned off the flashlight and stood in the darkness. I saw him coming towards me in the dark; and again I turned on the light. Looking fixedly at me he was drawing near. A slender youthful figure. There was such ferocity in his stare! It was the look of a killer.

I asked gently: "What do you want?"

As though to answer, his lips opened and trembled, but he said nothing.

"Did you come for the plantain fruits?"

The fierceness in his look changed to scorn. For a short while he stood with bowed head. Then suddenly lifting his head he moved towards the gate. My flashlight showed him the way. He opened the gate, went out and vanished in the darkness.

"He is no thief", I said.

"What else then?" she asked.

"Who knows?"

We climbed back up to the verandah.

"Do sleep a little", she pleaded.

"You go to bed. I must write."

She went to bed. I retreated into my room and sat down on the chair. But I did not write. Doubts, so many of them, in labyrinthine knots! I sat still, my mind filled with forebodings.

I felt like having *pansupari*. As I was removing the veins out of the pan leaves, I heard a footstep and looked up. He was standing at the door! With that fierce look!

"U.....m?" I growled grimly.

He came in without permission. I wanted to take up the nut-cracker and stand up. But I sat on tearing at the pan leaves. "U.....m? What do you want?" I asked again.

He did not say anything, but came close up to the table.

"Please sit down." I tried to play the host. He remained standing.

"Do sit down," I pressed.

"No." A very harsh voice made the refusal with extreme insolence. Turning carelessly the pages of a book on the table, he said: "I am not a thief."

"Well, I understood that," I said with a forced laugh.

"When?" The question was put in the tones of a police officer.

"As soon as I saw you."

"Why then the pretence of kindness and the question whether I wanted plantains?"

"To make you misunderstand that I had misunderstood." I laughed again.

"Don't try it," he said in a firm voice.

"I have given up the attempt... But don't talk so loudly. You should not wake up those who sleep."

He was silent.

"Please sit down", I requested again.

He accepted my hospitality. Sitting on the chair opposite and looking at me he spoke slowly, without feeling.

"I have come to kill you." It seemed to me that a cold cruelty surged under the feelinglessness. He took out a not too small dagger from under his clothes. "I came to plunge this dagger into your breast."

I sat absolutely still. In imagination I saw the dagger that gleamed in the electric light plunging into my breast and sinking in my heart's blood,

myself falling and writhing on the floor and bidding farewell to this beautiful world of diversities and disharmonies. I was aware that fear and pain were writ large on my face. I wanted to scream aloud, but made no sound. I dared not look at his face or at the dagger.

Pressing the point of the dagger against the table, he said: "You are a coward, aren't you?"

"Yes", I tried to infuse some force into my words. "I am a coward. I am quite incapable of facing death with a smile..... I have read in books about people who have done it. Socrates, for example, drank up the hemlock with a smile. But can one be sure that there was not the slightest trace of fear and hate and pain in that smile?"

"You are a coward and a weakling!", he repeated with great scorn.

"You who came so stealthily to kill me belong to the same tribe" He remained silent. The scorn, however, was still there on his face. A gust of wind set the electric light

swinging. Our two shadows swayed on the wall. A paper I had written on was blown off the table. It fell within reach of my hand. But I did not take it up. Suddenly he said pressing the dagger-point firmly on the table: "You are to die".

"Yes. I am to die and I shall die. But am I one who deserves to be killed?"

"Yes. You must be killed. You are an enemy of my party."

"Which party?"

"My party! The only one political party of the toiling masses. The only party fighting for freedom and progress, for a golden to-morrow" He was getting excited. As though seeing that golden morrow somewhere in the distance, he continued passionately: "Whoever obstructs the advance to that golden future of equality is the enemy of the working class, of humanity." He turned to me. For a brief second the image of *Kalan*, the killer-god, flashed through his eyes and he said glaring at me: "You must die."

The dagger seemed to make a leap in the direction of my breast. I tried to smile like Socrates.... I felt my soul

departing from my body and rising up in the air, saw my wife and daughter weeping over me.... My soul floated up slowly into the air in a dim light. From that other-worldly sphere I looked down. Skeletons from all centuries lay scattered on earth. Blood and tears flowed like rivers. Standing on top of the heaped-up skeletons, standing on the banks of the rivers of blood and tears, the creators of this "golden morrow" trumpeted their message of death which resounded even in that other-worldly region.

"Coward!", he said.

I woke up from my dream. My eyes were wet. Through my tears I looked intently at him. The killer-god was no longer reflected in his eyes. Perhaps he was looking for some excuse not to kill me. It might be with that purpose that he charged me with cowardice.

I said: "Brother, I desire to live. But I am in truth not afraid of death. I know, all die, those who fear death as well as those who do not. Why should I then fear death?.... But I have a question. What wrong have I done you, brother?"

"Not to me, but to my party, the only political party that

fights for the freedom of the toiling section of society. This dagger is meant for such traitors."

I could not suppress the scornful smile that rose to my lips. Looking at the dagger-point pressed down on the table, I said: "It is nothing new to the world, brother.... That dagger has drunk the blood of millions of heretics. It kills man in the name of the freedom of man. In the name of an uncertain future it hands over the present to a blood-bath."

He too was gazing at the dagger. Suddenly his hand trembled. But his grip on it did not slacken. Looking into his face I continued:

"The hypocritical ideology that kills the toiling masses in the name of their freedom is still in vogue. The deadly speeches that these daggers make in order to have the right of representing them continue. ...Brother, it is not you alone or your party alone that has such daggers. It is not your party alone that claims to represent the workers. Buddha, Christ, Nero, Hitler, Gandhi and Stalin also have claimed to represent them, brother."

His eyes continued their fixed stare. The dagger and the hand that held it trembled now and then. The milk of human kindness seemed to be surging up from some inner depths. I felt encouraged and inspired. "Brother, all who harp on representation are exponents of the 'one-and-only path.' They threaten that at the slightest deviation from their path, the world would be ruined. Suppose all those fanatics of the one-and-only path were to live in one house. Wouldn't it be a battlefield in a trice? Wouldn't it be transformed into a mad house?"

"Looking fixedly at him, I got up. He only bent his head. I continued: 'Brother, we have seen so many such one-and-only paths. These one-and-only-paths have turned out to be the paths of blood and tears. The travellers along the one-and-only path have not succeeded in wiping away the tears of the unhappy; they have only poured blood into those tears.'

His hand trembled. The hold on the dagger seemed to be slackening. Looking out through the window into the sea of darkness, I said: "Brother, the problem to-day is not who represents the workers or how to find permanent solutions for the ills of the world. The need to-day is to find an end to the

madness of those dagger-men who offer a panacea for our sorrows and sufferings. That is the most urgently felt need to-day. Brother, it may not be possible to find a lasting solution for sorrow. Unlimited freedom may be beyond reach. But can't we do something to lighten the burden of suffering, to make it bearable? It may be beyond our power to keep away tears from all eyes. But can't we at least desist from adding blood to those tears? Can't we dilute the saltiness of tears with a trace of sweetness?"

Something crawled down the thick hair on my cheeks. It was my tears. I turned to him. "Brother", I called him. He raised his face. His eyes also were wet.

The dagger fell on the table. The hand that held it hung weakly alongside his body.

I stretched out my hand. He took it. I told him in a resolute tone: "The remedy for suffering is not killing or dying. The cure for tears is not blood. Don't kill, brother, don't kill."

He embraced me. I returned his embrace and as he wiped my tears, I wiped away his too.

A cool breeze drifted in through the window like the sigh of the new dawn.

—Translated by Celine Mathew

Two Poems

Olappamanna

I Will Laugh

I may suddenly die one day,
How long will I laugh like this?
Birth made me weep yesterday;
Death may make me weep again tomorrow.
But I will laugh through this short life
Standing between the two--
As the rainbow merrily does
Amidst winds dark and dreary.

To A Budding Poet

To write poems,
My boy, in your heart
Should burn
A radiant fire
Of emotions
Blemish-free.

The idea should be
An unbroken thread
To the very end
And let the soul be
The needle
Through which
The threading is done,
My friend!

Your heart should possess
The purity that comes
With age, oh, boyhood;
Your eyes must become
The bright flowers
Of blooming youth.

Write thus, my boy!
With the heart's nib;
And you shall then become
A real poet
As real as any.

—Translated by Dr. O. T. J. Menon

The Malayalam Novel: The Second Creative Period

S. Guptan Nair

In 1970 the English-speaking world celebrated with great eclat the death centenary of Charles Dickens. Almost everyone was agreed that Dickens was the number two figure in English literature and was next only to Shakespeare. Nevertheless we notice that a critic like F. R. Leavis is reluctant to place him in the 'great tradition' of the English novel because he thinks Dickens was only a 'great popular entertainer'.

Anyhow we in Malayalam cannot fail to note the great similarity of the fictional world of our early realists, Dev, Thakazhi and others to the lively Dickens world.

S. K. Pottekkatt's Jnanpith award-winning novel *The Story of a Village* is really not far ahead except in point of time to Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* (1836). There is a remarkable similarity between the two, "an ability on the part of the author to dash off character after character,

rejoicing too in the language he puts in their mouths, a language so fertile and exuberant in comic invention" (Walter Allen: *The English Novel*.)

I believe that our writers up to the period of say, Uroob, could not get completely away from the technique of the great Charles Dickens in spite of all their ideological fervour and adherence to critical realism. Therefore the period I am dealing with here may be called 'the Dickens period' in Malayalam, the major writers being six—Kesava Dev, Basheer, Thakazhi, Pottekkatt, Uroob and Kovoov.

We may start with the year 1942. The Second World War was still on. There was excitement all over and literature was suddenly treading unfamiliar grounds. There was a general distrust of the rich and a cynical attitude to the freedom struggle itself. Words like 'progressive' and 'proletariat' were frequently

used in discussions. Political pundits were talking about 'working class people' and their misery while the academicians talked of Freud and Hegel and the French symbolists. Creative prose writers were by and large leaning towards realism. But most of them got exhausted after writing a few dozen short stories. Readers began to wonder whether they did not have the vitality to sustain their sensibilities and formulate them into a composite picture of some magnitude.

It was then that two novels - rather novelettes - by short story writers appeared: *Odayil Ninnu* (From the Gutter - 1942) by P. Kesava Dev (b. 1904) and *Balyakaala Sakhi* (Boyhood Companion-1944) by Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (b. 1910). Both Dev and Basheer were self-educated men who had led hard lives and who knew poverty and hunger at first hand and had become writers not by temperament but by the force of their sufferings. *From the Gutter* had very little that was shocking to the reader except perhaps the novelty of introducing a working class hero for the first time in the Malayalam novel. The hero, Pappu, is portrayed as a born rebel unaccustomed to implicit

obedience. The boy walks out of the classroom, faces life squarely and grows into a disciplined worker full of dignity and integrity. He picks up from the gutter an orphan girl on whom he showers all his love and affection. A sort of Jean Valjean - Cosette relationship develops between the two while he takes the girl's mother for his wife. When the girl grows up she falls in love with a rich young man. Pappu does not fully approve of the affair but concedes her freedom to make the choice and marry him. When Pappu falls seriously ill, he suffers his pain with fortitude, shuns his relatives with stoicism and finally walks out into darkness and to his final exit. In spite of the novel's melodramatic trappings it was at once acclaimed as a trend-setter; even the conservative readers could not help praising Dev for his idealistic portrayal of the hero. There was nothing of the filth and slime usually associated with the new realistic writers. It was a 'clean' book about small people.

It was followed by Basheer's *Balyakaala Sakhi*. It is a simple love-story and the plot does not get intricate at all. Yet this ordinary and obviously

autobiographical novel has a uniqueness about it. As Basheer himself says, before his time all the Muslim characters he had met in literature were bad guys and could not be thought of as men having normal passions and affections. But Basheer drew his people in pleasing colours with gentleness. Basheer's technique of defusing tension with understatement is evident even in this first work itself. Majid the hero of the novel lost one of his legs in an accident. Basheer describes the situation thus: "He again felt below. It was nought. Where has his right leg gone - the leg that had received the impress of the maiden kiss of his Suhra?"

Without any verbiage Basheer can fill our hearts with emotions. The same novel, in less competent hands would have turned out to be a sentimental tear-jerker.

Though the above two novels are thematically and structurally different from one another both are written by people who had no pretensions to literary scholarship. Both authors have confessed that they did not embark upon writing to enrich literature but to express their own experiences. Basheer himself once admitted that had he not

become a writer, he would have become a dexterous pick-pocket and God knows what Dev would have become. The entry of these new writers in the forties was the result of the great social convulsions which had thrown open the flood-gates of knowledge to the intellectual backwaters of the country.

And then freedom came with all its concomitant shocks - displacement of people, disintegration of families, assertion of the underdog and a frantic search for new avenues. *The Scavenger's Son* (1947) by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (b. 1911), *The Scavenger* (1947) by Nagavalli R. S. Kurup (b. 1917), *Poison Damsel* (1948) by S. K. Pottekkatt (1913-82) and *Sinners* by Ponjikkara Raphy (b. 1924) are some of the most outstanding novels of the period. These four novels are linked by a common concern for the sufferings of the underdog, something unknown before, in the world of our fiction.

Though Thakazhi's pet subject was the life of the Kuttanad farmer he could easily dig into the life of the Alleppey scavengers too, another unexplored territory for the born realist to probe. Many people were repulsed by the

very title of the novel but it did not turn out to be an open wound or an exposed dung-heap, it was raw life in all its ruggedness. Only Thakazhi among our novelists could do it with such unsentimental objectivity.

The Scavenger's Son does not hide the weaknesses of the worker, nor does it exaggerate his passions. The life of the scavenger who is traditionally tied down to one of the dirtiest occupations in the world is dissected with artistic disinterestedness. Chudalamuthu was one of those who dreamt of better days and wanted to get out of the filthy atmosphere. He sent his son to school hoping that at least his progeny would live in greater comfort, but the son promptly turned a drop-out and went back to the slums. Like his father he became a labour leader and organised his people. The end came rather unexpectedly allowing Fate to interfere in the form of a bullet from the police. This is our first novel depicting the labour movement in Kerala. Dev's novel had a worker, a very individualistic one at that, as the hero but there was no worker's movement as such in it. Thakazhi on the other hand, gives us glimpses of the

undercurrents of the working class movement, its strength and its weakness. Probably a more committed writer would have hesitated to hint at any weakness of a worker; but Thakazhi the artist is concerned only with the reality of life. It is also significant that Thakazhi shows the awakening of the scavengers as an internal process and not as the result of any exhortation by sermonizing leaders.

S. K. Pottekkatt's first serious novel *Vishakanyaka* (The Poison Damsel) became immediately famous mainly because of its quaint and exotic setting. It is the story of a great exodus: the large-scale migration of hard-working Christians from Central Travancore to the virgin forest-lands of Malabar was a significant event in the social life of Kerala. In this over-populated land the dearest commodity has always been the good earth. When people heard that there was plenty of land somewhere up in distant Malabar there started a mad rush for it. True, there was virgin soil waiting to be upturned, but they did not know exactly how inhospitable it would turn out to be. The peasants made a bee-line for Malabar staking everything they had. Pottekkatt begins his novel with a brilliant description

of the arduous journey. After they reach Malabar the struggle starts. It is a fight on two fronts, one against unrelenting Nature and the other against the vain but exalted land-owner. The hardy peasant would not yield easily, yet he is virtually sucked into the mire and devoured. The earth, the real heroine of the novel, is the temptress par excellence. She beguiles her lover. She rewards him only to trap him and squeeze the life out of him. The brave ones fight on, some fall on the way and die like flies, some succeed and become rich and prosperous.

The novelist has dovetailed a romance into this story of the soil. Madhavi the heroine is a symbolic figure. She is part of the luscious landscape, the rustic charmer with an elemental vitality, a vivacious sylph-like figure. She too is an enchantress like the earth. With a mischievous sense of humour the novelist tells us how Antony the very picture of puritanic celibacy is drawn towards her fatal charm. She does to him exactly what the soil does to her lovers. I am afraid Pottekkatt with his flair for romance and thrill underplayed the magnitude of the peasant's struggle. He could have made the novel a real epic of the migrant farmers' tragic

struggle. We get only glimpses of that exhausting fight. Pottekkatt is either reluctant or incapable of hitting hard.

Raphy's *Sinners* is not a major novel but anticipates his subsequent and more important work *Swargadoothan* (The Angel). The decay of the Catholic church is Raphy's pet subject and he writes on it with inside knowledge and, unlike Varkey, without glee. These novels indicate the changing trends and themes in the Malayalam novel during the dawn of Independence. The *enfants terribles* of 'modernism' would dismiss these writers with the probable exception of Basheer as conservative story-tellers, who did not have the courage to assert individual modes. We are lucky in a way that our Thakazhis and Uroobs had some respect for tradition even while breaking away from the cloggy past. They had the taste and knowhow to examine the matrix of life a little more penetratingly and a little more painstakingly. Some of them did succeed as Jung says somewhere in imparting a common rhythm to all human existence.

Let us for example look into Kesava Dev's most ambitious work *Ayalkar* (Neighbours-1963). It can be called a purposeful journey into contemporary

history. Dev makes his journey an exploration and an incrimination. The novel depicts the interaction of the three major communities of Kerala – the Christians, the Nairs and the Eazhavas on one another. They live as neighbours, but more often than not, as uneasy partners with conflicting ethical norms, each nursing a secret enmity for the others. The Nairs with their pride in the past were rapidly cracking under the dead weight of traditions. They had a pathological aversion to work and would prefer to vegetate and die rather than work. The Christians were fast growing by hard work, thrift and some cunning. The Eazhavas, the bulk of whom grew up as farm-workers and tenants were waking up to freedom, self-respect and a flair for defiance. Listen to Dev himself: “Even as they (the Eazhavas) threw away the burden of slavery they had animated a storm of social revolution. Though they had not gained much financially, they had in the process changed the infrastructure of the intellectual and cultural aspects of life. Since all their memories of the past were those of slavery, they passionately hated everything old and indiscriminately embraced everything new” (*Neighbours* Ch.23). Dev is fairly

authentic in his assessment of the three communities. But he has a tendency to overdo his portraits. This is seen particularly in his Padmanabha Pillai and Kunjan representing the best traits of the two major communities. Dev excels in the portrayal of the disintegration of feudalism but becomes confused in diagnosing the transition syndrome. Caste problems become an obsession with him and when he resolves certain situations by an inter-caste marriage things look too naive to be true. For all the world knows that such sporadic marriages have not ushered in an era of harmony or understanding. In spite of these author-manipulated characters and predetermined events, *Neighbours* is a major achievement in Malayalam fiction – a compulsory workbook for the future sociologist.

When Thakazhi wrote his 13th novel *Enippadikal* (*Rungs of the Ladder*–1964) he too had in mind the transition of our society from the traditional to the modern. But his concentration was more on the involutions of the bureaucracy than on the evolution of society. There was a time when the most brilliant graduate had to cringe for a job on Rs.25/- Thakazhi's hero was a graduate of those

lean years. But he—Kesava Pillai—turned out to be a consummate plotter and he went up the ladder rung by rung playing the perfect villain all the way. He could be obsequious and tyrannical by turns. He was on the side of the despot when the people's struggle was on, but performed a quick somersault when people's government came and became the Chief Secretary of the State. When democracy came people naturally heaved a sigh of relief, but the relief was short-lived. The wheels of power rolled on like the chariot of Juggernaut and crushed the innocents. Whether a despot was at the helm, or a people's Government was guarding the affairs of the state, the poor peasant and the petty pensioner had to go abegging for small favours and would in all probability die on the highway on an empty stomach and with a parched throat. Without any sign of emotional involvement Thakazhi gives us a true picture of the rotting rickety machinery called 'Government'. In this novel politics is only a metaphor. It goes deeper into the psyche of the success-mad go-getter. Thakazhi is unerring in this investigation of human selfishness.

Thakazhi is better known now as the author of *Chemmeen* (Shrimps – 1956) which is a rather untypical work of the novelist. The early Thakazhi was known for his excursions into unspecified erotic sentiments and the later Thakazhi for his sympathetic diagnosis of the life of the lowly and the down-trodden. *Chemmeen* presents a different phase of his creative power. The work has the quaint touch of a fable and the quality of a ballad. Whether Thakazhi's portrayal is true to nature is beside the point. The ordinary reader or the *rasika* is least worried about verisimilitude. As Joseph Bach observes in his *Twentieth Century Novel*, "in all art the great thing is not accuracy so much as fullness, or richness in the rendering of reality. In fiction facts are made important by being set in such a light that they become not facts but meanings"

To give meanings to human experience authors sometimes adopt a convenient myth. The myth explains what the facts do not. In *Chemmeen* Thakazhi has made a clever use of a popular myth. The fisherfolk believe that the life of the 'riders to the sea' depends on the purity of their women waiting at home. It is therefore

the part played by the eerie sea that makes *Chemmeen* a truly fascinating story. The sea is at once their dread mother and benign goddess. "Chastity is great, my daughter. Our men's wealth is our women's purity," says an old mother. The sea casts its spell over those hapless people. The myth is played upon to construct a moving tragedy. A young fishergirl Karuthamma falls in love with a Muslim fish-vendor. The girl's father is an unscrupulous old rat, whose sole aim in life is to get rich quick and he secretly fleeces the young man. When there is the breath of scandal he suddenly arranges his daughter's marriage with a simple-minded fisherman. Gossiping fishergirls spread the news that she is still carrying on with her old lover. Life becomes so unbearable that she is driven to commit suicide along with her lover. Mother sea becomes her watery grave as well. Her hapless husband too is consumed by the sea the same night.

Chemmeen combines a natural simplicity with lyrical charm. Thakazhi's hero, heroine (the 'unchaste' girl) and even the secret lover are all such fine people, that we fall for them at once. Their honesty, dedication to work and integrity are

the envy of the seniors. Palani (the hero), when left high and dry by his comrades is aroused. "How could they forbid him? His was a body shaped to fight the waves..... He jumped into the sea to catch the boat (of his comrades). He dived into the water like an otter, like a sea-pig. It was a passion, a passion to live like a true fisherman, like the son of the sea. But a large wave, larger than all that went before, rolled over his head. Next moment it rolled him into a ball and threw him back on the ground. Palani was beaten. He was exhausted." It is in such lyrical passages that Thakazhi excels his own earlier writings in which crisp punchy sentences abound.

Like Dev and Thakazhi S. K. Pottekkatt also tried his hand at the long novel and two of his achievements in this direction are *The Story of a Street* and *The Story of a Village*. It was for the latter that he received the Jnanpith award of 1980. In telling the story of Sreedharan of Athiranipatam, avillage in the suburbs of Calicut, Pottekkatt skilfully combines autobiography and local history against a background of national events. Both these novels show his mastery over the portrayal of

characters and incidents of great range and variety.

I have elsewhere discussed Basheer's first novel in its social setting. But a discussion of his more mature and characteristic work remains *Me Grandpa had an Elephant*. In this Basheer appears as the master of a new idiom, an idiom characterised by wit and irony. Basheer's subjective realism is a queer mixture of fantasy and reality. When you finish reading this novel in which there is so much talk about grandfather's prestigious elephant, you do not know for certain whether Kunjupathumma's grandpa ever had an elephant. But the shadow of the animal is cast over the entire story. The supposed aristocracy of Kunjupathumma who now lives in a thatched hut depends on the recurring tall talk upon the elephant. Basheer is able to penetrate the thick layer of Muslim orthodoxy and ignorance by gentle touches of irony. Basheer does not go at a thing hammer and tongs but knocks down with a feathery touch. Several other Muslim novelists such as N.P. Mohammad and V. P. Mohammad have dealt with the theme of Muslim backwardness, but none has the magic touch of a Basheer. Basheer is a class by himself.

If there is one writer who came near Basheer, it was not a Muslim but a Hindu who wrote under a Muslim pseudonym. 'Uroob' who was P. C. Kuttikrishnan (1915-79) in real life wrote a masterpiece *Ummachu* (1955) depicting Muslim life in all its rugged beauty. In *Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum* (Beautiful Women and Handsome Men - 1958) Uroob achieved a signal success in exploring human relations under terrible stress and strain. It is one of the most complex novels in the language with several strands entwining in its lengthy course. It is a saga with the crowded history of three generations between the two world wars. This period was also the stormy period of the Moplah rebellion which had a tremendous impact on the harmonious course of Malabar society. On the emotional plane it is a story of unfulfilled affections and consequent frustrations. There are at least four love-affairs which come to naught in this world of passions. The novel acquires an additional meaning on the genetic level with several characters inheriting the characteristic features of their parents. On the ontological plane the author seems to

convey the idea that all human beings are essentially good (beautiful in Uroob's idiom). Given the necessary conditions to love and fulfil their aspirations they will continue to be good. Even those who are prone to grievous errors under some stress are essentially good. There is an unseen force which pulls every being in a predestined direction (as in the case of Viswam). Following the natural currents in the lives of these characters we would echo with Uroob that to err is human but to forgive is divine.

Uroob is the most gifted poet among our novelists. His poetry is not merely on the verbal level as that of, say, Pottekkatt or Dev but at the deeper level of emotional subtleties. Uroob succeeds without evident strain in conveying "the unknown and uncircumscribed spirit" Among his contemporaries, none else can claim to have achieved the same degree of success in this art of poetizing the jigsaw puzzle of life. In a casual but suggestive passage he delivers his message through Rarichan the oil-crusher. He tells Viswam: "To die you require only two yards of rope. But to live, aye, that is a little tough. But let not the future mothers die (as in Rarichan's case) like dogs on the roadside".

N. Lalithambika Antharjanam (b. 1909), a major short story writer, turned to the novel rather late in life her *Agnisakshi* was published in 1976. This short lyrical novel which has won great acclaim deals with the confrontation of traditional and modern values within the framework of a plot woven out of the twin strands of the reformation of the Nambudiri Brahmin community of Kerala and the Indian freedom movement.

E. M. Kovoov (1906-1983) was senior to most of the novelists we have mentioned above, but was a late entrant in the field. He had been regaling his readers with his 'honey stories' and the like for a long time. He verily stepped into the shoes of that irrepressible humorist E. V. Krishna Pillai (1894-1938) and held the ground for well over two decades. A lawyer and later a judge by profession, he was all the time probably collecting data for launching his attack on the 'new rich' The result was a series of charmingly satirical novels. One suspects that he was influenced by the early 20th century American novelists such as Frank Norris of *The Pit* or Theodore Dreiser of *The American Tragedy*. Kovoov was knowledgeable on all aspects of high society, their

speculations, prevarications and suthless efficiency. The reader is introduced to a world of affluence, of planters and public school products, of drinking bouts and bacchanal merry-making.

Peaks, Forest and Mountains are some of his eminently enjoyable novels. A less ambitious but equally purposeful novel is *The Thorn*. In this he indicates by subtle touches that the moral delinquents of his community—the Christians—have no other way but to return to the old values of austerity and moral uprightness. The title has a direct reference to a passage in the New Testament (*II Corinthians* 12-7) where the thorn in the flesh is interpreted as the forbidden sexual instinct which human flesh is prone to. The story of Rajamma is the tragedy of an efficient overenergetic but greedy woman. In her youth she was willing to elope with any young man who would extend his hand to her. But Fate designed her to become the wife of a middleaged widower who was not carved out to be a romantic Romeo. His first and last love was business. But Rajamma would not leave him like that. She went all out to squeeze the sap out of him. She had no warmth for the

husband or for her step-sons; only greed. But all her ambitions were shattered when her daughter died of leukaemia, leaving her to ponder over the futility of human ambitions.

Kovoor believes in telling a story and he tells it with consummate ease. Story-telling is organic to his personality as humour is to his story-telling. The smooth flow of his narration gives an illusion of superficiality. But he is indeed an adept at exposing snobbery. He has a keen eye and deft hand but it is not the keenness or deftness of a surgeon but that of, say, an interior decorator.

As we look back upon these novelists of what I would call the middle period we are prone to conclude that they are pretty conventional in technique though not in outlook. Their sense of 'pragati' (progress) held them back from too much 'prayoga' (experiment). At least they do tell a story and they do not believe with the French that there is no novel without adultery! They have no doubt broken a few of the old rules of the game obviously with the blessings of the Western gurus—Rousseau, Marx, Freud and others. Yet they have not forgotten that after all the family is the basic unit of society and

that a man wants to settle down to the business of life with his wife and children around. The main features of these novels may be summed up in the following words:- the importance given to social problems, particularly the problems of the poor; a deep interest in social change giving the reader an

affirmative view of social convulsions; change of technique from long descriptive passages to short, punchy sentences or lyrical passages; a great feeling for human suffering; and the discovery of new and unexplored areas by each one of these writers for further scrutiny.

□

FROM THE GUTTER

By P. Kesava Dev

Translated by E. M. J. Venniyoor

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The Malayalam Novel: Contemporary Trends— The Early Phase

K. P. Sasidharan

The Thakazhi-Dev generation which includes as many and as uniquely distinct first-rate writers as Basheer, P. C. Kuttikrishnan and S. K. Pottekkatt was a generation more or less of the likeminded. One and all they were prophets and artists.

Pottekkatt may have had a little more of the finer artistic sense than his brother-soul Ponkunnam Varky, the short story writer; and Ponkunnam Varky may have instilled in Pottekkatt himself a sort of envy for the fire in his words. They were together, they were partners. Similarly too, a work of Kesava Dev's may be more spicy and hotter than that of Kuttikrishnan and at the same time a moon-beam-creation of the latter's, sweet as it is, must be as challenging and pungent as Dev's plainer social criticism.

And the writer whose achievement easily tops that of all his

generation is in a sense an epitome of all the excellences of the band in their entirety. That is what Thakazhi is. The case of the immediate successors of the Thakazhi-Dev generation is very very different. Kovilan, Nanthanar, Parappurath, Malayattoor Ramakrishnan and K. Surendran have been totally different from one another. They have been absolute individualists, each apart and alone.

Of these Kovilan, Nanthanar and Parappurath were ex-service-men. And yet one wonders today how different the material each of these chose to work in was! Kovilan (V. V. Ayyappan, b. 1923) wrote of the pity of war, far more tellingly than any English Wilfred Owen, through a series of electrically gripping stories and novels. Nanthanar (P.C. Gopalan: 1926-74) did not avoid all that but preferred to

turn his attention to the delightful exploration of the world of the child's mind. He wrote a series of novels and stories like *Unnikkuttante Oru Divasam* (A Day in the Life of Baby) and *Unnikuttan Valurunnu* (Sweet Baby is Growing up) etc. He did succeed in that. Probably he was not as sure of this as we are, and hence he jumped to a different conclusion regarding his own work and killed himself. Even when on occasion he writes a soldiers' story it would be the slightly comic presentation of an incident in the life of a soldier. A soldier for long away from home in great excitement over coming home gets over-excited about it and cannot enjoy the sweet meeting with his wife.

Parappurath (K. E. Mathai-1924-81) wrote of the service personnel in a style totally different from that of Kovilan and Nanthanar. Kovilan takes us to a tent in the upland and shows us a band of home-sick soldiers feeding a litter of puppies with their own ration and receiving their routine shock when they find a tank advancing in spite of them, crushing the puppies and their pit crib all into pulp. The crib they had made there for those beautiful living things!

Parappurath on the other hand will tell us infinite endearing stories of soldiers and military and civil nurses, their many sorrows and their fond hopes and fine dreams of a beautiful life. Also of mothers and brothers waiting in Central Travancore for money orders from military headquarters, their disappointments, their aspirations and their sorrows and the shocks they receive in daily life.

What a contrast between the two-Kovilan, author of *A Minus B*, *Himalayam* and *Ezhamedanga* (Wives) and Parappurath, author of *Ninamaninja Kalpadukal* (Blood - stained Foot-prints), *Panitheeratha Veedu* (Incomplete Building) and *Ara Nazhika Neram* (Just a Few Minutes)! This distinctness of the works of these ex-servicemen more or less of the same age, is thrilling. In each there is such an amazing 'suchness' that it is difficult to conceive they were all of the same profession and time. Kovilan could be said to be a little morbid by a Parappurath-enthusiast and our grim Kovilan enthusiast might report that Parappurath never was as effective as Kovilan. Still the fact is that all the three of them are highly gifted people and their works remain some of the finer novles of the period.

K. Surendran (b. 1921) has to be considered separately for his massive achievement. His explorations of the avenues of human experiences in our time have been massive, his worst critics would admit, it appears to me. His novels like *Kattukurangu* (The Wild Monkey), *Thalam* (The Rhythm of Life), *Maya* (The Illusion), *Sujatha*, *Devi*, *Jwala* (The Flame), *Pathaka* (The Flag) and the latest *Nadam* (Sound) are all serious studies of the predicament of man in our time. The travails of man in society are his concern. Problems of personal human relations too. As records of his serious confrontations with these problems his novels will remain interesting. *Jwala* (The Flame) may be in a sense his most successful novel. It is a biographical novel, celebrating a hero who fought for justice in the era of the native princes, defied them and courted disasters in fighting for justice. *Maya* may be an open admission as to how much money has made man callous. Surendran's ideas are all good and his craft is almost always unerring. Still his novels never fired any one as did and do the novels of M. T. Vasudevan Nair who came a decade later. As M. R. Chandrasekharan put it in one of the pioneer studies

on this subject, Surendran is a tough author.

The debut of G. Vivekanandan (b. 1923) as a novelist was impressive. His *Kalli Chellamma* (Chellamma the Thief) and *Pottan Neelandan* (Neelandan the Idiot) were interesting for their quality of sympathy. But his next work *Kallu* (Toddy), a well-done report about the toddy trade just failed to rise above the level of a mere documentary. Nor did any one of the few more novels that followed *Toddy* give a better impression of a writer who at first appeared quite a promise. Thakazhi's celebrated novel *Chemmeen* created a real craze for documentaries. The novel and the cinema based on it together proved that nothing could be more beautiful than *Chemmeen*. Some thought that it was the documentary element that made it click. Was it not the story of the fishermen of such and such a village? It was really the story of man vis-a-vis the elements. But some people took it for a story of fishermen in village X.

There appeared in the years following *Chemmeen* a series of documentaries, they were all claimed to be novels. These were accounts of people in odd trades and strange surroundings

that very often had nothing except the documentary value. *Toddy* was just one of those.

It was perhaps Malayattoor Ramakrishnan (b. 1927) alone who could successfully overgrow the limitations of a documentary even while attempting something like that. His *Ponni*, a novel with an exotic woodland setting, is a fine documentary like *Chemmeen* and it views life in its primitive simplicity with nostalgia. How gifted Malayattoor as an artist is can be seen clearly from the success of his novel *Yakshi*. He has no doubt been a prolific writer and some of his essays in the novel are mere jokes. Such a work is *Doctor Vezhambal*! Some of his works are quite ordinary. Still two of the finest of masterpieces among Malayalam novels have been written by him. *Verukal* (The Roots) is one of the loveliest novels in Malayalam. It is the story of a young man's search for the roots of existence. As a documentary of the Tamil Brahmins in Kerala and their very special modes of living *Verukal* is unique. But the far more remarkable fact about the book is that it is a beautiful study of 'alienation' Malayattoor Ramakrishnan's interesting recordings of the

anguish of the alienated man are touching. They are poetic. And his more massive work the novel *Yanthram* (The Machine) is a masterly study of our social mechanism. An autobiographical novel, *Yanthram* relates the story of the frustrations of a well-meaning, intelligent youth entering the Indian Administrative Service. By serving one's bosses he ultimately realises that neither he nor his poor countrymen will benefit from such service in any manner. The novel is a significant revelation about government as we know: a huge human mill, says Ramakrishnan. It has its secure place along with Thakazhi's *Enippadikal* and M.T. Vasudeven Nair's *Kaalam*.

Each of the writers mentioned above has established that he is an important novelist in Malayalam. The cases of Ponjikkara Raphy (b. 1924), Thikkotiyan (b. 1916), Vettoor Raman Nair (b. 1919) and Nagavally R. S. Kurup (b. 1917) are different and singular. All the four of them wrote one important novel each. Raphy's *Swargadoothan* (The Angel) which deals mainly with childhood and adolescence introduced the James Joyce style of writing in Malayalam. Raphy did not pursue the idea any

more. But many were being drawn to the new style very soon after Rappaport's pioneering work. Thikkotiyam may protest that we have no business to talk about him here and that he is only a playwright. A few years ago appeared his remarkable satirical novel *Asvahrudayam*. One of the most scathing satirical studies of contemporary society, Thikkotiyam's *Asvahrudayam* must surely appear an interesting Malayalam novel to any one.

Equally singular are the cases of Vettoor Raman Nair and R. S. Kurup. *Jeevikkann Marannu Poya Sthree* (A Woman Who Forgot to Live) by the former and *Thotti* (The Scavenger) by the latter are two significant Malayalam novels. However like Rappaport and Thikkotiyam these

writers are not to be deemed great builders of our noveldom. The people who contributed towards that are Kovilan, Parappurath, Malayattoor Ramakrishnan, K. Surendran and Nanthanar. Their contributions and a trend-setting novel *Ini Jnaanurangatte* (Now Let Me Sleep) by the literary critic P. K. Balakrishnan (b. 1927) amply prove that the achievement of our older contemporaries in the novel is as remarkable as that of the Thakazhi Dev-generation. Whoever walks after the king will be able to make only a poor show, it has been said. The Thakazhi-Dev generation was splendid. The successors of that generation, our older contemporaries, brilliantly kept up that splendour. □

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The Malayalam Novel: Contemporary Trends- Novelists of New Sensibility

K. M. Tharakan

The history of the Malayalam novel can be divided into three periods; the first starting with the publication of *Ghatakavadham* in 1877 extends up to 1942, the second covers the period between 1942 and 1962 and the third runs from 1962 up to the present day. Though critics may be able to discern characteristics of the novel of new sensibility in the novels of the first two periods they are by and large works of the great tradition. The new novel individuates itself and attains a stature of its own only in the third period. The pioneers who with an extra-sensory faculty perceived a marked shift in the attitude of our people were Parappurath and Kovilan. It seems the ghost of the man who embodied the morale and the goodness of the nation appeared to these as to Hamlet, and they wove verbal structures reflecting the despair that gripped the people.

Jesus said: "Seek and ye shall find, knock, it shall be opened." Yet Parappurath's Susamma, the military nurse in *Anweshichu Kandethiyilla* (Sought, but did not Find) sought in vain, she didn't find; knocked but it didn't open. This brought to the people a new consciousness which rejected the sanguine optimism of the traditionalists. In *Pani Theeratha Veedu* Parappurath represented our land as a house ever under construction, never nearing completion. Kunjenachan of *Aranazhika Neram* endorses the view of Solomon that all is vanity. The language of Parappurath is lushy and lusty. It flows like a gentle river with its delectable ripples. But Kovilan's language is terse, it is like a mountain stream that breaks its way through ridges. In *A Minus B* Kovilan pictures a young soldier who finds himself reduced to a particle of

dust in the army which in itself is a monstrous dehumanising structure. To the young soldier the only exit out of it is suicide which he attempts to commit without success. In *Thazhvarakal* (Valleys) Kovilan portrays an army in disarray offered as cannon fodder in the Chinese war.

The novelty is in the attitude, rather in the change in the attitude. The novels of the great tradition put up an uncompromising fight with evils at all levels and at all fronts. They wanted to reform society and even revolutionise it. The most remarkable thing about them was that they believed that it was possible to reinstate great values, it was possible to make our country a great republic where equality and equity prevailed. Parappurath and Kovilan very much doubted whether this was ever possible. They questioned the sanity of such a sanguine optimism.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair (b.1933) brought out his *Nalukettu* (The Mansion) in 1959. In its structure and form it is a novel of the great tradition. But its chief character Appunni is cast in a new mould. As one who has suffered untold hardship in his childhood his heart seethes

with the desire to take vengeance on his oppressors. He will demolish the house in which he was born and build a new one in its place. The angry man seeking vengeance is a new figure. Govindankutty of *Asuravithu* (The Devil's Seed) is in a way an outsider, not a totally alienated stranger. He is more sinned against than sinning. His rich brother-in-law forces him to marry a girl jilted by his nephew. The indignant Govindankutty chased by the henchmen of his brother-in-law is saved by Kunjarakkar. He becomes a Muslim, but the Muslims too persecute him. Govindankutty leaves his village and stays with an untouchable. He returns to his village only to bury his people who die of cholera. He rescues the illegitimate child of his wife and swears that he will bring the child up as a classless, casteless pure man. It is a hope, a fond hope, for the situation obtaining in the land is not congenial to the realization of the hope. The claims of both *Nalukettu* and *Asuravithu* to the title of novels of new consciousness may be questioned, but certainly *Kaalam* (Time) and *Manju* (Mist) reflect unconventional fields of consciousness. Sethu of *Kaalam* belongs to an ancient family. He shuns the beaten path of

Appunni; nor does he let himself be sinned against, rather he will be the sinner. No, the Gandhian method vitiated as it is by hypocrites cannot help a man forge his way ahead. The modern in order that he may be successful shall be unscrupulous, everything is grist that comes to his mill. From the position of a clerk he rises to be a capitalist. Farewell to sentiments that may tie one to one's family or women. Sethu is the man of the hour; he is no Charles Darnay. He loves nobody, though others love him, and he can love only one person, that is his own self. What a contrast between Sethu and a Pappu who suffers for a waif, a Koran who supports the wife of his close friend in prison? Vimala of *Manju* is a romantic figure who looks before and after and pines for what is not. But her background with her unconventional mother and a self-seeking lover paints an eerie atmosphere, and who can forget the cliff beyond which opens the abyss often scaled by the sick sardar? Vimala is the baited, alienated counterpart of Govindankutty with a nostalgia from which there is no escape.

Rajalakshmi (1930—65) has two novels to her credit, *Oru*

Vazhiyüm Kure Nizhalukalum' (A Path and a Few Shadows) and *Jananenna Bhavam* (A Sense of Oneself). No other novelist, man or woman, has given us the delicate delineation of the working of the heart of a sentimental woman as Rajalakshmi in *Oru Vazhiyüm Kure Nizhalukalum*. The heroine of the novel Ramani realizes that all the men for whom she felt a fancy were but shadows, the straight path for her was to marry Appu, a fountain of love though a patient of tuberculosis. Rajalakshmi's language, like that of M. T. Vasudevan Nair, is rich in sentiments and poetic charm. What distinguishes Rajalakshmi's novel from the novel of the great tradition is the attitude of Ramani which is free from romantic delusions. She grapples with reality however harsh it be.

The mood changes, and novelists resort to ruthless satire to expose the stark hypocrisy of the politicians, the callousness of the bureaucrats and the fickleness of the populace. In *Hiranyakasipu* N. P. Muhammed (b. 1928) successfully describes the possibility of a dictator, under the guise of a democrat, getting absolute control of the country. In *Arohanam* (The Ascent) and *Syndicate* V. K. N.

(b. 1932) shows how little men outmanoeuvring others have ascended to power in our land. Sir Chathu of *Pithamahan* (Grandfather) is any typically lucky third-rate schemer carving a career of his own, exploiting the situation most suitable to his purpose. Cochin of *Pithamahan* is symbolic of our great land, and Sir Chathu is any man at the helm of affairs, in the past or future. The way to success is the same, and nothing succeeds like success. *Ennappadam* of N. P. Mohammed portrays the life of the Muslim community in a locality with its varieties and varied moods, with its social and political undertones. But the novel lacks concentration and cohesive motive which are the hallmarks of *Hiranyakasipu*.

P. K. Balakrishnan and P. Vatsala deserve special study on account of their contributions to Malayalam fiction. Balakrishnan's *Ini Jnan Uragatte* (Now Let Me Sleep) is a recreation and reinterpretation of an episode in the *Mahabharata*. After the Kurukshetra war Panchali realizes that Karna was the elder brother of Dharmaputrar, Karna had out of his goodness spared the lives of all his brothers other than Arjuna. It is against the new

consciousness that Karna assumes huge proportions compared to such classical heroes as Dharma Putrar and Arjuna. However Karna in the novel is not transfigured into either a rebel, an outsider nor even a critic of contemporary society. The novels of P. Vatsala (b. 1938) are realistic, they give expression to the urge of the suppressed classes to liberate themselves. Raghavan in *Nellu* (Paddy) is a seeker of peace. He reaches Tirunelli, a hilly area inhabited mostly by tribesmen. Vatsala gives us a moving picture of the slavery of the tribesmen and suggests ways of liberating them. *Agneyam* of Vatsala gives the story of the effort of a Brahmin who adopts the Marxist-Leninist way to liberate society. There are novelists like A. P. Kalakkadu who espouse the cause of the down-trodden masses, but they don't have the talent to transform their materials into literary master-pieces.

Vilasini (M. K. Menon, b. 1928) is a talented novelist. With his *Niramulla Nizhalukal* (Colourful Shadows) he attracted the attention of the readers as one who could, like a Proust, though to a lesser degree, capture the thousand nameless thoughts and feelings that spring

forth in the human mind and portary them against a rather solid philosophical bedrock. His *Chundeli* (The Mouse) and *Oonjal* (The Swing) found favour with the people, they have adopted the stream of consciousness technique. Credit goes to him for having contributed the most voluminous novel to Malayalam. His *Avakasikal* (Heirs) consists of four volumes each running to a thousand pages. Velukurup is on his death bed, he has no children. Naturally his next of kin are genuinely concerned about his legacy. They form a variety representative of the various phases of human life as well as the multiplicity of human character. The cute, the gullible, the selfish, the hippy, the snob, the self-effacing, the sentimental, the philosophic all constitute this drama of life. The Unni-Raji love episode that extends over the four volumes is sustained by the novelist with a craftsmanship that is the envy of the great masters of fiction. Yet the greatest work of Vilasini is the much shorter *Inangatha Kannikal* (Disjointed Links) which portrays the restrained love relationship between Panikkar and Uma. The Bhagavat Gita's vision confers on the novel a rare philosophic grandeur.

II

The novelists so far discussed have rejuvenated the novel with some sort of new sensibility; each in his or her own way contributed something novel. But none of them broke entirely fresh ground. But Kakkanadan (b. 1935) administered a shock to the readers nurtured in the school of the great tradition. *Ushna Mekhala* (The Tropics) marks a turning point in the growth of Malayalam fiction. The novelists of the great tradition had faith in the progress of the land; whether that was to be brought about through democratic ways or through revolutionary ways. Sivan of *Ushna Mekhala* was a communist. But the party disowns him, and he loses faith in the party. Sivan is an outcast, an outsider. He flees to the big city where he loses his identity. Holding the dream of his early love close to his heart he wanders in the city of New Delhi. In *Ezham Mudra* (The Seventh Sign) Kakkanadan subjects to severe criticism the Christian eschatology. In *Vasoori* (Small Pox) he shows how values once held high have no relevance in the valley of death. *Kozhi* (The Fowl) shows the metamorphosis of a poultry farmer into a fowl. Kakkanadan's *Ajnathayude*

Thazhvara (The Valley of Ignorance) emphatically shows that man who lives in the vale of ignorance digs his own grave. Of Kakkanadan's later works *Orotha* which portrays the achievement of a suffering and persevering woman of sterling qualities is the most gripping. Even Unniamma of Kovilan's *Thottangal* pales into insignificance in the presence of *Orotha*.

Kakkanadan and M. Mukundan (b. 1942) have much in common. The style of Kakkanadan is masculine, that of Mukundan is feminine. Yet the works of both reflect more or less an identical field of consciousness. Aravindan of Mukundan's *Delhi* is an artist. He drew the picture of man as an animal; and man is that. Aravindan in the huge city, Delhi, shows how the modern city has grown monstrous, how it dehumanises man. The great traditional values are of no consequence in the urban set up. In *Ee Lokam Athiloru Manushyan* (This World, In it a Man) Mukundan introduces Appu who looks upon life as a curse rather than as a boon. It is as though life is a trap from which there is no exit. Appu makes a wreck of his life in a whirlpool of love entanglements. Every other girl in whom he

seeks succour jilts him mercilessly. Appu wishes very much that he is able to creep back into the womb of his mother, into the grave. Every girl he loves deludes him and Appu burns in misery from which there is no escape. What can life signify to such a man as Appu? In *Mayyazhipuzhayude Theerangalil* (On the Banks of the River Mahe) Mukundan introduced Dasan who makes a desperate attempt to give some meaning to life. The liberation of one's motherland (Mahe from the French) is a great cause, but even such a cause does not inspire Dasan. In *Haridwaril Manikal Muzhangunnu* (Bells Toll in Haridwar) we see Ramesh tormented by an obsession by no means magnificent but from which even the love of Suja cannot liberate him.

Either the milieu has changed or the men and women have changed. The moral values upheld by ancient classics and the code of conduct sanctified by custom cannot sustain the modern youth in a world that has lost its pristine value system. There is a rupture hard to stitch up, and the gash bleeds profusely. Yet the wounded and the hurt are insensitive to the laceration. The novels of

Kakkanadan and Mukundan are novels of the new consciousness.

C. Radhakrishnan (b. 1939) has been sensitive to this new trend. In *Marichika* (The Mirage) the hero fails to find joy in any aspect of life; Ravi resigns his job and comes home, but refuses to marry his love; for nothing is of significance to him. *Poojyam* (Zero), *Swapna Parampara* (Dreams) and *Ellam Maykkunna Kadal* (The All-Destroying Sea) are some of the best known works of C. Radhakrishnan. His *Agni* (Fire) though powerful, fails to hit the mark as a modern novel of new sensibility. P. Padma Rajan (b. 1945) exploits sex and violence in most of his novels. His *Nakshathrangale Kaval* (The Sentinel Stars) presents a string of deaths, no one is spared, death makes no distinction between the virtuous and the wicked. There is no 'pass over' At the end of the novel we see the heroine standing helpless with the child Hari.

The crowd consisting of beings without identity has been vividly presented by Kovilan in *Thazhvarakal*. In fact most of the characters in *Aalkkoottam* (The Crowd) by Anand (b. 1936) have identities of their own. The end of the novel, not to speak of the rest of it very much resembles

Parappurath's *Panitheeratha Veedu*. Yet *Aalkkoottam* accomplishes two things. It introduces political discussion in the novel and weaves it into the very fabric of its structure. Also it introduces a number of characters from various walks of life, all of whom find life equally purposeless. Sentiments, even anger are suppressed. The mood is one of sheer despair. Sunil says: "I am already dead". Radha analyses the persons she knows. "I was drawn to Joseph because of his love of life. Sunil lingered somewhere, Prem ran away from life." In truth nobody finds any meaning in life. Joseph soliloquises: "Sunil sat on the porter's rest by the wayside. Prem passed beyond the junction. Karbury became dust, Raghavan walks in the prison cell for the crime committed in his life. Mary who suffered in her smile has become a memory, on the other hand Radha who smiled through her sorrows is going to be a memory. And finally I am here, and my way". *Aalkkoottam* lacks unity of structure. Its style is stilted. Yet it is a notable work as it presents the new outlook of the new generation to life in general. It offers a valid criticism of contemporary society. Anand's *Maranacertificate* (Death Certificate) has unity of structure,

precision, suggestiveness; yet it is just a Kafkaesque novel. By far superior to this are the novelettes of Anand in which he proves himself a master of modern fiction.

There are four more novelists to be treated with respect and considered in some detail—O.V. Vijayan (b. 1931), Punathil Kunjabdulla (b. 1941), M. Sukumaran (b. 1943) and Sethu (b. 1942). This is not to ignore the contribution of Madamp Kunjukuttan (b. 1946). His *Aswathama* and *Bhrashtu* (Ex-communication) are both powerful novels. *Bhrashtu* pictures an ostracised Brahmin lady persecuted by her community. Kunjunni Namboodiri, the hero of *Aswathama*, according to Kunjukuttan, is the modern Aswathama. If anyone deserves the title of the cursed in its fullness it is Aswathama. He was born a Brahmin, but acquired the art of the Kshatriya. He incurred an inescapable curse, became an immortal. Kunjuni has no way to go. A way-farer without a way, he lives because he is not dead. Nothing more to say about it. He has no way nor any destination. But the works of Kunjukuttan don't have the seal of greatness.

O. V. Vijayan has written two novels, *Khasakinte Itihasam* (The Epic of Khasak) and *Dharmapuranam*. What verdict posterity will pass on *Dharmapuranam* one can hardly predict. In the estimate of contemporary critics the less said about the work the better for the book and the author. However *Khasakinte Itihasam* is adjudged a modern classic by quite a lot of younger critics. For one thing its language is remarkable for its suggestive quality. Every sentence is loaded with ore. It is not a question of decoration for the sake of decoration, embellishment for the sake of embellishment. Every expression is meaningful. It is the story of Ravi who comes to the village. Khasak; to start a school of his own. He is an intellectual, philosophic in his outlook with a wealth of experience. The amorous advances made by the second wife of his ailing father have made him cynical. If frailty's name is woman, he cannot respect his love, nor can he respect the hoary values of life. He moves from city to city, at last to find a haven in Khasak. The village is inhabited by Eazhavas and Muslims, they have their traditions, cultures and interests. They co-exist, the village has its values; but

one can drink liquor and lead a free sexual life. In a way it is a sort of permissive society. Ravi leads a reckless life. He loves his students, but pestilence takes away a few of them. Ravi loves Amina, which is the only redeeming aspect about his character perhaps. There is another interesting character in the novel, one who lives beyond time, Appukkili. After a stay in Khasak Ravi prepares to leave Khasak; As he waits for the bus in the rain he is bitten by a snake. Khasak and its life appear in the novel as reflected in the consciousness of Ravi who is but a projection of the novelist's own alter ego. Life is hollow, traditional values have no relevance. Death has its sway over life. Human existence between birth and death has no substance. It feeds itself on the milk of death, what humans do here and now have no significance; no value. All is vanity. That leaves man with many options; he can lead a totally irresponsible life, and an idler's life. Whatever life he leads has no ultimate significance or relevance. *Khasakinte Ithihasam* is a novel with great charm and artistic excellence. But it is the stuff with which dreams are made; devoid of a solid philosophic

base, it will find it hard to stand the test of time.

Both Sethu and Punathil Kunjabdulla have a number of short pieces to their credit. Lust for money, the bane of the modern, is the theme of Sethu's *Vanavasam*. Sethu's *Thaliyola* (The Palm Leaf) is a Kafkaesque piece. The magnum opus of Sethu is *Pandavapuram*. The novel is an endopsychic myth. Devi lives in a world of hallucination; the thought that she has a lover haunts her persistently. She acts out that harrowing phantasmagoria. Streams of consciousness are rolled in more powerful streams of consciousness in the novel. Vimala in *Manju* waits for a lover who has deceived her. Devi in *Pandavapuram* creates a realm of her own and peoples it. *Pandavapuram* is a milestone in the development of the Malayalam novel. In its technique, language and theme it is unique and absolutely modern.

Punathil Kunjabdulla has narrative skill, a high sense of humour and a clear understanding of human nature and the social setup. His most important work is *Smarakasilakal*. The term meantombstones. But tombstones have the tale of a village to tell.

How many have lived in the village which is the scene of action of *Smarakasilakal*. Many lie buried in the cemetery. They were mostly poor people doing odd jobs or serving some big masters. The out-standing man of the village was Pookoya Thangal, a powerful overlord. He worked hard, made money, and rose to be the feudal lord of the village. He had a number of dependants. He helped them. Hard work and generosity were the hallmarks of the great feudal lord. But Pookoya Thangal had a weakness for women. He would ride on horseback to the seashore, and rape the fisherwomen in the absence of the fishermen. And once a husband lay in ambush for the man and killed him. This was one way in which the feudal lords met with their end. On the death of Pookoya Thangal, his wife became mistress of the house, with the aid of her steward. The daughter is married to a dying man for money. And the girl suffers. Kunjali who enjoyed the freedom of a son in the family grows disgusted and goes to meet the communist rebels in the hope that they would be able to bring relief to the suffering people. There is a freshness about the style of the novel, it is vigorous - and spiced with wit. The backdrop

of the story has an antiquity about it that is romantic. *Smarakasilakal* achieves a rare blend of the novel of the great tradition and the novel of new sensibility. O. V. Vijayan, A n a n d, Kakkannadan, Mukundan, Sethu and Abdulla are all young, and we may expect them to enrich the Malayalam novel further.

M. Sukumaran is a great short story writer. His novelettes are significant for the novelty of their sensibility. He can be satirical; but his satire is fraught with sorrow, and anguish. Like Sivan of *Ushna Mekhala*, the hero of his *Seshakriya* (Funeral Rites), is disgusted with the callousness of the communist party. He is expelled from the party because he championed pure Marxism and criticised the wrong policies of the party. The top officials of the party sympathised with him; but no one came forward to lift him up from the bog of poverty in which he had sunk. The hero who suffers beyond endurance abjures his connection with the communist party. Sukumaran's verdict on the communist party shows that the liberation of the suppressed classes through revolution is unthinkable in the Indian context. That makes the people frustrated and leaves them in sheer agony. The tone

of *Sheshakriya* is one of suppressed indignation and despair.

The Malayalam novel continues its march forward; somehow our novelists fight shy of scientific subjects. May be in spite of the growth of big cities our country remains basically agrarian and rural. Novels like those of Thomas Pynchon are unthinkable to most

of us. Even psychology is not exploited to its fullest advantage. Prophetic novels like *Broke New World, Nineteen Eighty four* also do not appear in Malayalam. Yet such novels are bound to appear in our language. As it is, the new writers have enriched our novel substantially. And yet the Malayalam novel has many many miles to go.

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The Salt of the Earth

K. P. Vasu

[*Uppu*-Collection of Malayalam poems by O. N. V. Kurup; Published by S. P. C. S. Ltd, Kottayam; First edition, 1980]

It is heartening and even exhilarating that a poet who has left behind thirty years of his poetic life remains wedded to the ideals which inspired him at the threshold of the golden realm of his poetic career. Shri. O. N. V. Kurup, better known as O. N. V., has been steadily gaining ground by his creditable attainments.

His early poems throbbed with a feeling of indignation at the cruel realities in society, a sense of sympathy for the downtrodden and an irresistible urge for a just social order. The consistency in his commitment earned him both adoration and abuse. His poems were acclaimed as sweet songs of a social revolution. But many complained that the tone of anger and anguish was boisterous enough to mar the melody and music of his poems. Very often this sort of clap or slap had its roots in considerations

other than literary. The critics on either side were motivated by prejudices which originated in their likes or dislikes for the content of the poems.

His outlook was moulded by his experiences in life. He lost his father when he was a small boy and this proved a turning point in his life. It snatched away from him all luxuries: when the boy was waking up from the shock he was realizing the transformation of the lush affluence around him into grey austerity. He began to feel alien in this world. He started identifying himself with the poor and this kindled in him a concern for the teeming millions which blossomed into progressive social attitudes and revolutionary ardour. This development was accelerated by the wave of the national movement and the tide of revolutionary struggle he saw around him in the most for-

mative years and also by the socialistic ideas he gathered from books. It was only rational that his deepest emotions sprang from his sympathy for the toiling millions and his early poems reverberated with a clarion call for a change in the social order.

With the dawn of the sixties the voice of wrath and protest appeared soaked in sadness. It became the mature voice of a poet who was positively involved with the world he was living in, but who was being nagged by a conscience in agony. He must have looked back to see whether the flame of revolutionary fervour had damaged the golden wings of his poems. The tone of *Neelakkannukal* (The Blue Eyes) published in 1961 makes the beginning of an era dominated by a feeling of pathos. This tragic story of a girl working in a tea-garden is dedicated to "those who go along the ever-green land of sorrow". Coleridge's lines quoted by the poet also clearly indicate the gradual transformation in his tone. The maturity of the poet is evident from the pathetic story of a poor exploited girl narrated without any tinge of sentimentality. At the same time he speaks volumes, though reticent in words, about his adherence

to the philosophy of life and social values he has been holding dear.

The sixties turned out to be a period of great shocks to the poet. O. N. V has always been sensitive enough to grasp the contemporary tone and committed to render it into melodious music. This allegiance to contemporary realities has been misinterpreted as a mere concern with the superficialities of social life by some modernists who are noted for their indifference to social values. O. N. V. has never allowed his extra-literary beliefs to distort his literary judgement or his philosophy of life to overshadow the beauty of his poems. Though his imagination never tended to be at the mercy of topical problems he has never felt shy of associating himself with the conscious endeavour to eradicate inequalities. No wonder he was shaken by two events in the early sixties. The split in the Communist movement and the Chinese aggression against India were dreadful nightmares to him. To his great disillusionment he found in shambles every ideal he had been caressing and fostering. The excruciating agony brought out the best in the poet. After the turmoil the poet found himself "in the little green oasis

of sorrow inaccessible to the ideologies of demolition." He ends the poem *Valappottukal* (Broken Bangles) with a sob:

'Have you, my Desire, who
came to wed the Earth

Bent and broken the lovely
rainbow?'

This sense of despair and disillusionment has become an inalienable fact of O. N. V.'s poetic personality. All his sweet dreams about the future of India still remain as unreal as they have ever been. The realization that his dreamland is still a mirage prompts him to write in *Madhyahnageetham* (Noon-Song):

Here in this desolate earth
I stand
And ask: "Where is the
Promised Land"?

The remarkable feature about him is that this despondency has not turned him into a pessimist. The glow of historical optimism permeates every line he writes and his gloom is golden. He has not become a worshipper of melancholy and his hopefulness is reflected in his frequent use of the image of the phoenix, the mythical bird which rises from its ashes:

'I will rise from my ashes

And my wings will flutter like
blooming flowers.'

Uppu (Salt), a collection of forty one poems which won the prestigious Vayalar Award of 1982 is a true reflection of O. N. V. as a poet and man. His untiring attachment to ideology and unrelenting adherence to the precepts of artistry are evident in this anthology which consists of some pure lyrical poems, obituaries, reminiscences and a few others which are aglow with the flame of indignation at the inequality and injustice prevalent in society. The poet's violent reaction to the bewildering unconcern and alarming fraudulence of those in power is couched in moving images and myths. The surge of sympathy for the oppressed and the irresistible burst of fury form the dominant current in his creative stream.

Kannaki is an attempt to rouse the conscience of man. The poet here seeks the help of his famous ancestor in the family of poets Elankovadikal to conjure up Kannaki the mythical character symbolizing chastity who can turn anything into ashes by her burning words. Her husband was brutally murdered when he went to the city of Madurai seeking an

the firm faith that a Lord Christ or a Lord Krishna will rise from among themselves as their Saviour.

Sisuvvarsham (Children's Year) is a satire on the hypocrisy of people who forget to provide bare necessities and basic amenities for children but take meticulous care and make elaborate preparations to celebrate Children's Year by publishing children's books and producing fine films and toys. On the eve of the celebrations a destitute child seems to tell the poet that what he wants is neither milk, nor toys, nor picture books, but a handful of boiled rice.

The title poem *Uppu* (Salt) is rich with exquisite images. The first section portrays an old grandmother who says to her grandson that she will disappear one day just as the salt put into the porridge dissolves in it. The second section has an allusion to the saga of salt significant for Indians because of its role in the freedom struggle. The poem concludes with the scene of the ocean being drowned in the foamy milk pouring out in memory of its missing child. The poet seems to portray the picture of India which is in a deplorable state as she is not able to feed her children properly

with her breast-milk which goes to waste. The poem takes us to the pathetic plight of man who is the salt of the earth.

Most of the lyric poems in this anthology are fragrant flowers of the poet's exalted imagination and admirable creative talent. *Kapothapushpam* (Dove-Orchid) shows the sweet victory of maternal affection over the fear of scandal: it tells of a virgin whose prayer to the sun bears fruit and who thus bears a child. In *Kayalkazhchakkal* (Lake-Scenes) we have the scenes of night, dawn, day and dusk in a lake. These scenes have been harmoniously blended with human situations. The images and music of words are appropriate to the situations and the resultant emotional intensity is delicious. The elegies written about the famous poet Vallathol, noted novelist Uroob and the Marxian thinker and writer K. Damodaran are marked with a subdued flow of emotion. The praise is free from the customary excess and the self-imposed restraint adds to the power of these poems.

This review does not offer itself as a detailed assessment of all poems in the anthology *Uppu*. The intention has been to have a glimpse of the poet as emerging from this anthology. F.R. Leavis

once remarked, "Poetry matters because of the kind of poet who is more alive than other people, more alive in his own age..... The potentialities of human experience in any age are realized only by a tiny minority, and the important poet is important because he belongs to this (and has also, of course, the power of communication)." The anthology under study proves eloquently that this poet is important because he is quite alive and his concern is for man "the first of things" and "the roof and crown of

things" as Tennyson would say. It is also gratifying that ONV is growing from maturity to maturity as he never ceases to experiment in imaginative sophistication to sharpen his power of communication. The profuse use of rich and varied images and allusions to mythical characters ensure a directness of emotional impact and they never tend to allusive obliqueness. It is no mean achievement for a poet that he has combined a sensitive ear for the music of language with earnestness of purpose.

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A Distorted View About V T Bhattathirippad

I am a regular subscriber of your esteemed journal, *Malayalam Literary Survey* and I am glad to state that the journal carries the message of Malayalam literature and Kerala's culture to the people in other parts of India and abroad. I am also glad that of late the standard of the articles appearing in the journal has improved considerably. At the same time I am pained to note that an article published recently does not conform to the standards maintained by the journal. I refer to the article on V. T. Bhattathirippad the renowned rationalist and reformist of Kerala written by Prof. N. K. Seshan. As a person who has devoted some time and energy to study the life and works of V. T., I was taken aback when I went through that article. Such a distorted version about the great son of Kerala ought not have come from a professor and politician like Shri N. K. Seshan.

Prof. Seshan, with his Victorian style, has made an effort to tarnish the image of V. T. as a rationalist. He tries

to emphasise that V. T. was a great theist though not a follower of religious practices. What a posthumous shame to an iconoclast like V. T. who had burnt his sacred thread and sent its ash to the high priest of his community! What a shame to an honest intellectual who had proclaimed "Now we shall set fire to temples!" 'The most unkindest' comment is about his fate in his deathbed. It is a blatant lie to say that V. T. was chanting vedic mantras in sickbed in a semi-conscious condition. The real fact is that V T. was in a severe coma and was unable to chant anything or move his lips even.

The statement that V. T. at the fog end of his life said that "the time had come for him to convert man into a true Brahmin" is also a cooked-up story propagated by some Hindu revivalists. It may be noted that V. T. lived as a rationalist and died as a rationalist. But is he also having the same fate as other great men like Voltaire and Copernicus through the efforts of people like Prof. Seshan?

— Prof. Thomas Varghese

Sujith

Vanchiyoor, Trivandrum -35

Akademi News and Literary Notes

Arohanam

Shri Satyajit Ray, the famous film director, has decided to produce a film based on the novel *Arohanam* by the well-known Malayalam novelist Shri V.K.N. The English translation of this novel was published by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi under the title *Bovine Bugles*.

Kumaran Asan Awards

The Kumaran Asan Award for Malayalam poetry (1983) was given to Shri Vyloppillil Sreedhara Menon. Other Indian recipients of the Award were Ali Sardar Jafri (Urdu) Chandrasekhar K a m b a r (Kannada) Mahendra Bora (Assamese) and Sankha Ghosh (Bengali). The international award went to the famous Sinhalese (Shri Lanka) dramatist Dr. Ediriwira Sarachchandra. These are annual awards instituted by the Kumaran Asan Memorial Committee at Kayikkara (the poet's birth place).

Reception

Dr. Ediriwira Sarachchandra and Dr. Chandrasekhar Kambar were felicitated at a reception

got up on April 29 at Trichur by the School of Drama and some other organisations.

128th Birthday of Kottarathil Sankunny

The 128th birth day (April-4) of Kavithilakan Kottarathil Sankunny (1855-1937) was celebrated in the Kottarathil Sankunny Memorial Hall at Kottayam. Shri K. M. Mathew, Chief Editor, the *Malayala Manorama*, presided over the function and Shri Panmana Ramachandran Nair spoke on the occasion. Sankunny is remembered for his compilation of Kerala legends in eight volumes.

N. V. Krishna Warriar

Shri N. V. Krishna Warriar has been elected President of the Kerala Sahitya Samithi. Shri Kovilan and Shri N.N. Kakkad (Vice Presidents), Shri N.V.P. Unithiri (Secretary), Shri N. K. Desam and Shri C.N. Chelangat (Joint Secretaries) and Shri Theruvathu Raman (Treasurer) are the other elected officials of the Samithi.

C. P. Sreedharan

The general body meeting of

the Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishath held on March 27th elected Shri C. P. Sreedharan as the President. Prof. Mathew Ulakamthara (Vice President) Shri T.K.C. Vaduthala (Secretary) and Shri Tatapuram Sukumaran and Shri B. Wellington (Joint Secretaries) and Shri N.K.A. Latheef (Treasurer) are the other elected officials.

Symposium

A symposium was held at Trivandrum in connection with the 70th birth anniversary (March 14) of S. K. Pottekkatt (1913-82), the Jnanpith Award winning novelist, under the auspices of Charchavedi, Trivandrum. Prof. N. Krishna Pillai presided over the function and Shri K. Surendran inaugurated the symposium. Shri P. Bhaskaran, Smt. Balamani Amma, Smt. Madhavikutty and Prof. S. Santhakumary participated.

Kesava Menon Memorial Lecture

This year's K. P. Kesava Menon Memorial lecture was delivered by Shri C. Achutha Menon at the Calicut University Senate Hall. Calicut University P.V.C. Shri N. Purushothaman presided and Shri N.V. Krishna Warriar spoke on the occasion.

D. Damodaran Potti

Shri D. Damodaran Potti was elected President of the Kerala

Region of the Dakshina Bharatha Hindi Prachara Sabha.

The Best Book on Films

The National Award for the best book on films was given to Shri Vijayakrishnan for his Malayalam book *Chalachitra Sameeksha*. The award consists of Rs. 5000/- and a Rajath Kamal.

Abudhabi Sahityavedi

In U. A. E. an organization named 'Abudhabi Sahitya Vedi' was formed by resident Malayalis

Cultural Publication Department

A Cultural Publication Department has been formed under the Department of Cultural Affairs. Shri K. M. Mani, Finance Minister inaugurated the Department on 20th June at Vazhuthacaud, Trivandrum. Shri Sooranadu Kunjan Pillai presided over the function. Shri R. Ramachandran Nair I.A.S., Secretary, Department of Cultural Affairs, welcomed the audience and Shri S. Chandrasekhara Pillai, Director, Cultural Publication Department, proposed a vote of thanks.

The main objectives of the Department include the publication of the biographies of eminent Keralites and a cultural history of Kerala.

Akademi Anniversary

The twenty-sixth anniversary of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi was held at the Akademi Auditorium, Trichur, on 15th May. Shri K. Karunakaran, Chief Minister of Kerala, inaugurated the function and Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, President of the Akademi, presided.

The portraits of four eminent writers of the past, Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai, Dr. K. N. Ezhuthachan, Nandanar and Rajalekshmi were unveiled by Shri N. Sreekantan Nair, Dr. Sukumar Azhikode, Shri T. K. C. Vaduthala and Dr. M. Leelavathy, respectively.

Dr. K. M. George welcomed the audience and Shri Pavanam, Secretary, proposed a vote of thanks.

A seminar on the subject 'Malayalam Drama Today' was held before the public function. Prof. S. Guptan Nair presided over the seminar and Shri Kattumatom Narayanan presented the paper. Prof. Vayala Vasudevan Pillai, Shri V. P. Muhammed and Shri C. L. Jose participated in the discussion.

Prof. V. Aaravindakshan welcomed the audience and Shri Iyyamkode Sreedharan proposed a vote of thanks.

Sangeetha Nataka Akademi Fellowship

The Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi has decided to honour the following artists by conferring fellowships on them. Shri V. Dakshinamoorthi (music director), Shri Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair (playwright and actor), Shri K. T. Mohammed (playwright and director), Shri T. N. Gopinathan Nair (radio playwright) and Shri Champakulam Pachu Pillai (kathakali artiste).

P. Memorial Lecture

This year's Mahakavi P. Kunhiraman Nair Memorial Lecture was delivered by Mahakavi Vyloppillil Sreedhara Menon on 27th May at the N. S. S. Hall, Kottayam. Shri K. M. Mathew, Chief Editor, the *Malayala Manorama*, presided over the function.

70th Birthday of Mahakavi M. P. Appan

The celebrations of the 70th birthday of Mahakavi M. P. Appan was inaugurated by Shri P. Ramachandran, Governor of Kerala, on 21st June at the V. J. T. Hall, Trivandrum.

The celebration committee has decided to give an award of

Rs. 1000/- in the name Shri Appan to the best book of poetry in Malayalam every year.

Suvarnakairali Trust

The 'Suvarnakairali Trust' was formed to give an Award in the name of Sahitya Nipunan T. M. Chummar for the best collection of essays in Malayalam every year. The first meeting held under the presidency of Shri M. K. Madhavan Nair elected Shri. C. P. Sreedharan (President) Shri. T. K. C. Vaduthala and Shri. P. M. Jusse (Vice-Presidents) Shri Tatapuram Sukumaran (Secretary) and Prof. Mathew Ulakamthara (Treasurer) as the officials of the trust.

Kairali Children's Book Trust

Shri. K. M. Mathew (President) Shri D. C. Kizhakkemuri (Secretary) and Shri. K. Jose Thomas (Treasurer) were elected as officials of the Kairali Children's Book Trust.

Kathakali Troupe in China

A troupe of Kathakali artistes under the leadership of Shri. P. K. Warriar, Chief Physician of Kottakkal Arya Vaidyasala, visited China in June 1983, on a performing tour.

Seminar

A two-day seminar was conducted at Parur in the third week

of May to pay homage to the memory of the great scholar, thinker and critic Kesari A. Balakrishna Pillai (1889-1960) under the auspices of *Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sanghom* Justice T. Chandra-sekhara Menon presided and Shri C. Achutha Menon inaugurated the seminar.

125th Birth Anniversary of C. V. Raman Pillai

The 125th birth anniversary of C. V. Raman Pillai (1858-1922), the great Malayalam novelist, was celebrated from 19th to 22nd May at Trivandrum by the C. V. Raman Pillai National Foundation and the Birthday Celebration Committee. Shri. K. M. Mani, State Finance Minister, presided over the function and Shri K. Karunakaran, Chief Minister, inaugurated the celebrations.

Film on Pakkanar

The Government of Kerala has decided to produce documentary films. The first film will be on Pakkanar, a folk hero of wisdom belonging to the paraiah community.

C. Radhakrishnan

Shri. C. Radhakrishnan has been elected State President of 'Yuvakala Sahiti'

C. V. Celebrations at Abudhabi

The 125th birth anniversary of C. V. Raman Pillai was

celebrated at Abudhabi under the auspices of Abudhabi Malayala Samajam. Prof. G. Sankara Pillai presided over the function.

Obituary

E. M. Kovo or

E. M. K o v o o r (b. 23-2-1906) the well-known Malayalam novelist and short story writer passed away on 30th April. He retired from Government service as a District and Sessions Judge in 1961.



He had served as a member of the General Council of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, the Thunchan Smaraka Samithi and the Governing Body of the

Rural Institute of Thavanur. His published works include about twenty collections of short stories, half a dozen novels, three plays, two biographies and many collections of essays.

Kovo or first made his mark as an essayist with a keen sense of humour and as a short story writer of great charm. But he will be better remembered as the author of powerful novels like *Kodumudikal* (Peaks) *Kaadu* (The Forest) *Mala* (The Mountain) and *Mullu* (The Thorn) in which he distinguished himself as the satirical chronicler of the life of Travancore Christians, especially, the richer sections among them.

Our Contributors

[Biographical notes on some of the contributors have appeared in previous issues and in such cases details are not repeated]



Vilasini M. K. Menon (b. 1928) who writes under the name Vilasini is a major figure among contemporary Malayalam novelists. He spent more than two decades as a journalist in Singapore and rose to the position of the South East Asian Director of the international news agency A. F. P. He returned to Kerala to concentrate on creative writing. His novels which deal with the intricacies of human relationships have won for him the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, the Central Sahitya Akademi Award and the Vayalar Award.



Dr. V. S. Sarma (b. 1936) Linguist, scholar, literary critic and connoisseur of various performing arts, Dr. Sarma is currently a Reader in the Department of Malayalam, University of Kerala, Trivandrum. He is well-known for his scholarly study of the life and work of Kunchan Nampiar, and his critical edition of Nampiar's works.

G. Kumara Pillai (b. 1923) is a former Professor of English and a well-known poet in Malayalam.



P. Kesava Dev (b. 1904) is one of the most colourful figures in modern Malayalam literature. A born rebel, he has identified himself with all contemporary movements for social, political and cultural change. He was one of our early Marxists and one of the pioneers of our progressive literature movement. He was the oldest member in the illustrious group of writers who ushered in the golden age of the Malayalam short story in the thirties

and inaugurated the second creative period in the history of our novel in the forties. He is a prolific writer and has dozens of novels and hundreds of stories to his credit. Dev's novel *Odayil Ninnu* (From the Gutter) is one of our great classics.

Dr. Celine Mathew (b. 1930) who has translated Dev's story is currently Head of the Department of German in the University of Kerala. She has translated widely from German into Malayalam and from Malayalam into English.



Olappamanna Subrahmanian Nambudiripad (b. 1923) who writes under the name Olappamanna is one of our well-known poets. He has distinguished himself as a dedicated writer who combines a deep concern for human values with careful craftsmanship. The long poem *Nangemakkuty* is the masterpiece of Olappamanna who has published more than a dozen volumes of poetry

He is equally interested in business activities and the performing arts and is currently Chairman of the governing body of the Kerala Kala Mandalam, the famous school of Kathakali.

O. T. J. Menon (b. 1931) who has translated Olappamanna's poems is an administrator in the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bombay. He has translated many Malayalam poems into English and is author of a book of original poems in English, *Stray Petals*.

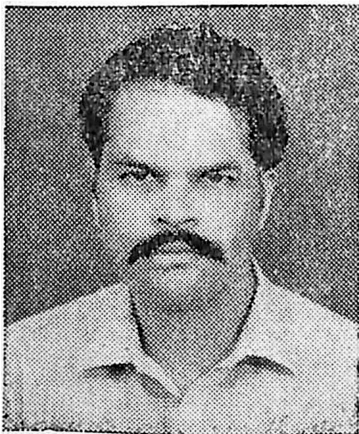
S. Guptan Nair (b. 1919) Formerly a Professor of Malayalam and a Principal in the Kerala Collegiate Education Service, he is an eminent literary critic.



K. P. Sasidharan (b. 1938) is one of our well-known literary critics of the younger generation. He has published seven books of criticism including *Russian Literature What and Why?* for which he won the Soviet Land Nehru Award for 1982. He has also brought out four novels and three collections of short stories in addition to some translations of world classics.

Shri. Sasidharan is a Professor in the Department of English, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam.

K. M. Tharakan (b. 1930) is a prominent critic and literary historian in Malayalam. He is a Professor of English by profession.



K. P. Vasu (b. 1935) who teaches English in Government College, Madappally, Calicut District, is well-known as an organiser of sports and cultural programmes. He is a perceptive literary critic who has published some interesting essays in journals.

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Editorial

Malayalam Literature, 1982

It was last year that we introduced a special feature on the previous year's work in Malayalam. We had then expressed the hope to make it an annual feature and so we are happy to include in our current issue a symposium entitled "Malayalam Literature, 1982"

We quote a sentence from our last year's Editorial Note: "The aim of a survey of this kind is to highlight the main trends, the significant books and the important authors of the year in each major branch of literature along with an account of the publishing industry so as to give an over-all picture of the literary scene". At that time we were able to get only five of the seven articles we had commissioned. This time we have got only four of them - on the novel, literary criticism, poetry and drama. The missing articles are those on the short story, general prose and the publishing industry. We have also failed in our attempt to include a bibliography of Malayalam books in English translation and original English works on Malayalam language and literature. We are sorry that the symposium is thus incomplete; but we hope that the articles we have printed give a bird's-eye view of the developments in four of the main branches of our literature in 1982.

Last year we had touched upon the difficulties involved in organizing and publishing a survey of this kind. Our awareness of the difficulties has become deeper; and yet our belief in the worthiness of the scheme has not weakened. We are sure that a survey of the previous year's work in Malayalam will not only promote the study of Malayalam literature but help the evolution of Indian literary culture as a whole by providing opportunities for a comparative study of Indian literature. We shall, therefore, spare no pains in making this a regular annual feature and making this feature as comprehensive as possible.

P Kesava Dev (1904-1983)



P. Kesava Dev passed away on the 1st of July 1983. He was in his 80th year and had been ailing for the past three or four years.

Dev was the seniormost member of the illustrious group of writers who brought about the efflorescence of the Malayalam short story in the thirties of this century; and his *Odayilninnu* (From the Gutter) which came out in the early

forties was one of the heralds of the second creative period in the history of the Malayalam novel. He was also well-known as a social rebel and as a very strong spokesman for dissent.

Dev was the author of several books including 20 novels, 17 collections of short stories 12 plays and an autobiography. His novel *Ayalkar* (Neighbours) won the Central Sahitya Akademi Award and the *Soviet Land* Nehru Award. His earlier novel, *Odayilninnu*, which is regarded as a classic, has been filmed; it has also been translated into English.

Born in an impoverished family, Dev had little formal education. With his sympathy for the down-trodden, he actively participated in their struggle for emancipation. He was among the pioneers who organized the labour movement and propagated leftist ideas in the state and the book he wrote on the Russian Revolution was the first of its kind in Malayalam. Dev was also among the foremost champions of progressive literature when the movement began to spread in Kerala in the thirties.

Though he spent most of his time as a writer and as an agitator, he worked for sometime as Producer at the Trivandrum Station of All India Radio; and in 1966-'68 he was President of S. P. C. S., our prestigious writers' co-operative society.

Dev was keenly interested in the growth of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi. He was its President from 1974 to 1977 and in 1981 the Akademi honoured him with the conferment of a Fellowship.

The demise of Kesava Dev is an irreparable loss to Malayalam literature and to public life in Kerala.

Vision And Design In the Indian Historical Novel

V. K. Gokak

It is always a pleasure to be on a visit to Kerala in the midst of its forests near the sea and in the company of its stimulating writers and critics. It is all the more delightful when there are literary and cultural engagements and some useful work is done in a collective manner.

It is a matter of pleasure and pride to inaugurate this seminar on the occasion of the hundred and twentyfifth anniversary of C. V. Raman Pillai, the father of the historical novel in Malayalam. It is due to the pioneering efforts of eminent writers like Raman Pillai in Kerala, Bankim in Bengal, H. N. Apte in Maharashtra, Vasudevachar Kerur in Karnataka and K. M. Munshi in Gujarat that the historical novel has come into its own in India.

The novel, realistic narration of the story of a certain section of society with characters drawn

from a wide range, is itself a form of recent origin. 1742 A.D. is, in fact, the year in which Richardson's *Pamela*, the first English novel, was born. The English historical novel came during the early decades of the nineteenth century and Sir Walter Scott was its father. Scott cultivated both the varieties of the historical novel—the romance as well as the novel—and *Ivanhoe* and *The Heart of Midlothian* illustrate the two types.

It is said that Raman Pillai's *Martanda Varma* was modelled on Scott's *Ivanhoe*. *Martanda Varma* is a historical romance. It does not, like a novel, confine itself to the narration of ordinary incidents and the portrayal of common human beings. Pillai's famous trilogy on the history of Travancore State becomes colourful and romantic narration.

Inaugural address: Regional Seminar on C. V. Raman Pillai held at Trichur on 10—11 September, 1983.

(2)

The historical romance or novel is a difficult genre. The novel is an imaginative representation of reality and it usually blends the real with the ideal, even in a fantasy like *Alice in Wonderland*. There is a substratum of reality on which the edifice of fantasy has to be raised. To this reality already present in the plan of a novel, the historical novelist brings in famous battles and encounters, real characters whose fame has already reached the readers, historical colour and a background of real life vivified by the imagination, the sayings and the famous writings of the time. If the writer is intensely aware of the times he depicts, he even introduces into the dialogues of his characters the somewhat archaic flavour of the language of those times, promoting the historical illusion, effectively in this manner. The 'past' is thus recreated instead of the 'present'. There is a 'recreation' of this kind even in a 'period novel' like Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale*, where it is only the changing background from the 'past' to the 'present' that is described vividly.

This brings us directly to the conflict that exists in the heart of the historical novel – the

conflict between the creative imagination which is responsible for all the imaginary characters and incidents in the novel and the constructive imagination which recreates the historical characters, incidents and the background material and language of the story. These two aspects of the novel cannot lie apart. The products of the two kinds of imagination have to interact and inter-mingle practically at every step. They have to balance each other. If this is not done and if one side is given more prominence than the other, the result will be extremely uneven. If the historical side is taken lightly, the work will turn out to be just a novel rather than a historical novel, like Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*. If the novelist takes the historical element too seriously weighing it down by its claptrap and pedantic diction, the novel will be more history than fiction, like *Richard Yea and Nay*.

In the early Indian historical novel, the authors do not seem to have paid much attention to the need to be faithful to the language of the historical period. They write in a somewhat florid and sanskritized diction and Raman Pillai seems to have been no exception to it. Hari Narayan Apte, or at least his

contemporary, Galaganath, who translated him into Kannada, uses odd phrases like '*Kimbahuna, ata eva, evancha*' and so on. But the novelists were also careful enough to preserve, in the midst of their own modern writing, faithful bits of historical fidelity and propriety: "*Yaa Alla Paravaradigar! Toba Tob.i!*" like Scott's archaisms (Quotha! Go thy ways etc.) even in the midst of a cumbrous diction.

Like Scott, Raman Pillai rarely permits his creative imagination to be damped by many historical details. Sardar Panicker, on the other hand, seems to have attached enormous importance to historical veracity. On the whole, great writers like Shakespeare and Scott are the best teachers of history for, within the broad circumference of historical truth, they appeal strongly to the imagination of the young and fill them with a sense of national pride and destiny.

On the other hand, there are plays like Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln* and imaginative biographies like Andre Maurois' *Disraeli* and *Ariel* (Shelley) which push the sword of imagination into the heart of the historical material itself. Historical characters are subject-

ed to a keen analysis and situations are invented which the reader has never heard of. These are invented for they are assumed to be able to throw a flood of light on certain ascertainable traits of the historical personages whom they have portrayed. An exercise of this kind in unbridled imagination damages the historical illusion which the novelist is trying to build up so painstakingly. For instance, Bernard Shaw depicts Shakespeare's waiting in the corridor when Queen Elizabeth comes sleepwalking and says: "All the smells of Arabia will not whiten this Tudor hand." (Later, this becomes the inspiration for Lady Macbeth's "All the smells of Arabia will not whiten this little hand."). In this improbable way Shaw guesses cleverly how Shakespeare borrowed his phrases. Again in her play, *Will Shakespeare*, Clemence Dane shows Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth conversing. In an excited moment, Shakespeare says bluntly to the queen: "Goi!"

(3)

On the whole, then, the unique excellence of a historical novel lies in a proper blend of the creative imagination which creates anew and the reconstructive imagination which

recreates the past. We may now raise the question: What should the design of the historical novelist be like?

(1) As for the design, the leading historical figure will never be in the centre of the novel, only in the periphery. An imaginary character will be the hero and be placed in the centre as such. The historical character will have only secondary attention. He cannot sustain full prominence. If he is placed in the centre, he will have to be delineated like the hero of an imaginative biography — with inventions, and 'stream of consciousness' musings, which will take away from the veracity of the sketch.

(2) Next, as in Shakespeare's history plays, a historical novelist may telescope events, alter them chronologically by changing the order of events a little and suppress those events which are not a part of his design in order to make his entire presentation significant.

(3) Some historical personages survive in the people's imagination as great heroes and some others as notorious villains. The folk image of Henry V was that he was a great king and warrior. In actual life, he was a harsh person and not so much

liked. Richard III's popular image was that he was an unredeemed villain, whereas he was not so bad after all. The popular image has power and it makes the portraiture interesting. That is why it is better to adhere to the popular image than form one after patient research.

(4) A novel is neither a treatise nor a thesis. To add a number of scholarly footnotes to the novel is effectively to kill the reader's interest in it. What is required is not documentation but creative interpretation and representation. For this reason, Ben Jonson's plays became diagrammatic rather than dramatic. The characters were constructed according to a recipe or formula in *Sejanus*. What is required is to imagine the essential qualities of a historical character intensely and pass him through situations which are broadly known to be historical.

(5) If historical accuracy is to be preserved in the kind of language that characters are made to speak in, a historical novel, if it is to be written in English, will have to be written in Old English or Middle English, if the events in the novel belong to Old or Middle English times. Scott made a suggestion here

which is worth remembering. The style of dialogues etc. should not have too antique a flavour, whatever the epoch to which the events of the novel belong. The language used by the generation of the grandfather of the contemporary reader would be neither too near to nor too far from the reader. This would create the required illusion of a historical atmosphere.

Many devices of this kind are used by a historical novelist with success.

(4)

The vision of the historical novelist is much more subtle than the design or the constructive ability which implements it. The vision is concerned with the perspective in which the novelist decides to view the raw material as a whole, the historical events as well as the imaginary episodes and personages. He has to see his characters silhouetted against the past and conditioned by the atmosphere far removed from that of his own times. For instance, Raman Pillai's romances reveal the utter instability and chaos of those feudal times. The kind of houses in which the characters lived, their dress, their manners, the literature they read, the language they spoke, their interaction with those

around them: the novelist will have to attend to all these factors to see that historical propriety is observed.

At the same time, the novelist has to make sure that the characters are not mere puppets moved by the strings of history but live human beings having their own initiatives, urges and passions. They should come out alive and the reader has to be made to feel that they are alive. This is the mystery of creation which the novelist's intuition and imagination alone can achieve. The vitality with which writers like Dickens and Shakespeare create is inexhaustible. That is why it has been said that, next to God, Shakespeare has created most.

A third requirement is the view of the history of the period that the novelist takes. Every student of history knows that a reading of history may be based on a theory of eternal recurrence or a random fluctuation of events and a flux of human motives about which nothing can be predicted. From this latter point of view, history is almost kaleidoscopic circumstance. Or it may be that a certain purpose, imperceptible initially, keeps unfolding itself down the centuries, evolving towards a far-off event towards

which as Tennyson says, the whole creation tends to move. Each novelist, though he does not explicitly profess this view or that, has an incipient view of history which colours his novel. Or, as Tolstoy does in his *War and Peace*, the novelist will give an epic or panoramic view of reality,—the glory and the shame, the evil and the good, the causation and the casualness of the whole chain of events, their impact of joy or sorrow on the group or counter-group and the precise position of persons and events on the chess-board of destiny will be made perceptible with utter objectivity. The personal, epochal and universal significance of the whole panorama is conveyed with the subtlety of a remarkable seership. This is no

mere intellectual attitude controlling mechanically the words used by a historical novelist. The attitude will pulsate in the very heart of the novel and colour every scene in it.

One does not know whether the Indian historical novel has produced such a masterpiece as yet. One has to study together the most esteemed novels produced in modern India and arrive at a conclusion which may be acceptable to many. Comparative studies of this kind are the need of the hour.

I have, once more, great pleasure in inaugurating this seminar organized in honour of Raman Pillai as a mark of our tribute to his cherished memory on the occasion of his hundred and twentyfifth anniversary.

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Special Features Of The Historical Novel

Dr. K. M. George

The essence of a novel is a story and one of the first qualifications of a novelist is to understand the art of telling a story. A story has an incident or a series of connected incidents, and some characters that figure in them. The novelist gives proper shape to his story by making use of the various elements that he has observed or experienced in actual life or read about in books and documents. His imagination helps him to weave the plot and create suitable characters from his vast stock of experience.

Now what is the basic difference between "pure fiction" and "historical fiction"; or rather the social novel and the historical novel? In pure fiction, the novelist is supposed to be completely free to use his imagination as regards incidents, plot and characters. In the historical fiction however he has to exercise some restraint. The

skeleton of the story must have a historical bearing and some characters at least must be historical personages. Even so, he has to be considerably free to manipulate the facts of history and interpret them in his own way, as otherwise he will make a poor novelist. From the cupboards of history, he selects his own skeletons and gives them flesh and blood. Thus the dull and drab facts of history become lively and interesting accounts. To be effective in the reordering of materials and recreation of characters, two canons have been fixed by Sir Walter Scott, the pioneer among historical novelists. First, it is unwise to unload too much of history into the plot of a novel; and second, it is not desirable to have real historical figures among the leading characters. If one adheres to these two canons, the term 'historical fiction' is justifiable; otherwise it will be a contradiction in

terms. Consider the terms fact and history on the one hand, and fiction and fancy on the other. Can we say that the historical novel has only fact and no fiction; and that the social novel has only fiction and no facts? Neither is true. According to me in all kinds of novels whether historical or social, we have both facts and fiction. It is a question of proportion and identifiability. Some incidents in a historical novel are recognizable as facts of history, and some characters are real historical personages. But there are also incidents and characters in them which are the results of the fertile imagination of the novelist; otherwise the novel will fail as a creative work. Pure fiction also will contain incidents and factual elements which cannot be easily related to history. These elements are sometimes myriads of tiny bits from which the artist makes his mosaic. It is the author's prerogative to use them and also introduce certain characters which he has observed in real life with modifications to suit the texture of the plot. So then, what is the essential difference between the historical novel and the social novel?

In our search for truth, it is not only facts that help us, but

fiction also, if properly designed and used. We are interested in knowing the truths about human beings, how they lived in the past, their problems, tensions, prejudices and quarrels, their enjoyments and pleasures, both in their collective lives and individual lives. We are also interested in getting a deeper insight into life in contemporary society. And literature should help us in our discovery of truth. Gandhiji has said that God is Truth. He has also said that whenever men begin to see beauty in truth, then true art will arise. As the old adage says 'Truth lies at the bottom of the well' The real novelist helps us to get a better grasp of the truth. We have to examine the special role of the historical novelist in this regard.

In most Indian literatures, the social novel has preceded the historical novel and Malayalam is no exception in this regard. But the gap between the two in the case of Malayalam is just two years. Chandu Menon and C. V. Raman Pillai are two titans in the field of Malayalam novel. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha*, published in 1889, is the first social novel of significance in Malayalam, though there had been some minor attempts earlier. Two

years later, i.e. in 1891, C. V. Raman Pillai made a debut by his historical novel *Marthanda Varma*. A comparison of these two novels, as also the respective approaches of the authors, will shed some light on the common as well as the distinctive features of the social novel and the historical novel.

Chandu Menon, a voracious reader of English novels, decided to write one in Malayalam following the English pattern, mainly to satisfy his wife who did not know English. He selected a local theme and it clicked. He took a good look at the social and cultural life around him. A deplorable degeneration was noticeable in the social structure relating to the two predominant communities of Nayers and Nambudiris. Nayar women belonging to respectable families were treated as mere playthings by high caste Nambudiris and the orthodox Nayar parents considered this too venerable a tradition to be broken. The matriarchal system contributed to the irresponsible ways of the Nambudiris. Chandu Menon wanted to expose this kind of lopsided custom. He wanted the Nayar community to have equal status and privileges. He also wanted the women to have better education and to enjoy

equal status with men. The novel *Indulekha* beautifully advocates all these and it has been a thumping success. The heroine Indulekha, her sophisticated lover Madhavan, and the suitor Suri Nambudiripad are all fascinating characters. (The novel had an English translation in 1891 by W. Dumergue).

Indulekha was a rare treat to readers in Malayalam. C. V. Raman Pillai's *Marthanda Varma* was also hailed by the readers in Malayalam as it opened their eyes to the manner in which local history could be exploited for creative purposes. In weaving together fact and fiction, history and imagination, C.V. was remarkably successful. As soon as the novel was published, *The Hindu* of Madras gave it a special recognition by publishing an editorial on the novel, something unusual for a standard English daily like *The Hindu*. While Chandu Menon invented the plot and created all characters from imagination, C. V. reconstructed history and recreated certain historical characters. Marthanda Varma is the name of the raja who once ruled over Venad which later grew into Travancore State. The internecine feud which he had with his cousins, the Thampis, over the title to rule the kingdom

provides the background for the story. The central character of the romance, however, is Ananta Padmanabhan a lieutenant of the prince. His romance is the most gripping part of the novel. Till the very end the narrative goes on with added momentum and suspense, until finally the royal authority is established and the lovers are brought together.

It is obvious that in structuring this novel, C. V. was considerably influenced by Scott's *Ivanhoe*. Similarly Chandu Menon was inspired by Victorian novels. Chandu Menon dealt with contemporary society and depicted characters with realism and exposed the deformities in society. C. V. on the other hand invested the dim past with colour and romance. It is difficult to compare the relative merits of realism and romanticism. But one should admit that both approaches are discernible in the novels of either of them; only that realism predominates in Chandu Menon's social novels and romanticism in the historical novels of C. V.

Though *Marthanda Varma* has a special place in the history of the Malayalam novel, *Dharmaraja* and *Ramarajabhadur* the two other historical novels written by C. V. are

considered more mature creations. All the three novels have their basic themes drawn from Travancore history of the 18th century. Quite a few of the characters in them are historical personalities. But there are countless characters and several incidents introduced by the author from his own imagination. Ananta Padmanabhan, Chanthrakkaran, Haripanchanan, Perinchakotan and Kesavan Unnithan are a few of the colourful personalities that he has introduced. The characters are drawn so convincingly that each one has a distinctive personality. The historical and fictitious characters have been mixed; so also real incidents and imaginary incidents. Yet through all this mixing and blending, C. V. has succeeded in giving a ring of authenticity to life in 18th century Travancore. Through *Indulekha* and *Sarada* Chandu Menon has given us a true picture of 19th century Malabar, though all his characters and elements of plot are fictitious. So the question arises: What is the relevance of facts of history and of real incidents in understanding the truth of human life? Are we not considerably dependent on the artist's view of life and his interpretation of the facts of history and the social situation

that he encounters? Yet historical incidents and historical personalities have their own importance in our understanding of the past.

A novel is considered historical only when it deals with certain facts of history, which naturally involve certain personalities. History is the record of important events in the life of a community. Biography is the true story of real human beings who have influenced society. Both are important for our understanding of the past and both are interconnected and complementary. When imagination flows into history and makes it alluring and attractive, it becomes historical romance; so also when imagination colours biography, it becomes a kind of fiction-biography, like Andre Maurois's *Ariel*, which is most entertaining and illuminating. Historical romance cannot replace history, neither can fiction-biography replace the conventional type of biography.

In most historical novels in India we see a tendency to glorify the past and glamorize certain leading characters. This is probably a deliberate device to arouse in the readers a pride in their heritage. Bankim Chandra of Bengali has written

as many as eight novels dealing with historical incidents and characters. He himself states that "A novel is a novel, not a history." According to him a novelist should concern himself with inner matters, not with history. The truth is that history plays an unreal role in most of his novels. The ordinary man is practically absent from Bankim's novels. His historical novels abound in melodramatic incidents; he allows his heroes and heroines to accomplish fantastic feats. As a historical novelist in Bengali, Ramesh Chandra Dutta is more acceptable.

Hari Narayan Apte has made a very substantial contribution to the historical novel in Marathi. His *Ushakal* centering on the life of Shivaji and *Vajrakhat* (Thunderbolt) on the Vijayanagar empire are well-known. Through these novels he has fired the patriotic feelings of every Maharashtrian.

A great name to be remembered when one discusses the historical novel in Tamil is that of Kalki R. Krishnamurthy. His *Parthipan Kanavu* and *Ponniyin Selvan* are particularly well known. He is a master story-teller who has extolled Tamil history with a hypnotising touch.

Chilakamarthy Lakshmi Narasimham (Pantulu) is a well-known Telugu novelist who has drawn upon Andhra history. The delineation of character and description of places like the Godavari Delta are considered spicy and charming. He is also not wanting in exalting the great achievements of the past.

As mentioned already, C. V. Raman Pillai also has glorified the past; he has introduced not only heroes and superhuman beings, but lesser folk also to fill up the pages of the novels so that a wider canvass on which humanity is painted is set before us. But one cannot say that he is fully critical in his concept of history. He depended largely on the meagre historical information available and the stories current in his own time.

In this context, it seems worthwhile to recall a few attempts by modern novelists to investigate and present forces of decay and disintegration rather than presenting an epoch of glory. When I say this I have in mind the two Kannada novels *Chennabasava Nayaka* (1950) and *Chikkavira Rajendra* (1956) by Masti Venkatesha Iyengar. Here Masti boldly portrays certain communities that have become

incapable of subduing the forces of corruption and disintegration. For taking this critical attitude, he was questioned seriously and attacked by a section of the public.

This type of historical novel with a modern scientific and critical approach is yet to develop in our country. Here the focus is the *inward life* of the real people and not the *external life* and exploits of heroes and warriors. This means a lot of research and study and not merely a play of imagination. If C.V. Raman Pillai were to write now historical novels based on 18th century Travancore, I dare say that the products would be considerably different. The modern tendency is to devote more attention to the thoughts than to the actions of the central characters. This again is a fallible and precarious method.

Every author reflects in his work his own opinions and the opinions of his age. And he will not be above partiality when he deals with his own heritage, however objective he would like to be. But the deep insight of the creative writer can pierce to the heart of things and reveal truth better than what his counterpart can do in conventional history. □

Kesava Dev-The Man And The Writer

C. Achutha Menon

P. Kesava Dev was one among the galaxy of young men who came on the literary scene in Malayalam during the thirties and blazed a new trail. The era of the great trio of Asan, Vallathol and Ulloor had ended. Although the latter two passed away only in the fifties, their creative period had come to an end by about 1930. People's taste had turned from poetry to prose, especially fiction. A new and larger class of readers had come on the scene. It was a time of great awakening among the common people. Although the two great phases of the civil disobedience movement had ended in failure, they had brought about a great churning of people's minds, with the ideas of liberty, equality and brotherhood spreading far and wide. With the victory of socialism in the USSR and the successful completion of its first five year plan, a great boost was given to socialist ideas. Thousands of young men who had come out of jails found them-

selves thrown on the world at large without jobs. Stirred by the new ideas they threw themselves into day-to-day political and social activities. It was as a result of their efforts that hundreds of village libraries were started all over Kerala. These libraries naturally created a taste for reading. Something was needed to cater to their needs. The new periodicals like the *Mathrubhoomi* Weekly, and the *Malayalarajyam* Weekly came forward to satisfy the craving for literary fare among the newly awakened class of readers. They would not be satisfied by the usual journalistic stuff in the form of articles and write-ups on serious topics. Something lighter and more entertaining was needed. The short story was the most suitable literary form to satisfy this need. And thus a large number of short stories came to be written during this period. No periodical could thereafter appear without a short story. And most of the new young writers like Thakazhi,

Pottekatt, Basheer, Karur and Ponkunnam Varkey began to write short stories. Kesava Dev (1904—1983) was one among these. Changampuzha, the poet, was the only notable exception.

Although Kesava Dev acquired his literary reputation first as a short story writer, he was when he began writing, principally a political propagandist and agitator. Born in a middle class Nair family in North Parur in the erstwhile Travancore state, he suffered all the deprivation and neglect that was the lot of junior members of a matriarchal family. His only solace was his mother for whom he entertained the deepest feelings of adoration and love. But the mother had no means of providing her son with any of the good things of life. Dev could not even complete his education upto the tenth standard. But the boy gained a lot of experience by freely mixing with all sorts of people, including those among the low-caste untouchables which was anathema at that time to people of the Nair caste. Later on he became a voracious reader dipping freely into the libraries of such intellectuals of the time as Ramavarma Thampan, the noted rationalist, and later still of Barrister A. K. Pillai, the Congressman and A. Balakrishna

Pillai, the famous literary critic and editor. Thus was laid the foundation of Dev's literary career.

As noted earlier, Dev did not start his public career as a writer, but rather as a social and political worker and publicist. His adolescent experience in the surroundings in N. Parur engendered in him a fierce hatred of the caste-ridden feudal social system. 'Sahodaran' Ayyappan, the great crusader against caste was living just in the neighbouring village of Cherai. Ayyappan's ideas made a very strong impression on the young Kesava Dev. His intense hatred of the caste system impelled him to join the Arya Samaj. It was during this period of his apprenticeship in public life that Parameswaran Pillai Kesava Pillai became Kesava Dev in true Arya Samaj style. Ever after he was to be known by that appellation.

His hobnobbing with the Arya Samaj was short-lived. Newer ideas captured his imagination, the ideas of socialism, the vision of a new world without castes and inequalities. Meanwhile he had also become an agitator, an orator and propagandist, stalking from one end of Kerala to the other. He also felt the urge for writing and

began to contribute articles to the newspapers and periodicals for which he got sometimes a pittance and sometimes nothing. It was during this period that he wrote his famous work *The Fire and the Spark*, a brief account of the events and ideas of the first socialist revolution in the world, viz., the October Revolution in Russia. Kesava Dev can truly claim to be the first propagator of socialist ideas in Malayalam.

But living was becoming an acute problem to the young man. His journalistic work could not sustain him and he had no other means of livelihood. There were days when he had not even a single meal. He saw hunger and poverty in all its nakedness. It is no wonder that throughout his works one can see stark pictures of poverty and its consequences. But it must be said to his credit that there is no morbidity in his works and he never loses the zest for life and faith in human goodness.

It was in the above circumstances that he tried his hand at short story writing. Suddenly he discovered that he could write popular stories. Kesava Dev used to say that he was not one who set out with the aim to be a writer. He wrote out of sheer compulsion—the compulsion of his

circumstances, as well as the inner compulsion to write. He never thought that what he wrote would be reckoned as literature. But the people who read his stories told him that it was good literature. The publishers were willing to pay for his stories decently and thus it was that he became a short story writer, one of the foremost in Malayalam during that period.

As short story writer and novelist it was to the credit of Kesava Dev along with his contemporaries to have brought the common people into literature. Hitherto it was the gods and goddesses, the kings and queens, the nobility, the poets and philosophers who peopled literature. For the first time in Malayalam literature we find in Kesava Dev's stories, the rickshaw-puller, the headload worker, the weaver in the coir-factory, the panshopwala and the boatman as hero and the sweeper and fishvender as heroine. Dev portrays the bitter struggle for existence of these lowly people, their poverty and hard life, their little joys and sorrows, with a sympathy and understanding, which is unrivalled. Dev is a propagandist of socialist ideas and his aim in portraying the hard life and struggles of the common people is to show how rotten present

day society is and the necessity to bring about revolutionary changes in the social order so that those who labour and sweat and create all the wealth of this world may lead a happy life. But it must be noted that there is very little of direct propaganda in the best of his stories, nay, even in the majority of his stories. For Dev never forgets that he is an artist and his function is to portray real men and women in flesh and blood and not robots working to order at the command of the author as examples of certain ideas. Of course, it is true that in some stories Kesava Dev does fall into the temptation of becoming a political propagandist and lectures or harangues through his characters. But such stories are few. The majority of his stories are portrayals of real life situations of real men and women. Even in such a story as the *Red Volunteer* which is directly connected with a strike in Alleppey, the strike is only in the background. The shouts of the crowd and the sound of the police firing are heard from the distance, but the actual scene is in a worker's hut where his wife is struggling with the pains of childbirth, with nobody to attend on her and the husband is torn between his duty to his

class which demands his presence in front of the marching workers and his duty to his wife suffering helplessly the pangs of childbirth. It is the portayal of the mental agony of the worker torn between conflicting emotions that makes the story gripping.

Or take the story of the cool drinks vendor and the little girl. A little girl of thirteen who does her daily chore of delivering milk in the houses of the townspeople stops one day in front of the cooldrinks vendor Ahmed, wishfully looking at the bottles on his table, containing the sweet cool drinks. Unable to contain her desire any longer she begs the vendor to give her a little cool drink free. The man at first refuses but subsequently taking pity on the poor girl, gives her a little. She feels immensely grateful to him. Thereafter she comes to him everyday, doing him small services such as tidying his premises, sweeping the floor etc, and sometimes bringing him delicacies from home such as jackfruit pulp. At the end of the dry season, the vendor prepares to leave the place, packing up his things. The little girl is sad at finding this and her eyes fill with tears. The cool drink vendor misreads

the meaning of her tears and offers her a two-anna piece to assuage her feelings. The girl indignantly refuses it. Ahmed asks her why she is crying. She does not answer, but only looks wistfully as he disappears in the distance with his belongings. She is too young herself to know the meaning of those tears and perhaps Ahmed also doesn't know. The perceptive reader however will know that it is the void created in her heart by the sudden snapping of the friendship that had developed between the two. In this story there is not a trace of class war, neither is there any hint of any ideological propaganda. But in the background is the stark reality of the depth of poverty which deprives the little girl of even the enjoyment of a little sweet cool drink. It is not however this that stands out in the story, but the basic humanity of the two characters, the cool drink vendor Ahmed and the little girl. The best stories of Kesava Dev are of this type written in a realistic style.

There are a few stories of Dev in what may be called the romantic style. The very names of the stories would suggest their content and style. "The Poet," "The Songstress" and "The Unknown Poet" are some of

them. In these stories Dev leaves the familiar ground of the life he knows and deals with imagined situations and characters. The style is pompous and stilted unlike Dev's usual style which is simple, crisp and scintillating. There is too much of sentimentality in these stories. Fortunately the number of stories Dev has written in this style is few.

From writing short stories Dev turned to writing novels with his publication of the novel *Odayil Ninmu* (From the Drains) in the forties. This was a notable event in the history of modern Malayalam literature. Although the Malayalam novel can be said to have come of age with the publication of O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* in 1889, there was a long period of stagnation for the novel after the time of Chandu Menon and his later contemporary, C. V. Raman Pillai, who specialised in historical novels. This period lasted a quarter of a century during which no significant novel appeared in Malayalam literature. Whatever was published in the name of the novel was mere trash. None of them have fortunately survived to this day. It was in these circumstances that Dev came on the scene with his *From the Drains* (1942).

In more respects than one *From the Drains* is an outstanding novel. Some consider it to be Dev's masterpiece. It can hardly be called a novel, because of its short length. At best it is a novelette. But that however is not an important matter. For the first time in Malayalam, a worker, a rickshaw-puller was made the hero of the novel. And what a hero! A true hero in every sense of the word; and in every inch of his being a man of sterling, even of outrageous independence. Reluctant to serve under a master, he becomes his own master by becoming a rickshaw-puller. He earns his living by hard labour. But he finds a meaning in life only after he has picked up a little girl from the drains; and he brings her up as his daughter. Thereafter his whole life centres upon the girl. He fulfils her every desire and brings her up as a gentlewoman. The girl, however, is ashamed to acknowledge among her classmates her real relationship with her foster-father. But Gopinathan, a rich young man who becomes her lover corrects her ungrateful attitude. Although Pappu gives his blessing to the marriage of Lakshmi to Gopinathan, he doesn't attend even their marriage

ceremony but leaves them and walks away into the distance, a broken and sick man.

As can be gathered from the above short summary of the story, there is an element of romanticism in the novel. It is present even in the delineation of the character of Pappu. For the rest it is a realistic novel. It is useless to analyse critically the structure of the novel and its other characteristics, because its chief significance is the truly epic character of Pappu himself within the canvas of a short novel.

After his first novel which got universal acclaim among Malayalam-speaking people, Kesava Dev wrote a dozen or more novels. The most important of them are *Bhranthalayam* (The Lunatic Asylum) *Ayalkar* (Neighbours) *Kannadi* (The Mirror) *Rowdy* (The Rowdy) *Ulakka* (The Paddy Pounder) *Sundariyute Atmakatha* (The Autobiography of a Beauty) etc. All of them are not of the same quality. For as Kesava Dev grew older his powers began to decline. His latter day effusions like *Pankalakshi's Diary* are very poor stuff hardly worthy of a writer of Dev's standing.

The Lunatic Asylum is a romantic novel about the communal riots of the days of

the partition of India. Although for want of the author's direct experience of the horrible events which took place in North India, there is a lack of realism in the novel, Dev tries to make up for it by his sincere passion for communal harmony. The novel has a moving story. It is to the everlasting credit of Kesava Dev and a tribute to his wide vision that he could react so powerfully to the events which took place thousands of miles away, because he felt that those tremendous events had a bearing on the future of the country. Dev was undoubtedly a writer who was fully conscious of a writer's mission.

Neighbours, the novel which won the Central Sahitya Akademi Award, is the only full-length novel of Kesava Dev. It traces the history of the socio-economic transformation that took place in Kerala from the dawn of the 20th century to the forties. The chief interest of the reader must necessarily centre round the characters depicted and the story that is woven around them, because, after all one has to assess it as a work of art. Critics have rightly pointed out that the structure of the novel suffers from some drawbacks but the events have been realistically and convincingly depicted and the

chief characters are delineated with masterly skill. Padmanabha Pillai, the karanavar (head) of the matriarchal feudal family is an outstanding character—manly, self-respecting, straightforward, brave and loving. His broad sympathy extends not only to the members of his family but also to members of all communities. But his fierce hatred of the rival tharawad (family) leads him even to divorce his first wife who belonged to that tharawad. Within the short space of this article it is impossible to discuss the other characters. On the whole it may be said that *Neighbours* is one of the great novels in Malayalam.

Mention must also be made of the novel, *The Mirror*, the more so because critics have usually bypassed this novel although it is perhaps the finest novel written by Kesava Dev and the most characteristic. It deals with the story of the great coir factory workers' strike in Alleppey (1938), without actually mentioning the date. The development of the trade union movement in Alleppey is traced from its early beginnings, with a certain attention to detail which makes it illuminating. The characters are differentiated with a subtlety of touch which is nowhere to be found in Kesava Dev's other

novels. The technique is severely realistic without any touch of sentimentalism. There is no space in this article to deal with the other novels.

Before concluding, however, one should like to mention Kesava Dev's autobiography *Ethirpu* (Opposition). It is one of the finest autobiographies in the language. Apart from being a history of the socio-political events of Kerala from the third decade of the twentieth century to the thirties, it is a moving account of the struggles of the poor young man for a place

under the sun which would enable him to exercise the powers, he knew, he had in him. Kesava Dev's deep feeling for his loving mother who suffered and sacrificed so much for him is depicted with a fineness of touch that is unmatched in any other comparable piece of writing in Malayalam. No wonder that some critics have observed that more than Kesava Dev's all other works, including his novels and stories, his autobiography has a claim to be considered his greatest work.

□

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The October Revolution And Malayalam Literature

Pavanan

Malayalam is one of the Indian languages in which references to the events in Russia were made from the very beginning of this century. Articles on the 1905 Revolution against tsarist autocracy were written by some intellectuals of Kerala immediately after the February events. Since then many Malayalee writers and intellectuals have been paying close attention to the events in Russia and some have been eulogising the role of the working class in bringing about a new era in that country and drawing parallels to the events in India.

After the advent of the October Revolution articles and comments on the new life that was sought to be built up in Russia appeared in Malayalam journals almost continuously. The gigantic efforts made by the Soviet people to raise their country from backwardness to a new modern, industrialised state, the role of the Soviet women in the new society, the care

bestowed by the Soviet state on children, the reforms introduced by the workers' state in the fields of education, prison life and legal system, were all subject matter for articles and comments by some of our writers. These writers also gave wide publicity to the ideas of socialism governing the new Soviet state and also to the life and teachings of the great leader of the Revolution, V.I. Lenin.

The impact of the October Revolution was felt in every field of life; more so in the fields of literature and culture. Even a cursory glance through the Malayalam literary works of the thirties, forties and fifties will convince an impartial observer that one of the governing ideas of the period was socialism and that it was the shining example of the land of the October Revolution that drew many writers to this idea.

Dr. K.M. George, in his book *Western Influence on Malayalam Literature*, calls it a period of 'socialist realism' and admits it

has changed the course of Malayalam literature. Here are his words: "This period of realism which commenced as critical realism during the thirties and evolved later as socialist realism had great influence on Malayalam letters of the period" (He is referring here to the period from 1930 to 1947) "During this period", he continues, "more than in others, Russian literature influenced Malayalam as it did several other literatures. And Marxian dialectics gave an edge to writing on the whole; the period of socialist realism was one of vitality and worth and Malayalam literature became more proletarian and humanised."

One may agree or disagree with Dr. George about the interpretation he has given to socialist realism. But what is important is the acknowledgement of the impact of the October Revolution and the new Soviet literature (which he terms "Russian literature") on Malayalam literature at a time when the democratic-minded, progressive, people of Kerala were readying themselves for the final assault on the autocratic rule in Travancore and Cochin States and the British Raj in Malabar.

In point of fact, as has been stated earlier, the ideas of socialism and socialist revolution were implanted in the minds of Malayalee intellectuals much earlier. For example, we find Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai, a pioneer in the field of Malayalam journalism and a fighter for democratic ideas, publishing a biography of Karl Marx in 1912. Again in 1913-14, we find Ramakrishna Pillai writing a series of articles on the development of society, socialism and communism in the *Atmaposhini*, a well-known magazine of that time edited by Vallathol Narayana Menon (Mahakavi Vallathol) who was to become a staunch champion of Indo-Soviet friendship decades later.

It was again Ramakrishna Pillai who first commented on events in Russia in 1905. Writing in the *Keralan* (of December 1905) he stated that the "people of Russia have shown that no nation can be ruled without people's consent if the people of that nation have become fully mature." The *Rasikaranjini*, another famous Malayalam magazine of that time, also used to carry articles on Russia. One of the articles published early in 1906 says that "all sections of people, including those who are in the service of

the tsar have joined together in Russia to fight against the tsarist autocracy, the reason being that the tsar is denying to his people even those freedoms which are enjoyed by other advanced peoples of Europe." The article entitled *The Dinner of the Russian Emperor* points out that "the affairs of Russia have reached a juncture where the tsar can't trust even his cooks" and that "for fear of poison he is giving his food first to dogs and cats." Written by C. S. Gopala Panikker, the article gives an excellent exposition of the state of affairs in the Russia of those days.

As for the October Revolution, the event was immediately noted in the Malayalam press. The *Atmaposhini* carried an article giving a complete and correct background of the Revolution. Ambadi Narayana Menon's article published in the December 1917 and the January 1918 issues of the journal pointed out that there was a lot of misunderstanding about the Russian Revolution in this country, owing to lack of correct information. Then it went on to say that the revolutionaries were guided by noble sentiments of humanism and patriotism: "They want to liberate mankind from the

fetters of slavery." The article also compared the condition in India to that of pre-revolutionary Russia and asked the people to draw the appropriate lessons.

C. Krishnan, a liberal leader of the social reformation movement of Kerala, also expressed similar views in his famous journal the *Mitavadi*. In an essay written in its December 1917 issue Krishnan compared the social injustice then existing in India to that of Russia in the tsar's days and stated that people should know how the tsarist regime was overthrown.

A careful study of the old Malayalam magazines preserved in the Kerala Sahitya Akademi reveals that some intellectuals and writers of Kerala were diligently watching the progress of Soviet Russia and also the leaders of the new state. We find an issue of the *Swadeshabhimani* published in 1922 carrying interesting comments on Lenin. It said Lenin was the "most powerful man in Europe" and described him as a "democrat dedicated to the cause of uplifting the downtrodden." The article also said that he was "simple in living and high in thinking" and that his personal life was "exemplary."

There are a number of Malayalam essays on life in Russia during the period immediately after the Revolution. Essays published in *The Modern Review* on Soviet life were well-nigh invariably translated into Malayalam. Nehru's writings after his visit to the Soviet Union were carried by the *Swadeshabhimani* immediately after it appeared in *The Hindu* in 1922.

In the thirties a number of famous Malayalam writers and publicists regularly wrote on the Soviet Union, defending the Soviet Government and the new experiments conducted there. They included such stalwarts as K. P. Kesava Menon, P. Kesava Dev, M. C. Joseph, Sahodaran Ayyappan, Kuttippuzha Krishna Pillai, Barrister A. K. Pillai, E.M.S. Nambudirippad, K. Damodaran, K.A. Damodara Menon, A. Balakrishna Pillai, Vakkom Abdul Khadar, C. V. Kunjuraman and Chovvara Parameswaran. In fact their number is legion. Almost all important journals carried articles and studies by one or other of these well-known writers who had a definite role in shaping public opinion and the course of socio-political events in Kerala. The journals which carried the message of the

new era opened by the October Revolution included the *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, *Sahodaran*, *Kesari*, *Yuktivadi*, *Thozhilali*, *Prabhatham* and *Mitavadi*.

Among the innumerable contributions of these writers two need special mention; one by K. P. Kesava Menon and the other by P. Kesava Dev. Kesava Menon was a well-known freedom-fighter, a prolific writer and a diplomat. He was also the editor of the *Mathrubhumi*, the premier nationalist daily of the time. Kesava Dev was a revolutionary and a pioneer in the field of progressive literature in Malayalam. Writing in July 1922 in the *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Kesava Menon traced the history of the October Revolution fairly accurately and gave a fair description of the functioning of the Soviet state. He also paid wholesome tributes to Lenin as a person whose "sharp intelligence, boundless courage, thinking ability and qualities of leadership" were instrumental in solving many a problem that defied solution in the early stages of the new state. He concluded his series of articles (published in three issues of the weekly) with the following sentence: "The future of the world itself depends upon the success or failure of the

experiments conducted by Bolsheviks in Russia."

Kesava Dev's study on the October Revolution written a year earlier was published in the form of a booklet entitled *Agniya Sphulingavum* (Fire and the Spark). Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, the most original Malayalam fiction writer, once told the writer of this essay that he helped Dev to sell the copies of this pamphlet because it was the first account of events in Russia, available at that time. It gives a lot of details about the Revolution, the first three decrees of the Soviet government, the principles that governed the first socialist state of the world and also an endearing account of V.I. Lenin's life. This was the first book ever published in Malayalam on the October Revolution; later it was serialised in the *Yuktivadi*, a monthly edited by M.C. Joseph, a renowned rationalist.

During the period of World War II many important Malayalam writers and poets from Mahakavi Vallathol to K. P. G. Namboodiri rallied round the Soviet Union even before the country entered the war. They held that the main enemy of fascism was the Soviet Union and that a showdown between Hitler's fascist hordes and

Soviet Red Army men would be inevitable. Mahakavi Vallathol himself gave vent to this feeling in one of his poems. And when Russia was attacked by Hitler these writers followed every event with bated breath. When the Red Army was on the offensive they were elated. Expression to this feeling was given in Mahakavi G's famous *vers libre* poem, *Beat the Drums of Victory for the Russian Soldier*. It was a time when the cultural scene in Kerala was affected by anti-fascist and pro-Soviet sentiments. Plays, skits, *ottan thullals*, *pathakams* and even *kathakalis*, were written and enacted on the subject during the period. By this time books on the Soviet Union and socialism were aplenty in Malayalam. Lenin's works such as *State and Revolution*, *To the Rural Poor* etc., were already translated. The most important original work written during the period on the land of the soviet was *Soviet Nadu* by C. Achutha Menon who later became the Chief Minister of Kerala. Written in prison in 1941, the book gave detailed information about the conditions in Russia before and after the Revolution and also the progress achieved by the country during the two decades of Soviet power. Modelled on Webb's *Soviet*

Communism, A New Civilisation, Menon's book gave for the first time in Malayalam a clear, detailed and unerring picture of the life in the USSR. Panampilli Govinda Menon who later became Chief Minister of Travancore-Cochin and Central Minister for Railways, stated in his foreword to the book that "Soviet Russia would help to solve many issues that face India today..... Russia is a pioneer providing us with hope and courage."

Of the poets and writers who were inspired by the October Revolution and who in turn inspired the people of Kerala, pride of place goes to Mahakavi Vallathol. He not only presided over the first all India Conference of the Friends of the Soviet Union at Bombay and gave a stirring call to all Indians to rally round the Soviet Union, but also wrote a number of poems on V. I. Lenin, the Soviet Union and the October Revolution. Vallathol was the first Malayalam poet ever to go to the Soviet Union; he was also the first Malayalam poet to be translated into Russian and other languages of the U. S. S. R.

Mahakavi G., Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon, N. V. Krishna Warriar and many other

well-known poets have written on the Soviet Union. Krishnā Warriar's *Hey Lenin!* is one of the best poems ever written in the Indian languages on the great leader of the October Revolution in a markedly Indian context. But there were many other Malayalam poets in the field even before the trio mentioned above came up. K. P. G. Namboodiri is the best-known among them. *Nani's Songs* written by him, were on the lips of every progressive Malayalee in a certain period. T. S. Tirumump, Premji, Cherukad and others in the later forties and O.N.V. Kurup, Vayalar Rama Varma and P. Bhaskaran in the early fifties followed him; Changampuzha was there even earlier.

Of the other writers who pursued the line from the forties to the sixties mention may be made of K. Damodaran, Kuttippuzha Krishna Pillai, Joseph Mundasseri, P. Narayanan Nair and C. Unni Raja. Of these it was Kuttippuzha who wrote in the early forties: "If there is a heaven on Earth it is the Soviet Union."

Most of the important Russian classics and major Soviet literary works are available in Malayalam translation. Tolstoy,

Dostoevsky, Turgenev and Chekhov were familiar names in Kerala even in the early forties. Pushkin and Gogol were introduced soon after Gorky's *Mother* was translated in the same period. There are three translations of this modern epic in Malayalam. Gorky's other works including his three autobiographical volumes, novels, stories and dramas were translated in the fifties. Mayakovsky's *Lenin* was translated by K. P. G. Namboodiri; his other poems are also available in Malayalam and have had considerable influence on contemporary poetry as well. Sholokhov's works were also translated in the fifties. Fedeyev, Fedin, Semanov, Aitamotov and many other Soviet fiction writers and poets have also been well-received in Malayalam. A number of our important fiction-writers have openly acknowledged their indebtedness to Gorky and Sholokhov in taking a new line of approach to their creative work.

It may be news to outsiders that Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned* and *Quiet Flows the Don* have been adapted for *katha prasangam* by Sambasivan the foremost Malayali artist in the field of this performing art

which is immensely popular in Kerala. There is also evidence to show that the influence of Soviet literature is being felt in the field of literary and art criticism. Modern Soviet literary and art critics are translated and often quoted by some of our literary critics in Malayalam to substantiate their arguments on the organic relations between life and literature.

Neither has the exchange been one-sided. Apart from Vallathol's poems, Mahakavi G's poems were also translated into Russian and published as an anthology many years ago. A Russian version of Dr. K. M. George's *Survey of Malayalam Literature* has been published in Moscow. Our major short story writers like Thakazhi, S. K. Pottekkatt, M. T. Vasudevan Nair, Uroob, and Karur have also been introduced to Soviet readers. Thakazhi's *Chemmeen* and *Two Measures of Rice* were published in Russian as early as in the sixties.

Progress Publishing House, Moscow, is bringing out a series of books, both classical and contemporary in Malayalam translation and they are being very well-received in Kerala. A number of studies on Soviet

literature have also appeared in Malayalam in recent years. Dr. M. Leelavathy's study on the Don novels of Sholokhov is one among them. Prof. K. P. Sasidharan,

prof. V. Aravindakshan and some others have specialised in the study of Russian literature. The author of this article has also brought out three titles on the subject. □

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Who's Gandhi, Ma?

Vennikkulam Gopala Kurup

The sweet sound of the spinning wheel
dropping nectar in one's ears,
came gracefully with the message of peace
on the festal day of Gandhi's birth.

While mother was spinning yarn
the room resounded with the child's curiosity
coming in the three words,
"Who's Gandhi, Ma?"

While the woman rejoiced
in her son's questioning,
the child's little eyes
played with the cotton
lengthening into thread.

The mother said, 'Darling,
though your question is short,
all my explanation
will not be answer enough to it.

Even I do not know
the truth about Gandhi's being,
still I'll say a few things
and you will do well to listen.

Haven't you seen the picture
of a squatting man
showing his toothless gums
as he smiles?

That is Grandpa Gandhi
kind to all
and ever eager to play
with little children.

Often people call him
Bapu
You too might have heard that word,
it means father.

Because he worked to remove
other men's sorrows
the name Mahatma Gandhi
too came to be widely known.

He is the noble soul who saw
truth as God and worshipped it,
who shone like gold
by his pure deeds.

He wept over any harm
befalling even a little ant;
the compassionate one
averse even to pluck a tender leaf.

Love, duty or right conduct -
why should I describe each?
Mahatmaji is a teacher
in whom all the virtues blend.

They who fly their flags
on hills of gold -
even they bow before this man,
possessing not a penny
he can call his own.

Let us leave all that.
What is the good that Gandhiji has done us?
It is 'liberty' in one word -
but I'll explain.

For no reason we quarrelled
and white men became our masters.
In our own land
we became little more than wage-earners.

Day after day the land struggled
to sweep away this domination
like an elephant trying
to throw off the mahout clinging to it.

Heroic leaders
stood with pallid faces
seeing the long long way
which should lead to victory.

“Khadi, non-violence
unity and prohibition—
gather this four-fold army
to fight this sacred war.

When compatriots stand
shoulder to shoulder
do they need guns and spears?
They will never fail”
with this assurance came Gandhiji.

With the power that surged
in that frail body
the whole country stirred
like a sea under a storm.

The white men seeing the turmoil
jailed many a time
this hermit-like man
who knew no fear
and kept moving forward.

Gandhi inside was more powerful
than Gandhi fighting from outside
and what other way was there
save for prison doors to fly open?

At last the white men felt vanquished
and they left bag and baggage;
today we are masters in our land.

He who smiles when hit,
He who makes a castle of a cottage —
that's Grandpa Gandhi, son,
a wonder among wonders.

Translated by C. A. Joseph

Four Poems

R. Ramachandran

The Loser

As I remember you
Flitting far-off like a flame,
In this somnolent countryside,
—Where shadows fall
From a cloud-hidden sky —
In my soul,
You turn into a shadow.

In the vain dreams of the dusk
Slumbering like a fallen stone idol,
In the scattered bones of the moonlight,
In the hysteric babbling of the senile wind,
With the past and the present
Interfused in its conscious self,
You dissolve, you fade
Ah! I remember you
But to lose you!

My Homeland

Like the tired recall
Of a wish unfulfilled
My homeland sleeps in me.
Dawn's flushed tint spreads
Like darkness's triumphant frenzied smile.

Daylight lingers
Like a veritable tomfool
Who has entered a stranger's door!
Dusk sits with a bowed-down head
Like an old country granny
Whose memory has lapsed
Half-way through an anecdote.

Static mobility!
 Dumb eloquence!
 Bound immensity!

While I dwell
 In this dark womb of sensuous exhilaration
 I doubt whether I myself am;
 Yet dark lascivious damsel
 Leaning on that gold-enamelled pillar.
 In the dreams that burst into bloom
 In the corner of your eye,
 Ye, ever-virgin, I see myself still.

In the nectar that fills
 The fancy-lotus of your hand
 Lies dissolved the amaranthine joy of my soul.

The memories of intimate ties
 In lives other than this
 That on still nights of fading moonlight
 The blowing breeze awakens in me—
 Is it all grief, blessed virgin?

I know not;
 There beams in my eye
 The compassionate smile
 Of *TATHAGATHA*.

HERE

Here
 A fascination that blossoms like the firmament
 Changes and fades away
 As a desire that spreads like the sunlight
 As a shadow that grows like a grief
 As a silence that hardens like darkness.
 Here
 What may one ask someone about someone?

Translated by R. Viswanathan

Irrepressible Fighting Spirit

P. Kesava Dev

The front-courtyard of Nalledathu house was about thirty yards wide. At the eastern edge of the courtyard, a jacktree stood almost clearly marking off the boundary between the courtyard and the grounds. The unapproachables could come only up to that jacktree whereas other low caste people—the untouchables—could enter the courtyard.

The lowest of the lot who came to buy milk and butter-milk from Nalledathu had to place the pot and money at the foot of the jacktree and stand off. Then, either Karthyayani Amma or Madhavi Amma would bring milk and butter-milk and some water in a vessel. They would pour milk or butter-milk into the pot, sprinkle some water over the coins to purify them and walk back with the coins. Then the unapproachables would take their pots and go back quietly.

One day a boy deemed to be

an unapproachable one called aloud for a long time: ‘buttermilk, butter-milk’ from the foot of the jacktree. But since everybody was on the northern side and the ladies in the kitchen were fully immersed in a quarrel, the cry from the foot of the jacktree went a-begging.

But Kesavan perched on the branch of a cashew at the eastern side of the plot heard it. Since nobody came there to give that boy butter-milk, Kesavan jumped down from the cashew. He came near the boy and asked him:

“Butter-milk for how much money?”

“For three cash,” he said.

“Give the cash,” Kesavan said.

The boy gave the paise to Kesavan. He took the boy’s small earthenware pot and walked to the front of the house. Madhavi Amma who spotted Kesavan first from inside nervously cried out:

"Oh! sister, do you see it?"

Everybody ran to see that sight and all in unison said aloud: "Oh!"

Kesavan stood stunned with the small pot and the money in his hand. Everybody stared at him as if he were holding a venomous cobra.

But Karthyayani Amma came from the kitchen slowly and asked him quietly, "Son, what do you want?"

"Give that boy butter-milk for three cash. Money and pot are here. He has been calling for a long time."

"Ah, Mother shall bring it. You remain there itself. Don't enter the house." She brought butter-milk and poured it into the pot.

"Here is the money," he said. Mother just said: "You keep it. When you go to school you can buy something for it."

Kesavan walked back. Karthyayani Amma said: "After giving it, you have a dip in the pond and then come."

All stared at Karthyayani Amma. Kesavan might have taken the untouchable boy's pot because of his immaturity and lack of awareness. But could they tolerate Karthyayani Amma's support to him? She

did not scold or punish him. Besides, she had given him the money too. Could one ever pardon her?

Madhavi Amma said in anger:

"Even when this boy walks back after killing someone, this mother of his will only laugh."

Kunjukutti Amma muttered: "Nobody need say anything now. Blood will ooze from this mother's eyes. Then only will she learn."

Karthyayani Amma just smiled once and quietly said: "He is only a child. Just by his act of taking that pot, has the sky come down or so?"

Kunjukutti Amma firmly said: "It will fall down. When untouchability and caste are thrown to the winds, what else would occur?"

"If it begins to fall, then I shall hold it up." Karthyayani Amma retorted.

She too believed in untouchability and caste. But she was prepared to bear and justify anything done by her small Kesu.

* * * *

It was the month of Makaram (January-February). By dusk it was biting cold. All children of Nalledathu were saying their drayers, sitting on the floor of

the sit-out. The karanavar (the family head), in the same act, was on the chair.

Prayer should be heard seven fences away. That was the rule. All would shout "Rama, Rama" at the loudest pitch possible. One might feel that children had terrible hatred for Rama. Really they did have hatred for the karanavar who compelled them to shout like that. Their prayer was only a curse on the karanavar.

After an early supper just after dusk, the karanavar set out to his wife's house with a packet of snacks kept ready by Karthyayani Amma. Children heaved a sigh of relief.

Then started the common night meal. As usual there were silent and loud protests, sly remarks, and complaints. However, everything was over in a short while.

Madhavi Amma had menses on that day. Women at the menses period should dine in the courtyard. They should then sleep at the paddy-peeling shed. After the general supper, Madhavi Amma was given her food in the northern yard. Usually women in this condition were not given a lamp. They had to light a dry bunch of coconut leaf and eat in that light.

At that juncture, from the house on the northern side there arose the shrieks of someone possessed by the ghost. All children ran to that house to witness the wild dance of the possessed.

Madhavi Amma finished her supper and drew a line around the spot. Then she walked to the northern pond. The spot where women ate during periods was treated as polluted. Only after the sprinkling of cow-dung water at that spot would it become pure. The line was drawn to prevent the casual treading of that place by someone.

All children, after seeing the dance of the possessed, ran back especially since it was pitch dark. When Madhavi Amma walked back from the pond flashing her indigenous light, she noticed someone's footprint inside the line and spontaneously shouted: "Sister, sister, somebody has trodden here."

"Who?" Karthyayani Amma asked from the kitchen.

"A tiny footprint.....seems Kesu's"

Any forbidden thing was done by Kesu. That was taken for granted. So other children washed their hands of it and asserted that this mischief too was done by Kesu. Kesavan

said: "Me, myself have trodden ...will repeat it..."

A stream of usual curses and threats flowed – eyes would burst, legs would break, he would be pushed into the pit of leeches, the family would be reduced to nothing, the house would be razed to the ground. At last all decided and declared in one voice: "Kesavan should bathe at once."

Kesavan vehemently said: "No, I can't bathe now in this cold night."

"You needn't bathe in this cold," Karthyayani Amma supported him. Oh! There was a virtual storm. But Karthyayani Amma and Kesavan remained silent.

At last from the room at the southern end old Lakshmi Amma came out supporting herself on a stick and angrily asked: "Karthyayani, are you bent upon causing the disintegration and destruction of this 'tharavad'? Has anyone got the right to advise a polluted child not to bathe?"

"Then what shall I do? Shall I dip him in the pond in this cold night? Will he not become sick?" Karthyayani muttered. Grandma retorted: "So when one becomes polluted, shall one not take even a bath

on the pretext that it is cold?"

Kesavan rushed forward and flung a bomb:

"Grandmother, if you can purify everything that has become untouchable. I shall also bathe."

"Haven't you alone become impure, untouchable?"

"No. I have entered the kitchen. Then inside the house too. I have touched mats and pillows. If you can throw out the vessels from the kitchen, burn the mats and pillows, I also shall bathe." Kesavan said in a breath.

An uneasy silence....All looked at each other.

"Decayed!Tharavad (family) is lost." Lakshmi Amma still bent on her stick mumbled something and walked back to her room.

"Tomorrow, get holy water from the temple and sprinkle it everywhere," Kunjukutti Amma suggested a way out.

Thus ended that uproar against untouchability.

* * * *

On the southern side of Nalledathu house there was a narrow lane with barbed-wire fence on either side.

One could always hear "Ha, Ha" sounds in that lane. It was

the sound produced by the upper caste people to keep off the untouchables. "Driving off by the warning voice" was a common practice in those days. But in Nalledathu lane it was a little more. After dusk one might hear besides this sound, the sound of blows and cries. Some might forget to shout "Ha, Ha" and when the untouchables came near the upper caste people, they invariably got blows and that resulted in cries.

Thazhare Kunchu Pillai, Nalledathu Kutti Amma's husband, used to come that way at dusk. His supper was specially prepared at Nalledathu. So, by dusk, everyday he proceeded to Nalledathu, releasing loud farts on the way; he wore a small piece of cloth reaching only up to his knee, and always kept a cane with him.

To get sleep Kunchu Pillai had to beat at least one person every day; on the pretext that an untouchable had run into his path he would beat him. That was his practice. In order to perform that act Kunchu Pillai would not make any warning noise.

One day at dusk all children of Nalledathu were shouting "Rama, Rama" and the karanavar was uttering his prayer in a low pitch.

All on a sudden there arose a moan from the southern lane. Nobody cared for it as it was a usual thing. But it continued, rising and falling and caused some anxiety.

From the gate someone called 'Pappunni!' (Kunchu Pillai addressed Padmanabha Pillai, the karanavar, like that.)

The karanavar rushed to the gate. Children followed him stealthily.

"That untouchable boy is on the ground. Ask his mother to take him off."

"Will he die?" the karanavar anxiously asked. Kunchu Pillai casually replied, "If he dies let her bury him. Otherwise let her drag him away."

Kesavan stealthily got into the lane. He could just hear a grunt of Kanakkan Kochu Karampan. He was flat on the ground. Kesavan's heart was ablaze with shock and terror. He unknowingly jumped forward and anxiously called "Kochu Karampa! Kochu Karampa!"

The karanavar shrieked: "What have you to do here? Get away Go home " Everyone ran back. Kesavan did not. He was about to go near Kochu Karampan.

"Won't you go?" the karanavar again shouted. Kesu's sister Janaki forcibly took him away.

Kesavan could not sleep that night. Kesavan and Kochu Karampan were good friends. Kochu Karampan was older than Kesu by four years. His black body had a fascinating shape. His way of climbing coconut trees like a sprightly squirrel was a treat to watch. His father had died after a fall from a coconut tree. For his mother and sister Kochu Karampan had been the sole source of relief ever since.

He learned to chew betel leaf from a young age. Kesavan used to supply him with it whenever he came to Nalledathu.

In return Kochu Karampan helped Kesu to steal coconuts by throwing down plucked coconuts in such a way that some reached the serpent-grove where Kesu would stand hidden. But, above all these, they had genuine love for each other.

Next day Kesu went to Kochu Karampan's hut. He gently called "Kochu Karampa!"

When he entered there all inside the hut were scared. Kali, Kochu Karampan's mother, nervously said, "Oh! young lord, please, please do not make people kill us. Please go out. Please..." Kesavan with real concern asked, "Kochu Karampa, are you bad? Anything serious?"

"A hit at the heart...When warmed, got some relief..." with overflowing eyes Kochu Karampan mumbled.

Kesavan sat beside him and gently massaged Kochu Karampan. "Go out please... Do not force us to be got killed!" Kochu Karampan's mother reminded him.

Kesavan got up. If his visit to that hut was known, it was dangerous. He got out and walked away. He wanted to shout at the world and ask many things. But the questions that germinated in his mind were still hazy. He yearned to fight with many. But he was not quite sure about the people or things to be fought against. Thus with innumerable questions not yet voiced and an unquenchable thirst to protest and fight he walked back to Nalledathu.

—Translated by
N. Ramachandran Nair

Shingidi Mungan

Vaikom Muhammad Basheer

'Who's that?'

'That?'

'That.'

'Wonder of all wonders. I'll tell you, listen carefully, with devotion, with reverence and with humility. First hear and then decide. Isn't it the right way?'

'You didn't tell us who it is.'

'Wait a minute, I told you I'd tell you. You must have unflinching devotion. Want to hear?'

What I have recorded is the conversation between Kariathan, Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi. Who is this Shingidi Mungan? Before I tell you that great secret I will tell you something else. Abdul Razak is a gentleman employed in a Gulf State. That means he is in Saudi Arabia, making eight thousand rupees a month, after all expenses are met. His wife Ayisha Bibi is also employed. She is a teacher in a Moslem school, near her house. She makes about one thousand rupees a month. They have

built a beautiful house spending two lakhs of rupees. They live there happily. Abdul Razak gets two months of home leave every six months. His plane fare, both ways, is met by his company. It's a very happy life indeed. But they are grief-stricken. They have been childless for ten years, ie., since their marriage. That is the problem. Why is it that Ayisha Bibi never got pregnant?

Could it be the curse of the invisible spirits? Came the Musaliyar. He stayed in the new house and tried to exorcize the evil spirits. Eggs with charms written on them were buried underneath the stepping stone. Bottles with charms written on them were hung from the four corners of the house. All in vain.

What was to be done now?

They thought of praying to Allah for a baby. He might grant them their prayer. But there was a hitch. There is a clause that forbids one to petition direct to Him. There

must be a mediator. Shaikh Muhiyudin was well qualified for that role. He is also called Abdul Khader Jailani. He passed away centuries ago. He lies buried in Bagdad. They were asked to beg of him to intercede on their behalf and pray to Allah to bless them with a child. No effect. They prayed to the Prophet to get Allah to help them out. Nothing came out of it. Prayers were arranged to be said in all the holy places. Lots and lots of money was also sent. All in vain.

Thus ended Islamic prayers. How about trying Christianity? They prayed direct to Jesus, the only begotten son of God. No result. Then they tried all the saints and holy places. No good. Ayisha Bibi did not get pregnant. What next?

There are the Hindus. They have lots of gods and incarnations and holy temples. All the gods, old and new, were approached. No change in Ayisha Bibi's situation. What was to be done now?

You might say that the two of them should have undergone a medical examination. That they underwent long ago. Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi were examined by the most celebrated

doctors. Nothing was found to be wrong with them. What then?

Aren't there animals in water, on earth and in the sky? The females of these lay eggs or give birth to young ones without anybody's intercession. Be patient. Who said this? Let it be anybody. But how long can they go on believing in this dictum? Ten years have passed after the marriage. One hundred and twenty months. More than three thousand days and nights! What's the meaning of all this? How long are they to wait in sorrow?

Then there comes a bit of happy news!...Kuttichathan!... (A demon in the folk tradition) Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi read about him from newspaper advertisements. They sent letters and money and their prayers. No effect! Then there appeared a terrific ad about the exploits of another Kuttichathan! ...This must be the real one.

Letters were sent. Money orders were sent. Their wishes were sent by registered post. They waited. Days went by. No links were established between Ayisha Bibi and pregnancy. What's the meaning of all this? Whom should they tell now?

As Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi spent their days in sorrow, there came before them Kariathan!

Kariathan was a Pulaya, an untouchable. Jet black in colour. He was thirtynine. He had been married for twenty years. He also had no children. He was very healthy. A good talker and a thinker. He read at least three newspapers a day and all the books that he could lay his hands on. He had his own opinions about everything. He was also a speaker. He had his own house and one and a half acres of coconut grove. He got enough coconuts. His wife had a kitchen garden. He and his family had a temple of their own. On the whole, life was very happy. All that he liked to do was to eat fish and drink toddy. Both were special subjects.

Abdul Razak, as you'll recall, was a Gulf Malayali. Money was no problem. Kariathan's mission was to see if he could make ten rupees for the day's fish and toddy. It was then that he heard of the woeful tale. Ten years after marriage. No children. The deities of Muslims, Christians and Hindus, not even Kuttic hathan, could help in the matter. How many offerings! How many prayers!

Kariathan listened to the stories, nodded and laughed loudly. Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi looked at him in wonder. Why did he laugh so loudly? They asked him. Kariathan said:

'Your prayer has not reached where it should have. That's the thing.'

'Where then should it reach?'

'I'll tell you. Listen with devotion, with humility, with reverence. He is short-tempered.'

'Who's he?'

'Shingidi Mungan!'

'Shingidi Mungan? Who's he?'

'Didn't I tell you? Wonder of all wonders! Shingidi Mungan will give you both a darling baby. You should offer your prayer with devotion, with reverence and with humility. Shingidi Mungan is the deity of the original Pulayas.'

'Haven't heard that they had such a deity. Will the other Pulayas vouch for this?'

Kariathan said. 'That's the trouble, Pulayas have so many deities—*Kalan, Kulan, Marappottan, Chamundi, Chindoppa, Chaklipothan, Shunkulattan*. No sense of unity. No education. No knowledge about who they are. Get kicked around by all the so-called high caste chaps

like Nambudiris, Brahmins, Konginis, Nairs, Eazhavas and Thiyas, Moslems and Christians, Washermen and Tailors and Cobblers. Suffer all indignities heaped on them and live the hellish life of slaves. Who? The Pulayas!

'Who, then, are the Harijans?'

'Well, that's the name given to them by some, high caste Hindu—Harijans!'

By then, tea and snacks and fruits were served. He ate and drank and lit a costly dunhill cigarette brought from the Gulf. Then he said:

'First God created the Pulayas. Then He created the Pariahs, the Ullatans and others. All the rest were made out of the left-over stuff. And now those riff-raff call themselves the high castes!' Kariathan spat out loud and long, puffed at his dunhill and continued:

'We are the first among men. We are the original royal Pulayas. What about our throne and crown and sceptre? Those high caste chaps... Kariathan spat out derisively and went on. 'Didn't I tell you. they usurped everything. Pulayas were scattered. They were made slaves. Sometime ago we tried to organize them and bring them under the banner of the 'Shingidi Mungan' party and to

get them to believe in the 'Shingidi Mungan' cult. That didn't click. Pulayas have several organizations with several names. Do these names have any meaning?'

'What is the Shingidi Mungan cult? What are its tenets and rituals?'

'This cult will spread all over the world. It won't be long. In order to convert to this cult you don't have to part with any part of your anatomy; no need to tie anything round your neck. No shaving off your hair, no ochre robes, no long dhotis, no sacred thread, no pigtail on your crown. Hold fast to the belief: 'Shingidi Mungan is God'. Drink toddy, eat fish—that's all. Hara, Hara, Shingidi Mungan!'

'Here come the miracles!' Kariathan took another puff. He coughed and said: 'This is too long.'

'Yes. It's a long cigarette,' agreed Abdul Razak. 'What, then, are the miracles, Kariathan?'

'O, them?' Kariathan said. 'I'll tell you. Once when God Shingidi Mungan directed his glance downwards to the earth, he saw people fighting. The upper caste chaps, the Nambudiris, the Nairs, the Konginis, the Brahmins, the Moslems, the Christians, the

Thiyas and the Eazhavas had ganged up against the holy, the noble castes—the Pulayas, Paraiyahs and the Ullatans. They were beaten to pulp and made slaves. Must have been a frightful sight! Do you think Shingidi Mungan will stand that sight?"

Here Kariathan paused. He sat meditating for a while. He lit another dunhill, took a puff, coughed and then said:

'I told you the historical facts about how we, the original Pulayas, became the kings of Pulayas. One day one of our women, a great grandmother, went to cut grass. She saw a long stone while cutting grass. It was a block of granite. Our grandma sharpened her sickle on the stone. There was a miracle then!'

'What was it?' Ayisha Bibi asked him excitedly. Karithan said:

'Why, it was blood!'

'Blood?' said Abdul Razak.

'Yes. Real, purple blood from the stone! Flowing non-stop! The old woman went running to her people and reported the matter. They got the holy astrologers for a holy meet and thus was revealed the wonder of wonders! Incarnation for the good of the world!...The original

Shingidi Mungan!...Fierce deity ...short-tempered self-born!'

Kariathan paused for a while and went into meditation. Then he chanted:

'Hara, Hara, Shingidi Mungan!'

'What then?' Ayisha Bibi and Abdul Razak asked at the same time. Kariathan said:

'Then there was hectic activity. Offerings, chanting, sanctum sanctorum, camphor, lamps, golden throne—a temple had to be built and the holy idol installed. But would the so-called upper caste chaps give us the land? We, the original Pulayas, then, organized ourselves. We collected money and bought a bit of land at the end of the rice-field owned by those who claim to belong to the upper castes. We built a temple and installed the deity. Hara! Hara! Shingidi Mungan!'

'What do you want us to do?'

'I've told you right at the start. You must have devotion, humility and faith. You may go to the temple; chant the hymns, fold your hands in supplication and then offer your prayer for the grant of a child. You may offer to weigh the child and make an offering of an equal weight in fish. You may also promise to

offer a pot of toddy. What do you say?"

Was there anything more to worry about? Abdul Razak, Ayisha Bibi and Kariathan went to the temple for worship. They went in a car. It was noontime. The car was parked on the roadside. They had to walk some distance before they reached the temple. There were a number of houses, all of which looked like hovels. They walked past the hovels. There were a number of dogs, a number of cats, a number of pigs, a number of chickens and goats. Walking thus across the rice field they reached the temple. It was a small building with an old thatched roof about to fall to pieces. It had bamboo sticks for pillars and plaited coconut fronds for walls.

Ayisha Bibi and Abdul Razak felt no wonder at the sight of the temple.

Kariathan loosened the rope that fastened the door and stepped inside. Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi followed him. It was pitch dark inside. The place smelt of stale air. Before their eyes got adjusted to the darkness, Ayisha Bibi and Abdul Razak got a vision of the deity. Wonder: camphor light. It was lit by Kariathan by striking a match. There was

the idol in the sanctum sanctorum. There stood before them the real Shingidi Mungan!

There was no golden throne; no real sanctum, and the camphor light was gone. They stood in darkness. There were no eyes, nose, mouth, ears, head nor hands, nor legs. All that was visible was a black piece of granite long and rectangular in shape. Was it fixed to the bare earth?

Kariathan asked them to fold their hands in supplication and speak out their prayer. He then picked up a bell from somewhere and began ringing it. Ayisha Bibi and Abdul Razak prayed in one voice:

'Give us a child. We will make the fish offering and give a pot of toddy.'

All the three of them then chanted:

'Hara, Hara, Shingidi Mungan!

Hara, Hara, Shingidi Mungan!

Hara, Hara, Shingidi Mungan!'

After the prayer and the chanting Abdul Razak said:

'What do we give to the temple, Kariathan?'

'No need to give anything to the temple. But give something.

to the deity. Just what you like! Abdul Razak took out a hundred rupee note and offered it to Kariathan who could see now as his vision had got adjusted to the darkness. He said:

‘No, no, I shouldn’t take it off your hand. He is very short-tempered. Give it to Him.’

‘Could I put it at the top of the stone?’

‘Oh, no. That’s the head! Please leave it at the feet.’

Abdul Razak did as he was told and then got out. Ayisha Bibi followed him. Kariathan remained inside for a while and said special prayers:

‘Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan!’

After that Kariathan also came out. He closed the entrance to the temple and walked along with the others to the car. He showed them his house which was tile-roofed. Sitting in the house one could see the road. There were only two temple guns in the house. He used to get some more on hire at the time of the annual festival. There would be a display of fireworks for the festival which usually went on for two or three days, day and night. During the festival days there would come kinsfolk of the Pulayas from far off places—women, children and old folk.

A few Pariahs and Ullatans also would turn up for the festival. There would be tea shops, beedi shops and merry-go-rounds, as also big feasts with fish and toddy. Men and women would go into a frenzy and dance excitedly. Women who went into great devotional frenzy would loosen their hair and do the revolving act which was considered a ritualistic act of great efficacy. The huge crowd—men, women, children and old folk—would rend the sky with shouts of:

‘Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan!’

They came near the car. Abdul Razak gave fifty rupees to Kariathan and told him:

‘This is for you, for fish and toddy. I’ll go to Saudi Arabia in a week’s time; will be back after six months. Offer special prayers for Ayisha.’

The car started. Ayisha Bibi, Abdul Razak and Kariathan chanted with folded hands:

‘Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan!’

After a week Abdul Razak flew to Saudi Arabia. Ayisha Bibi was not alone in the house. Her mother, a younger sister and her husband were also there. Life was very happy. It was a month now. Nothing happened.....But then, it happened, wonder of wonders!

Atom bombs and hydrogen bombs exploded at the same time! The world shuddered. What do you think was the matter?...Pregnancy!

Ayisha Bibi was in the family way. Shouldn't the world be told? An urgent cable was sent to Abdul Razak in Saudi Arabia:

'Pregnancy! Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan! Ayisha.' Response came from Saudi Arabia in the form of an urgent return cable:

'Happiness on happiness! Coming on leave. Take good care. Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan! Abdul Razak.'

Kariathan came on hearing that Ayisha was in the family way. He was so happy that he ate a lot of fish; and he downed a lot, a great lot of toddy. He couldn't stand erect but he could sit. He sat down. He said as his body swayed:

'Hara — H a r a — Shingidi — Mungan!'

He went to Ayisha's house on most days and ate from there.

Happy days went by. So did months. Abdul Razak came. He took Ayisha Bibi to the temple. Shingidi Mungan saw Ayisha's big tummy. Abdul Razak offered one hundred rupees at the feet of Shingidi

Mungan. Kariathan got fifty rupees and a few packets of dunhill cigarettes. They then returned. Kariathan spent most of his days in Abdul Razak's house till the latter went back to Saudi Arabia. Everything went well.

Ayisha Bibi's belly went on growing. (Is the baby a boy or a girl? It doesn't matter whether it is a boy or a girl. All that matters is that they should see the teeny weeny legs of a little one and a teeny weeny smile. Everything should be fine. Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan!)

Then came the biggest news of all, jewel-studded news:

Ayisha gave birth to a baby boy! A pretty little boy!

An urgent cable went to Saudi Arabia;

'Baby boy born. Mother and child fine. Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan. Ayisha.'

Came the return cable:

'Very happy. Take care of yourself and the baby. Coming in a few months. Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan. Abdul Razak.'

Kariathan came. He ate fish, drank toddy and danced about happily. There was happiness everywhere.

The child was a sweet little darling. Did he take after his father or mother? Let him grow up. When would the father come to see his darling son?

They didn't have to wait long. Abdul Razak came with a lot of luggage. He lifted the child and kissed him. He was very happy. He kissed his wife.

Kariathan came. Had tea and snacks and smoked dunhill cigarettes. Abdul Razak said:

'We must perform the weighing ceremony of the child tomorrow itself. We'll buy fish and toddy tomorrow; must also get a big weighing scale. You come tomorrow. There'll be good fish in the market in the morning.'

'I shall come in the morning'. Kariathan left.

The next day at nine in the morning everything was got ready. There were fresh fish, toddy and a big scale. Ayisha got the child freshly bathed and dressed. Abdul Razak wore a new suit. Kariathan came. And all of them left for the temple in a car. No problems on the way. Everything was fine.

They reached the temple. Ayisha, the child and Razak got in. Ayisha, showed the child to Shingidi Mungan.

Then she kissed the child. Just at that moment she was seized with an irrepressible desire! She wanted to touch Shingidi Mungan!

She told Razak about it. He went and told Kariathan. Kariathan was trying to fix the scale. He said:

'O, no. He is very powerful, short-tempered and self-born. Women shouldn't touch him. Those who dare touch would be burnt to ashes! But then if she is very sure about her chastity, she may.'

Ayisha Bibi looked at Abdul Razak with fearful eyes. She wanted to touch. But would she be burnt to ashes? She stretched her tremulous right hand and touched Shingidi Mungan just once! Nothing happened. Clean! She was chaste. That was a blissful moment!

Ayisha Bibi and Abdul Razak offered a choral prayer:

'Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan!' Then they got out and weighed the child against fish and toddy. A holy ceremony. That was it. When it was over Kariathan took the fish in a basket and put it by the side of Shingidi Mungan. The pot of toddy was also placed nearby. Then the three of them shouted in unison:

'Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan!' Everything was fine, auspicious and splendid!

Kariathan closed the temple door. They were happy. They walked back to the car. Abdul Razak got in and told Kariathan:

'Kariathan, how about getting a tusker for the Shingidi Mungan temple?'

It was a very auspicious thing to do this. He thought about the lucky guys who had given tuskers to temples. They were blessed souls. A tusker should be available for thirty thousand rupees.

'Elephants are naughty,' Kariathan said. 'They gore people to death! They seem to take it as a holy act to kill their mahouts. They have to be fed and washed daily. What does one get out of them, after all? The offer of a milch cow is a better idea: That would ensure a daily milk offering to Shingidi Mungan.'

'That's good,' said Abdul Razak. 'Ayisha has a wish. We must fulfil that. The temple needs renovation' It must have a sturdy wooden structure, tiled roof and stone walls. Let us whitewash it and give it a cement floor. The sanctum must receive artistic touches. Shingidi Mungan has to be duly

installed on a sturdy cement throne. The temple should look gorgeous. It has to have electric bulbs inside and outside of it.'

'Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan!'

'Get a master carpenter to prepare an estimate. The work can wait till my next visit. You come to my house tomorrow. I have brought some gifts for you. You will eat with us. So, let's take leave of you now.'

Ayisha Bibi Abdul Razak and Kariathan shouted:

'Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan!'

The car started and they were gone.

Lucky guy! Lucky gal! Lucky child!

Kariathan turned back and walked towards the temple. What are the things he is going to give me tomorrow? Let it be anything. Well, good fish and toddy are already here. Must fry some fish. And some could go into a curry. Must tell her to put lots of green chilly and ginger in the curry. May be some tamarind also can go into it. It must be hot and sour. It goes well with toddy. All the best varieties of fish are there. Must give two fried fish to Kelu Mooppa, the toddy shop owner. Let him see how the original Pulayas live!

Eat, drink, copulate and sleep—that's life! Who said this? Doesn't matter who. Whoever said it must be a great guy indeed. Life is happy and there is no doubt about it. Happiness! Happiness! Happiness everywhere! He was near the temple—what was it? A growl, a bark, a snarl.....noise all round.

The temple door lay open. He remembered having closed it. Who opened it? There was melee inside! All the mongrels, all the pigs and all the cats of the countryside had come for holy vision!

Kariathan took a stick and started beating the beasts. Growls, barks and snarls. All gone now. When the place was cleared of them he saw to his utter consternation that not a speck of fish was left. The toddy pot was also broken.

Kariathan trembled with rage. His body began shaking in a mad frenzy. He began shouting. He asked Shingidi Mungan:

'You Shingidi Mungan ..son of a gallowsbird, what have you done here? Hey, do you see who is standing before you? I am Kariathan! Your priest! Do you remember all the chanting, all the camphor flames, all the ghee lamps and the holy songs and the lamp offerings? Do you remember all this, you son of a

whore? Look here fellow, do you have weighing ceremonies here daily? Just had one after all these days! And that too with fish. It is I who selected all the best fish and the toddy. Yet, you son of a gallowsbird, do I have just a single slice? A drop of toddy? You wretched fellow, did you think that all these dogs and pigs and cats were your dad? I don't have the words to scold you. I'll break you to pieces; put you in a gunny bag and throw you into the sea! You played your nasty tricks on me, Kariathan. Here, take this!!'

Kariathan kicked Shingidi Mungan with all his might. Shingidi Mungan fell on the floor.

'Lie there, you son of a whore!' As he looked around Kariathan saw solid evidence of the devotees having used the floor as a toilet! He cleaned the floor and got out. As he stood there he spotted two devotees, a man and a woman, walking towards the temple. They were seen carrying a chicken. Was it a cock or a hen?

Kariathan raised Shingidi Mungan from his prostrate position and stood him erect. He cleaned the mud and dust off Shingidi Mungan and stood there waiting. The devotees

came. It was a cock.

As they drew near they sniffed and said: 'What's this smell of fish and toddy?' 'How can it be otherwise!' Kariathan said.

'The ceremony of weighing against fish! Muslims. Husband and wife. Married for ten years. No children. Prayers, offerings, Muslim holy men, Christian saints, temples of Nambudiris' Brahmins, Nairs and Konginis, temples of Eazhavas and Thiyas, gods, goblins, Lord Ayyappa of Sabarimala, Ayyappa's Muslim devotee—why extend the list? They made prayers and offerings to all temples, saints and gods. Spent a good lot of money. To what effect?'

'What happened?'

'At last, they found. Shingidi Mungan!'

'No wonder! At last everyone finds out.'

'They came to the holy presence. Offered a prayer for the grant of their wish!'

'What then?'

'The wife conceived. And gave birth to a baby boy! It was the weighing ceremony of that child—against fish. There was also a pot of toddy.'

'What happened to the fish and toddy?'

'Vanished.'

'How do you mean?'

'Vanished into thin air. Not to be seen anywhere.'

The woman said, immersed in divine ecstasy:

'Mass prayer!'

They prayed in one voice:

'Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan!'

'Now, may I know what brought you here?'

'O it is the same matter. A child. Our ewe is barren.'

'Don't you have rams around?'

'Yes, there are two or three of them.'

'Not only ewes but also elephants will be delivered of young ones. What have you brought?'

'A cock.'

'Haven't you tied its legs?'

'Yes, we have.'

'Take it and place it near his feet. Be careful. Very short-tempered. Terrible deity. Will burn you to ashes.'

They did as instructed, prayed and came back. Kariathan said:

'Those Muslims have agreed to renovate the temple and have it electrified!'

'Hara Hara Shinigidi Mungan!'
As the devotees left Kariathan

thought there should be someone here throughout. A steel box to receive cash offerings should be installed with lock and key. The practice now was for the devotees to come as they liked, open the door, offer their prayers and to leave what they liked on the floor. There had been no theft of money so far. Who would dare do it? Whatever that be, the box of offering should be installed soon. There must be lamp offering at dusk and also arrangement for dawn worship. There must be someone engaged on a full time basis. Well, things would be all right soon. Kariathan walked up to Shingidi Mungan and said:

“Look here, Shingidi Mungan. This is Kariathan. Let there be a truce between us. Forget what I’ve said or done to you and forgive me. For the next festival I’ll give you a special salute of eleven gun shots. Now I’ll chant one hundred and one hymns in praise of you. And thereafter a cock sacrifice. Are you satisfied?”

Kariathan stood there and chanted ‘Hara Hara Shingidi Mungan’ one hundred times, counting one after the other. Then he slit the throat of the cock and offered Shingidi Mungan some blood. He also drank some. Fastening the entrance, he left with the slain

cock. He had his dinner with chicken curry and then he went to sleep. Shingidi Mungan came to him in his sleep. He dreamt that Shingidi Mungan had forgiven him for everything. He told his wife about this dream visitation. She asked him:

‘It is twenty years since we married. Why hasn’t he given us a child?’

‘Do you mean to say that it is my fault?’

Kariathan went to the house of Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi. They were very happy!

He was given a sumptuous breakfast. Then he smoked his cigarettes. Then came the usual holy ritual.....wrapping the gold-laced cloth round him! Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi together offered him the cloth. Not golden, but an expensive foreign shawl. Then they tied a foreign watch round his left wrist.

‘No need to wind it. Just keep it there. It will run.’ Afterwards he was given a piece of shirting, a double dhoti, a full-sleeved woollen sweater, a fountain pen, a big torch, soaps and a shaving set, tiger balm for headache, a belt, and an umbrella—all original foreign stuff: A saree and a blouse piece—both foreign, for his wife. He was also shown the

trick of opening the foreign umbrella.

'How many kids have you, Kariathan?' asked Ayisha Bibi. He said: 'We have been married for twenty years. But we don't have children!

'Why hasn't Shingidi Mungan blessed you?'

'Some get blessed soon; in the case of others it takes time. Who knows divine secrets?' Ayisha Bibi and Abdul Razak had been the recipients of instant blessing. It was a miracle indeed!

Ayisha Bibi said:

'I have to redeem a promise. I'll perform the hair-dance on the festival day!'

'Hair-dance! it's the holiest act, ha!'

'Hair-dance, that's it.'

'Would you please ask your wife to come here and teach me how to do it?'

'Isn't it a sacred thing to do! She'd love to oblige you, I'm sure.'

Said Abdul Razak:

'I'll perform the oracle-dance.' 'A very sacred thing to do indeed. To work oneself into a frenzy, and then dance. Dance in a frenzy, that's what one should do.'

'Would you teach me how to dance?'

'Yes, certainly I'll teach you how to do that sacred act.'

'We've committed a mistake,' said Abdul Razak. 'We should have arranged for photographs being taken of the weighing ceremony and given them to the papers with the news.'

'I'm sorry, I too forgot about it.'

Ayisha Bibi said:

'My child, my husband and I shall get converted to the Shingidi Mungan religion. We've great belief in it.'

'The Muslim community is very malicious,' said Kariathan, 'They'll chop you to pieces and throw you away.'

'You mean, us?'

'Anyone.'

'We are not their paid servants. We have the liberty to get converted to any religion we like in this country. Who gave us our darling son?'

'O, well, isn't it a miracle?'

'Miracles do happen daily. Who takes note of them? The doors of the Shingidi Mungan religion are wide open. Let the entire Muslim community walk in! Their

Musaiyars. Thangals and Moulvis and all—'

'There are also the Shaiks!'

'Let the Shaiks also come. As also all the Christians with their holy fathers, nuns, bishops and the Pope—let them all come.'

'Let the Nambudiris, Nairs' Brahmins, Konginis, Sikhs, Jains and the Budhists come. Let the Thiyas and the Eazhavas come; as also all the Chandalas. They are all welcome! The Shingidi Mungan religion is the newest religion of this land of the rishis! This is going to be the religion of the world! Let them hear, those who have ears!'

'Kariathan,' Ayisha Bibi said.

'Is it essential that those who embrace this religion should drink toddy?'

'Well then, listen to the story of toddy! In the beginning Shingidi Mungan created a few coconut trees and a few palm trees. Shingidi Mungan himself tapped all of them. He got good toddy. He tasted it.....nectar! He then ordered those coconut trees and the palm trees to go and propagate themselves. It is the progeny of those coconut trees and palm trees that we see now all over!'

Rice, fish curry, fish fry ginger curry, curd.

Rice, another delicious variety of fish, curried and fried.

Curried green-chilli, curd, steamed rice-cake, potato curry, fruits, tea.

Soft rice-pancake, mutton curry, gruel made of pulverized rice.

Rice, chicken curry, chicken fry, fried papad.

Porotta, meat curry and tea. Biriyani (egg), chutney, strong tea.

Coconut rice, mutton curry, dal, papad, chutney.

Rice, buffalo meat, curried and fried, dal, papad, chutney.

Ghee-rice, chicken curry, papad, a side dish.

Biriyani (mutton), curd-chutney, strong tea.

Biriyani (chicken) ginger curry, strong tea.

Biriyani (fish), lime pickle, strong tea.

After eating the courses listed above Kariathan looked healthier and thought that Islam was not bad after all. This religious aberration lasted only for a while because Kariathan stood firm in his Shingidi Mungan religion. Such slight aberrations were only human. Now and

then, Abdul Razak's Umma, that is mother, reminded him about the naming of the child. There was the grandfather, Uppappa--how about his name being given to the child? There were also the names of prophets and saints, famous kings and prime ministers and presidents. It must be sweet-sounding and sensible; shouldn't be difficult to pronounce. A simple but beautiful name. It was a big problem. What name would they choose?

What was the name chosen by Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi after due deliberations?

Wait That ceremony will also be performed at the appointed time!

The cow and its calf came. It was of a good breed yielding a lot of milk. Got it cheap. Four thousand and five hundred rupees!

The cow and the calf went to the temple first in the company of one of Kariathan's helpers. Abdul Razak, Ayisha Bibi and their darling son went behind in a car. Then went Kariathan. The car was going slowly and smoothly. It shouldn't bounce since the child was in. They stopped the car by the side of the road and got out and walked towards the temple. They walked through the crowd of goats and

the dogs and the pigs. Kariathan kicked the beasts as and when he got a chance. A huge crowd of devotees, men and women, young and old, followed Abdul Razak, Ayisha Bibi and the child--they knew that the Muslims who had performed the weighing ceremony and who were renovating the temple were visiting the temple. Clamour!

They arrived in front of the temple. Kariathan tethered the cow to the bamboo pole of the temple. As instructed by Kariathan Abdul Razak carried the calf in his arms and entered the sanctum. The idea was to show the calf to Shingidi Mungan and then offer the cow and the calf formally to the temple. But Abdul Razak stood there dumbfounded.

Kariathan, Ayisha Bibi and the darling child got in now. They also stood dumbfounded!

What a miracle!

Shingidi Mungan.....was not there! Someone had stolen Shingidi Mungan! May the deadly snake bite the thief!

Abdul Razak consoled all of them. He gave instructions to send urgent wires to the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister and the Chief Minister. He gave Kariathan five hundred rupees

for the purpose. The police and the newsmen had to be notified. Wires had to be sent. The police inspector had to be informed personally. The bigwigs left with money for all this.

With the crowd as witness Abdul Razak tethered the cow and the calf in front of the entrance to the Shingidi Mungan temple. Thus that auspicious ceremony was gone through.

Now the child had to be given his name. Shingidi Mungan would be brought back safe by the smart policemen. That was certain! And there would be reinstallation too! That was also certain!

Abdul Razak, Ayisha Bibi and Kariathan proceeded with the naming ceremony. The

crowd watched intently. Abdul Razak said something to Kariathan's ears. His eyes shone.

Kariathan rang the bell. The crowd and Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi stood in meditation. At last they opened their eyes. It was time: The auspicious moment!

Abdul Razak pronounced with due reverence the holy name of his darling son:

'Shingidi Mungan!'

There was heard like an orcaular shout, like a terrific roar, this chanting from the mouths of the crowd and of Kariathan, Abdul Razak and Ayisha Bibi:

'Hara Hara Shingidi
Mungan!'

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The Malayalam Novel, 1982

K. M. Tharakan

More than fifty percent of the books published in Malayalam every year are novels; and some of them are really voluminous. Anyone who attempts to assess the productions in fiction every year has a hard time turning over the pages of these works. In the process he comes across works that have some impact on his sensibility and he studies them with care. Stock responses deter the reader from discerning the merits of original works by new writers. One must be open to the impact of the traditional and the new, the conventional and the unconventional.

Not very many good novels came out in 1982—novels that could rejuvenate our sensibility. Like the novels of the seventies the novels of the eighties also fall under two categories, novels of tradition and novels of new sensibility. Novelists of the great tradition seek to build their works on sound plots; and try to people their world with memorable characters. But most

of them fail to weave new plots and powerful characters seldom emerge. One can understand why they fail as satirists, but sad to say they fail even as humorists. Novelists of the great tradition of the past excelled in exploiting the primary passions of the human heart. Their successors have mostly sentiments at their disposal, the basic difference between passions and sentiments they have failed to understand. What they can do at best is to polish their language and make their writings readable. One has only to look into the majority of popular novels to see how lamentably they fall far short of the great novel of the great tradition. There are for example four novels, *Honam* by P. V. Thampi, *Nenmanikyam* by Muttar Soman, *Cchaya Prathicchaya* by Krishnakumari and *Akkani* by A.M. Vasudevan Pillai

Honam gives us the story of a woman Subhadrakutty who suffers untold hardship for the sake of her only daughter. She

successfully resists the amorous advances of many a philanderer; at last as she is about to surrender, an old man Kunjurama Panicker comes to her rescue. Subhadrakutty for a time thinks that her problems are over, but her daughter Sreedevi as she matures turns against her. The story is set against the life of the dependants of Vaikkom Temple. The characterisation and plot construction of the novel are conventional, but the story is engaging and the narration is lively. The same may be said about Muttar Soman's *Nenmanikyam* set against the Kuttanadan background made familiar to readers through the works of Thakazhi. It is the story of Vasanthikunjamma who identifies herself with the working class. The woman suffers, may be to atone for the sins of the people of her class who led a life of debauchery and exploitation. The novelist is at his best in his portrayal of the beauties of rural Kuttanad and its life. *Cchaya-Prathicchaya* gives us the tragedy of domestic life resulting from the failure of the husband to meet the needs of the wife. It is not the question of incompatibility but of sheer callousness and indifference on the part of the husband. There is one character emerging out of

the novel, Ammalukutty who is more sinned against than sinning. The suffering mother, Kunti of Mahabarata, and the deserted wife, Sita of Ramayana haunt the minds of these traditional novelists, but they fail miserably in capturing the grandeur of these archetypes. In *Akkani* A. M. Vasudevan Pillai narrates the story of the struggle of the tappers against their oppressors. Medayil Vaidyar, Esakki, Thangayyan, Thanu Pillai, Ponnunmuthu and Lakshmi have their own individuality. The thrust in the novel is its social criticism. The novelist highlights the role played by Christian missionaries in converting the workers into Christians. However they do little to improve their lot. The clash between Nadar Christians and Nairs is basically a clash between the workers and the feudal lords. The protagonist of the novel is Ponnunmuthu who serves the missionaries in vain. He gets a wife, but no job. There is little joy for him in being the watcher of the house of the European. In disgust he leaves the place. It seems *Akkani* intended to treat the theme of disillusionment of Nadars who became Christians in the hope of achieving freedom. But the novel misses the mark, and lapses into an ordinary tale.

Certainly different from these novels is J. K. V.'s novelette *Azhamillatha Mannil* (In Thin Soil). A novel of tradition, it has a life of its own. It is woven around the lives of three people Mercy, Georgekutty and Babu. We remember them; and though there is nothing new about the story, it stirs our hearts. For one thing, it is the story of the disillusionment of Mercy. She loses her lover Babu, her classmate but gets their professor Georgekutty as her husband. Georgekutty grows melancholic and philosophic as he proves himself a miserable failure. Mercy is in penury, in sheer misery. She attends on her sick daughter Renu who is hospitalised. At the hospital she sees Babu, now a rich man, pass before her with his wife. As Babu comes to her and presents her with a gift of money she is bewildered: is it an expression of charity or hypocrisy? Aren't we turned into hollow men in the modern context? J. K. V. combines sentiments and satire, a rare blend indeed. He exposes the weakness of our economic structure. *Azhamillatha Mannil* shows how a traditional theme can be vitalised by an original mind with a new vision. Modern relationships are like plants that grow on a plot with no deep soil.

Ivide, Avide, Appuravum (Here, There and Beyond) is an ambitious attempt by J.K.V. to create a new type of fiction-which is a blend of fact and fantasy, discussion and sallies, journalistic reporting and simple narration. The novelist is thoroughly unconventional in his approach to sex and morals. He introduces Lakshmi and Kamalam, mother and daughter at the outset. The mother describes how Kamalam was born. They happen to die and go to the under world. (This reminds one of Dante's *Divine Comedy*) where they see Sarojini with whom Kamalam had had sex relations while on earth. The underworld according to J.K.V. is very interesting, peopled as it is by saints and philosophers, thinkers, scientists and just ordinary men and women. There, we see Diogenes, Thomas Aquinas, Madison, Faraday, Iphigenia, Helen, Penelope, YahyaKhan, Bhutto, Russell, and a number of others. They discuss a number of themes-culture, politics, sex and war. The major theme is war; man in spite of his achievements has grown into a war-mongering animal. He has invented mortal weapons. The executive committee of the governing council of the underworld resolves to see that present-day man is wiped

out and a new species of creatures is born to inhabit the earth. Here is an excerpt. "Sonny (a member of the executive committee) says, "Sir, it is better we put an end to this immediately. As Tolstoy said 'Only six feet of earth man needs' Let us destroy men and arsenals. Let all of them come here." Thereon St. Thomas was rapt in thought. "Yes we have to supersede them, no other way—we want a better race of humans, a more sane race." That is the message of the novel. The novel is new, and interesting; thought-provoking—though it is lacking in power and grace.

Madampu Kunjukuttan is a seeker of truth like any other modern. His *Mahaprasthanam* (The Great Journey) retells the story of Siddhartha's pursuit of truth. Suddhodana of Kapilavasthu and Mayadevi look forward to the birth of their son with joy and anxiety—when the baby is born Asithan predicts that it will grow into "Nirvana Guru". Maya Devi dies an untimely death; Suddhodana brings up Siddhartha with care. Siddhartha is a seeker of truth; he pleads for the release of a swan at the court. As he grows into a young man he is sent out into the open world. Whatever he sees gives him pain. The

king arranges for Siddhartha's marriage with Yasodhara. But the young man is obsessed with the problem of suffering and death. As Suddodana sees in a dream Siddhartha leaves the palace for good and becomes a sanyasin. The novelist concentrates on depicting the effect of this departure on Suddhodana and Yasodhara. They wait for his return. Years later Buddha comes to the palace, not as a son or a prince or a husband. He has overcome himself; and discovered the truth. The narration of the story is good, though the novel misses the mark of greatness by a wide margin.

Punathil Kunjabdulla's *Adayunna Vathil* (The Closing Door) is a powerful novelette. It gives us the agonies of a young wife, Radha. She is the daughter of an ex-service-man, Govindan, who is insensitive to the feelings of other people. He gives his daughter Radha to Raghavan who is but a boor. Radha's misery begins with the first night of her wedded life. She is a total stranger in her husband's house. She finds herself reduced to a chattel. She feels suffocation. She has a lot of chores to do; there is no end to them, and she gets little to eat. Raghavan works at the check post. He eats a

lot and has illicit relation with another woman. His mother has a liaison with a middle aged ex-service man. She finds nothing wrong in the relationship. In fact the mother-in-law expects Radha also to gratify the lust of the man. Radha is now a cog, a cog that works, that feels that suffers, a cog that yearns for freedom. In her frantic search for freedom she goes home. The insensitive father is not concerned with her welfare. He asks Radha "Why did you come rushing here?" She tells a lie: she says "I have come to take with me the pill for my cold". What else shall she say? She returns to her husband's house. As she returns she asks herself. "Nothing happened as I worked. Didn't I come all the way to hug my father and tell him about all that I suffered? But as I reached home I forgot everything." The narration continues, "In her mind each of the fetters of her father's agony to get her married was falling off. Can't, can't bear it any longer. She was walking faster. No, it is impossible to work out one's work, specially if you are a woman". This is the story of man who finds himself in a rat-trap. The story of Radha is the story of a woman; it is also the story of the alienated and persecuted

modern, the modern who is like Orestes in Sartre's *Flies*; but here is a significant difference. Orestes is guilty of matricide. But the only crime of Radha is that she was born in this world especially as a woman. That is the predicament of the modern.

In *Lokathile Adya Viplavangal* C. Radhakrishnan gives in short episodes the revolt of the nephews and other dependants against the elders of the family. The novelette is a satire; the language is powerful; picturisation of character is effective; however this can not be considered an excellent work of C. Radhakrishnan.

Parameswaran is just another novelette of new sensibility by Kakkanadan. Apparently it is a travelogue that reminds one of the story of *The Ancient Mariner*. An eerie atmosphere is created. There were three of them, the narrator, Parameswaran and Jagatmohan travelling north from one region to another in varying climates. As they travelled both the narrator and Jagatmohan indulged in romantic reveries. Parameswaran had no girl friend or old flame to think about. He was drowsy for most of the time. They reached a frozen territory, the very atmosphere of which

instilled fear in the hearts of both the narrator and Jagat-mohan. Parameswaran was undaunted. They got down at the station. The station master, directed them to go to a tavern or so in the judka of Keval Singh at night in the severe cold defying the blizzard, through a mountain pass. It was a hazardous journey. As the horse, fear-stricken, hesitated to climb up, Keval Singh and Parameswaran sang hymns in praise of the goddess of the mountain and the horse plodded on. But it failed to carry them beyond a point at which it fell down. The three got down and went into a tavern, they drank rum and rested. Ever since the journey became troublesome Parameswaran was their mainstay. It was he who held the wild wind from hurting them all night. The two went into deep sleep. Next morning Parameswaran was missing. And this is how the story ends. "As we stepped into the spring that drove away winter outside the door we knew that Parameswaran had disappeared. At that time we had no need of Parameswaran; he was not a problem to us.

From the spring of the woods it was with enthusiasm and renewed vigour that we - Jagat-mohan and I - returned to the

city. And at the station Parameswaran was standing there. He welcomed us with his famous smile.

He said 'Wasn't your journey comfortable? Pardon me I could not make it.'

'That was wrong of you' I expressed my disapproval. As my cheeks turned red he came to my side. With his hand on my shoulder he said, 'Friend, take it easy'.

I felt his touch almost like an armour that enveloped me. I felt a new sense of security."

Now what does the journey signify? And who is Parameswaran? It is anybody's guess. But the heart of the matter is the creation of the eerie atmosphere as in Coleridge's *Christabel*. Parameswaran, whether he symbolises manliness or godliness, is a source of strength on which one has to draw in times of crisis. The language of Kakkanadan is, as usual, powerful; every word has its impact on our sensibility.

As a work of fiction *Orotha* commands our attention. It is a novel of tradition. It has a plot of its own and a towering character. It is written in the form of a biographical novel. It is the story of the life and struggles of a powerful woman

Orotha. In the floods of 1923 Orotha lost her parents and relatives. She was a baby left all alone in a house floating on the water. The brave Pappan of Palai, a boatman by profession rescued her and brought her up. He loved her more than his nephew Kochuvarkey, or his keep Janamma or her son Muthukrishnan. Orotha grew up under the protection of Pappan; she married Kochuvarkey and bore him children. On a festive night Pappan died in a skirmish in the church premises. Thereafter it started, farmers and peasants of Palai set out for Malabar to settle in its virgin forests. Orotha and others set out for Chemperi under the leadership of Ittiyavirah. In Malabar life was a challenge, an incessant fight against the inclement weather and the hostile soil. Orotha took the lead in clearing the forest and cultivating the land. She suggested how logs of wood in the wild might be sold outside. She also worked in the plantation. Most of the settlers suffered from wild attacks of malaria. Malaria took away children, and rendered many including Kochuvarkey invalid. Orotha continued her fight against adversity. She yielded to Outhekutty her brother-in-

law one Easter night. Once she had also to surrender herself to an estate-owner for a little money that she needed to save her child. Orotha was a pillar of strength. She rose to be the leader of the settlers. Chemperi developed into a flourishing village under her leadership. Finally to open the watershed at the mountain top for the villagers Orotha goes up the mountain. She loses her life there like Kunchaikkutty in C.V's *Rama Raja Bahadur*. Orotha is a legendary figure—one of the most memorable women characters in Malayalam fiction. No doubt, *Orotha* is one of the best novels of Kakkanadan and easily the best that came out in Malayalam in 1982.

And there are two more books that engage our attention; *Thrikkottoor Peruma* (The Glory of Thrikkottoor) of U. A. Khadar, and *Ravum Pakalum* (Night and Day) of M. Mukundan, Thrikkottoor is a place like Kudalore of M. T. Vasudevan Nair, *Athiraniippadam* of S. K. Pattekkatt and Khasak of O. V. Vijayan. There are tales that celebrate the glory of Thrikkottoor. They are as delightful as Arabian Nights tales, as intriguing as the legends of ancient India; and as artistic as modern short stories. The tales

present us with a number of feudal lords and people whom they have exploited. There are men and women; Nairs, Thiyyas, and Muslims, the old and the young, all creating an exciting drama of life. There is, for example, the tale of a woman who wove and sold sheaves of coir at the market. She was loyal to her husband who climbed coconut trees and plucked the nuts for the feudal lords. As she sold the coir sheaves at the market the chieftain of the locality made amorous advances to her; she rebuffed them with a slap on his face. The man bought a sheaf of coir from her. A few days later he had her husband killed and hung by the coir on the branch of a tree. The woman bore the agony silently all alone. The chieftain had a son and he was growing up. The woman seduced this young man. The young man spent his nights on the verandah of the woman's house. The chieftain one night set fire to her house. But while she escaped miraculously with her son, the son of the chieftain was charred to death. This woman, Janaki, suggests the novelist, is the prototype of Kuttimani, a woman of the ancient legends of love. Janaki continued to go to the market to sell coir as earlier. This is

how the story ends—"Ah; she has again set out to sell coir at the Vadakara market. Janaki with her son by her side leaned against the compartment wall and sang to herself the couplets from a ballad—Oh, Kuttimani, the Puluya woman who burnt to ashes the princes of Kadalunkara; Oh, the slave girl of Kolar Kodan Mala who sucked the blood of Puliarmala prince!"

Janaki smiled. She had sharpened the weapon she had; wasn't she going to the same market to sell coir? One can hardly forget these tales that sound both ancient and modern at the same time, ancient in their theme, and modern in their treatment; they are modernised versions of ancient tales.

Ravum Pakalum of Mukundan is the symbolisation of a powerful vision. The only defect of the book is that the symbol is not adequate enough for the vision. The novel could have been a little shorter. Yet it is a major work of Mukundan and deserves detailed analysis. The events of the story take place in the village Chavukara through which the Chempuzha flows and on the hill Irulmala that stands as the guardian of the village. The village is now and then afflicted with pestilence, which renders people blind, or inflicts

on them incurable wounds. The villagers suffer incessantly, and the river is muddy throughout the year. The belief of the people is that Kalamooppa who symbolises the god of time as well as death governs their destiny. If only he is propitiated the village will be liberated from the bondage of suffering. How can this be done? Anantan the most loved young man of the village filled with compassion for his village wants to know the truth about suffering, and learn how he may free his people from evil. Once again the river shall be filled with clear water; he scales Irulmala all alone and among its rocks and woods he meets Kalamooppa who tells him that if only babies are offered as sacrifice to him, he will save the village. Anantan believes his words and sets aside his conventional value system. For him there is only one goal, the liberation of Chavukara; he shall sacrifice babies as directed by Kalamooppa. There is a host of characters in the novel, each representing some phase or other in the life of the people. At first Anantan offers Rohini's son to Kalamooppa, and then Barghavan's son. In order to have a son of his own Anantan takes Leela to wife, but Leela dies; then he takes Karthi home, but she is barren; then he takes away from the Adhikari his keep

Madhavi, she is persecuted by the Adhikari and she has an abortion. Finally Anantan forces Sreedevi wedded to Krishnan to bear his baby. And with the baby he goes to Kalamooppa. It is a still-born child and Kalamooppa rejects it. Totally disillusioned, Anantan returns to the village. The angry villagers who come to know of Anantan's misdeeds stone him to death, whereupon the village is redeemed from its curse. The water of the Chempuzha becomes as clear as ever. The story offers itself to analysis from various angles. Anantan would have been an image of Socrates or Jesus if his ways were fair. As it is he is a perverted messiah whose death cleanses a village of its sins. True liberation comes not through conventional offerings which are basically 'evil', but through offering oneself as sacrifice. The story has different levels of meaning, it can be read in a variety of ways too, like other novels of Mukundan. Camus raised the question why so many innocent babies were killed for the sake of Jesus. Would the slaughter of the innocents achieve salvation for mankind? Certainly Jesus was not crucified for this slaughter, but the images are all there in *Ravum Pakalum*.

Do these novels point the way forward or backward? Do they suggest that the growth of the Malayalam novel is stunted? I for one do not think so. Though most of these novels are not very outstanding, their authors are men of talent and they have many more years ahead of them; their masterpieces are yet to be.

□

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Literary Criticism in Malayalam, 1982

M. Leelavathy

Literary criticism is considered to be a less fertile branch in Malayalam compared to the branches of creative literature like the novel, the short-story and poetry. Probably the same state of affairs prevails in other regional languages too. Yet with regard to production in 1982, no fewer than a score and a half books are to be listed, some of them by very eminent critics. By any standard, this is not a poor harvest. A significant feature is that most of them are collections of essays written on various occasions and on an assortment of topics. Studies concentrating on a particular author or particular branch of literature are not many. In this respect the two previous years had a richer harvest; during the period critical histories of Malayalam poetry, Malayalam drama and Malayalam literary criticism authored by M. Leelavathy G. Sankara Pillai and Sukumar Azhicode respectively, two studies of the works of

Mahakavi Sankara Kurup written by D. Benjamin and M. Leelavathy and one on the works of Mahakavi Kuttamath written by Pavanam had come out. In 1982 similar attempts were not less in number but in extensiveness and comprehensiveness there is no comparison. Five works on novels and two on poetry are, however, notable contributions.

Novels in Malayalam by K. Asokan is a reliable guide for readers of novels. Too many novels are being published every year and therefore average readers would be grateful for getting effective guidance from discerning critics. Asokan has proved his competence in this respect. His work on novels is a dispassionate assessment; it is a rational endeavour to learn with a responsive mind and propagate with a responsible interest, the significant features in the works of some of our eminent novelists. His literary response is not confined to any particular generation or school.

The selected list of novelists includes reformists revolutionaries, satirists, visionaries, philosophers, mere story-tellers and modernists...all types of authors who have taken distinctive strides. It cannot, however, be claimed that every eminent author finds a place here. There are omissions. Lalithambika Antharjanam and P. K. Bala-krishnan came to the fore-front each by writing a single novel. Asokan being a critic with balance, his views on the recognition gained by them would have been welcomed by the reading community. We find Parappurath and Nanthanar here, but not Kovilan. The omission of Malayattoor Ramakrishnan stands out. In the younger generation, the omission of Anand disappoints us. Vatsala also could have been included. As the author does not claim to have included all novelists of consequence, the list of omissions is perhaps unwarranted. What I stress is that it would have been a greater blessing if a work of this kind had been more comprehensive.

Malayalam Novel - the Beginnings by Dr. George Irumbayam is a product of research. All the fourteen chapters of this book had been published as independent articles in various periodicals

within a span of five years, from 1977 to 1981. The thirteen works he has chosen for detailed study belong to the 19th century and nearly ten among them are almost obsolete as far as the common reader is concerned. Therefore, the attempt to give in a nutshell the gist of each book along with comparative criticism is an invaluable help for serious students of literature and a short-cut for the common reader who would like to get a general picture of the first phase of the Malayalam novel. The author's standard of critical judgement is, on the whole, beyond controversy. And his charming style has succeeded in arousing the interest of specialists as well as casual readers.

Chandu Menon by P.K. Gopalakrishnan belongs to the series 'Architects of New Kerala', a scheme of publication undertaken by the Kerala History Association, on the model of *Makers of Indian Literature*, a project of the Central Sahitya Akademi. In six chapters, the history of the Renaissance and its impact on Malayalam Literature, the biography of Chandu Menon, critical evaluation of the two novels, *Indulekha* and *Sarada*, and Chandu Menon's cultural heritage are

summed up. Though a small volume, it leaves out no essential details.

Parappurathu by G. N. Panicker is a study of the works, six major novels and short stories, of the late novelist, Parappurathu. As the first attempt to evaluate the works of the author, this is a commendable success. Himself a novelist and short-story-writer, Panicker is conscious of the problems and pangs of the creative writer and the consequent sympathetic understanding has lent a tenderness to the approach which the general reader is not likely to grudge.

Kalaghattangal, Pravanathakal (Periods and Tendencies) by Kallada Ramachandran is an analysis of the various aspects of the novel as a literary genre.

Two major studies of poetical works are *The Art of Ezhuttacchan* by P. K. Balakrishnan and *The Venmani Movement* by Dr. Akavoor Narayanan, the former concentrating on the works of one poet, Thunchattu Ezhuttacchan, and the latter on the works belonging to a specific school of poets.

The Art of Ezhuttacchan is the result of an original analysis of the poetical works of Ezhuttacchan, who is known as the father of Malayalam. It contains new revelations.

Scholars and outstanding critics like P. K. Narayana Pillai, Dr. Chelanat Achyutha Menon, Ullur Parameswara Iyer, Prof. N. Krishna Pillai and Dr. K. N. Ezhuttacchan have made extensive studies of the works of the great poet. One is inclined to feel that discovery of hidden pastures would be next to impossibility. But Balakrishnan has proved that a seeker with genius could still unravel hitherto uncomprehended truths that contradict conventional deeprooted beliefs existing in the collective mind. He has investigated in minute detail the plausible reasons for certain deviations from Mahabharata that Ezhuttacchan seems to have deliberately adopted in his abridged translation or rather transcreation, and for the fundamental difference in the depiction of Karna, a character of vital importance. The conclusions are likely to be a bit unpalatable to many, but truth with its scintillating beauty as revealed by the author gives authority to his novel observations.

Venmani Prasthanam is a study in depth of the works of a school of poets known as the Venmani School which flourished during the second half of the nineteenth century. It was a transitional stage being the last phase of the

neo - classic period before the dawn of the romantic revolution. The Venmani poets, the Princes of the Kodungallore Palace, Naduvam poets, and the poets who enriched the 'pure-Malayalam' sub - movement were known to be members of this school, almost all of them hailing from the central region of Kerala. They had tried to liberate Malayalam poetry from the tyranny of pedantry and the exhibitionism of scholarliness that prevailed in southern regions. In effect it was an attempt at democratisation of poetry. Poetry came to many of them 'as leaves to trees' and the phenomenon of 'instant poetry' was a common feature. Kunhikuttan Thampuran translated the whole of Mahabharata in less than three years, to be exact in 874 days, which is a lasting proof for his fantastic speed in composing poetry. Their indifference to documentation has made it a difficult task for any sincere researcher to bring out all the dimensions of this movement. Dr. Narayanan has taken immense pains to collect relevant material from the pages of the old periodicals and from old informants. The book is a modified form of a doctoral thesis. Being the only one of its kind, it serves as a reference

book for those interested in a spiritual voyage into the past.

A study of the genre autobiography has been made by Dr. Vijayalayam Jayakumar. More than a critical evaluation, this also serves as a reference book, in which the important autobiographies in Malayalam are summed up. Some of these are of political, social, and literary luminaries such as C. Kesaven, V. T. Bhattathiripad, E. M. Sankaran Namboodiripad and Mannathu Padmanabhan.

Next we come to collections of essays. Contributions in this category surpass in range and value those of the past two years.

Selected Essays by S. Guptan Nayar is a volume which includes some essays taken from books published in the past three decades, but several of them are being compiled for the first time. A leading critic noted for his poise, balance, refined literary taste, extensive reading, knowledge in Indian and foreign literatures as well as literary theories, he is looked upon as a reliable guide in controversial literary issues. This book is a collection of all his important critical essays. Students of literature will be grateful for getting them all together in one volume. The book is divided

into five parts. The first is deliberations on certain oft-discussed problems of criticism. The second is balanced observations on the poems of some of our renowned poets like Asan, Vallathol, G and Changampuzha, and a thought-provoking analysis of modernist poetry. The third part deals with the aim and function of art in general, random thoughts on the art of acting, and a study of the art of blending music in the libretto of the dance-drama, *Nalacharitham* by Unnayi Warriar. Some of the essays in the fourth part have been taken from his book, *Visionaries*; but the investigation into the works of C. V. Raman Pillai to discover the roots of his legacy is a new one. The fifth part deals with sociological approach to literature. This book won the Central Sahitya Akademi Award for the year 1982.

Arthathinte Atirthikal (Frontiers of Meaning) by Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai is another collection of critical essays belonging to a similar span of time with the difference that none of them had been previously compiled into book-form. Dr. Raghavan Pillai's critical approach is noted for his ability to bring out the best in the old and the new with equal

dexterity and open mindedness. The wide range of topics shows how keen a student of diverse branches of knowledge he has been. Some of the themes are: the poetic concept of Aurobindo, the literary style of Kalidasa, critical analysis of the poetry of Ullur S. parameswara Iyer, the new experiments in poetry, critical studies of the plays of N. Krishna Pillai and C. J. Thomas, the philosophy of Samuel Beckett, the Indus Valley script and the 'Sphota' theory of Bharthruhari... A very strange assortment indeed which suggests the extensiveness of the author's intellectual interests and the expanses of meaning he finds in the creative thinking of some of the great. This book won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award for essays in 1983.

The Essays of Ayyappa Panicker is yet another collection of essays written within the same span of time, three decades. It is divided into five parts—poetry, drama, story, criticism and miscellaneous topics. Himself a renowned poet who is widely acclaimed as the most outstanding among pioneers of modernist poetry, his assessment of the works of older generations of poets and the moderns has evoked special interest. He possesses strong

literary convictions and expresses them bluntly. Evaluation of literature on grounds other than literary merit comes in for scathing criticism at his hands. He has not spared the veterans among the previous generation of critics and creative writers. This he did when they were at the peak of their eminence. Analysing some of the poems of Vallathol he unveils the inconsistencies and opportunistic concepts which generally passed for liberal-mindedness and illustrates how the tendency set standards inspiring subsequent writers to regard lack of intellectual honesty as an accepted factor. This is quite convincing. But there is a slight contradiction when he writes off similar aberrations in the poems of Asan as insignificant. However, he expresses in unequivocal terms his disagreement with the argument that sublimity of literature invariably depends on the sociological content and commitment. This work won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for literary criticism in 1983.

Kavithayum Janathayum (Poetry and the People) is a collection of six essays of criticism on contemporary poetry and the function of poetry, by K. Sachidanandan, whose

judgement of poetry reminds us of the saying of Ben Jonson: 'To judge poetry is the faculty of poets and not of all poets, but the best' He is one of such rare artists who are equally endowed with creative and critical faculties. His knowledge of the developments in world-poetry is upto date. In the magnitude of spiritual disquietude he has no parallel among contemporary Malayalam poets. Each of his poems and critical essays is a serious expression of this disquietude that incessantly churns his mind. His spiritual obsession is the ultimate liberation of the oppressed section of mankind. Consequently his poems and his essays bear the marks of these pangs and therefore when he refers to the rebellion in poetry it has a wide significance. New Poetry in Malayalam that began to gain ground in the Sixties and the Seventies appeared to be enigmatic to many an earnest reader. One of the essays in this book is an interpretative analysis of the same and the significance of irony employed by the poets is explained convincingly.

Aswadanam Niroopanam (Appreciation, Criticism) by Prof. P.G. Purushothaman Pillai

contains detailed reviews of books belonging to various categories such as history of literature, 'sandesa kavyas' novels, critical studies; travelogues etc. Book reviews in periodicals are generally superficial. But reviewing books, Professor Pillai takes immense pains to discuss all the relevant features of the book and to point out omissions and defects, if any, for which his critical acumen and high academic standard have been profusely utilised. According to him the function of criticism is to be a golden link that connects the work with the mind of the reader. This book is a rich document of the fulfilment of this function.

Kaliyugaranyakangal by Asha Menon is an earnest attempt to take the reader direct into the emotional experience of the communion between the critic and great authors like Neruda, Tagore, Thoreau, Aurobindo etc. We get a glimpse into the inexpressible ecstasies of that communion, but sadly enough are unable to share the ecstasies precisely because the author's task appears to have been to express the inexpressible. He uses words in such a way that the accepted connotations fail to convey the meaning he

intends. Quite often the reader is left in the dark.

Alokanam by Pavanan is a collection of fifteen essays which include interviews, memories, reviews and studies. A wide range of writers appears on these pages. The author's personal contact with some of them gives an intimate touch to the observations. When he writes on revolutionaries and progressive thinkers or writers, he is in his element and such articles emit more heat and light. The essays on K. Ramakrishna Pillai, Mundasseri, Cherukatu, D.M. Pottekkatt, K. Damodaran and M. C. Joseph are outstandingly authentic and maintain a very high standard.

Athyanthadhunika Niroopanam (Ultra-modern Criticism) by Prof. P. Meerakkutty reveals the author's views on the philosophy of the creative process, the critic's partiality, art as beauty of labour, creative process and liberty, commitment in art, the problems of criticism, academic criticism etc.

Prasanna Pooja by E. K. Narayanan Potti contains articles on beauty of rhyming and syllabic structure in poetry, the characters depicted by poet Vallathol, the poetic excellence of Ullur, depiction of 'sringara' in the dance-dramas

of Irayimman Thampi, the Pure-Malayalam movement and its main exponent Kundoor Narayana Menon, linguistic analysis of some caste-names etc.

Deepasikha by Professor K. Gopalakrishnan contains nine articles written between 1972 and '80. Some of them exhibit deep critical insight and courage to declare convictions that might turn out to be unpopular. The analysis of Asan's *Karuna* is an instance. A good introduction to the life and works of V. C. Balakrishna Panicker, a genius who rose and disappeared like a super-nova is also a commendable essay.

Bheerukkalute Swargam by Professor Mathew Ulakamthara is his random thoughts on 'value' in literature. He is one who would not have any compromise with those who depict hollow, aimless, inhuman life and call it a new philosophy. He has no hesitation in condemning blind emulation of western authors like Camus, in some of the most celebrated novels of today.

Sargadarsanam by Mampuzha Kumaran contains general essays on creative imagination, writer's vision, writer's freedom and the works of Vallathol and Kunjuraman Nair.

Abhiveekshanam by R. Viswanathan Nair contains critical appreciations of the works of four major poets, Changampuzha, Vallathol, O. N. V. Kurup and Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon. The essay on O. N. V. Kurup under the title 'Poet of the Pink Period' is comprehensive but that on Vyloppilli appears to be incomplete.

Literary Genius and Society by M. S. Devadas is a product of the Marxist approach to literature. All the articles in this book, though published in 1982, were written nearly two decades ago, prior to the split in the Communist Party. This school of critics in Kerala has always upheld the view that literary merit needs necessarily be in direct proportion to social commitment. Devadas, however, does not appear to be dogmatic though his conviction in the social function of art is unshakable. He has written on Shakespeare, Sholoklov etc. in conformity with the above perspective.

Another book, *Literature and Politics* by P Govinda Pillai also employs the Marxist approach to literature. The book is a collection of essays. Poetry and communism with respect to the works of Neruda, Albert Camus, the conscience of the white man, Budha Dev Bose and the limitation of the genius of

the ultra-moderns are some of the essays on non-Malayalam literature. Also we find the studies of the works of Malayalam authors like Uroob, Karur etc. A study of the novels of Malayattoor Ramakrishnan, a well known author whose works have not been paid enough attention by critics so far, is also included in this book.

So far we examined the contributions of individuals. I consider it not irrelevant to mention a collective endeavour which happens to be a monumental work—the first volume of *Bharatheeya Sahithya Charithram* edited by Dr. K. M. George and published in Malayalam by Kerala Sahitya Akademi. It is a colossal effort with no parallel in any other

regional language, so far. The English version *Comparative Indian Literature* is to be published shortly. The first volume is divided into six parts: Language, Folk Literature, Old Poetry, Modern Poetry, Drama and Novel. In each part, articles on the contributions in fifteen languages viz. Assamese, Urudu, Oriya, K a n n a d a , Kashmiri, Gujarathi, Tamil, Telugu, Panjabi, Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi, Sanskrit, Sindhi and Hindi written by experts. are included. Being the only one of its kind it has a unique importance, which, the Kerala Sahitya Akademi hopes, will be recognised by academicians, readers and writers in other regions when they go through the English version'. []

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Malayalam Poetry, 1982

K. S. Narayana Pillai

Poetry has always formed the core of Malayalam literature. It is true that the days when creative writing was totally equated with poetry have merged with the legendary past and other literary forms like fiction have become the literature of the common man. But poetry continues to be regarded as the symbol of literary expression. Even now the rhythm of poetry and the images created by it seem to produce deeper impressions on the minds of people when compared to the more easily enjoyable elements of other forms of literature.

Yet in very recent times a sizable section of readers seem to have lost this natural sensibility to a certain extent and become ignorant of the total picture of Malayalam poetry: There are many who read only one type of poetry and completely ignore all other varieties. This tendency is the direct result of the existing literary atmosphere which is very much similar to that of the political arena. The literary

scene is composed of divergent trends and irreconcilable forces represented by groups of writers. Diversity of approach is quite natural in a growing literature. But the present situation cannot be explained in that manner. There are schools and groups which refuse to recognise others as literary realities. Much of the debate that is going on is not about the relative merits of the different schools; nor is it concerned either with the quality of their representative products or with the implied sense of values. Very often it becomes an exercise in mutual condemnation based on real or imaginary attributes and the labels attached. Some of the divergent groups come together merely to repudiate others and to dominate the literary scene.

But it is significant that even in these circumstances Malayalam literature has witnessed the survival and further development of a number of distinct schools of poetry. This phenomenon reveals the innate vitality of Malayalam poetry and

the ultimate futility of negative criticism. Yet for the time being the devastating nature of the narrow-minded mutual criticism seems to have retarded the growth of at least some of the healthy but unusual elements of all the schools. It has also prevented many a promising poet from developing his personality and produced adverse effects on the majority of readers.

The multi-phased development of poetry as well as the emergence of water-tight compartments in the realm of literature demands special efforts to explain and evaluate contemporary poetry in its totality. Hence periodical surveys like this have a contemporary relevance. What is attempted here is a general survey of Malayalam poetry as it existed in 1982, based on the works published in that year. It is proposed to view the contributions of all the concerned poets objectively and to treat them as members of one family representing various aspects of the same culture, developed and expressed differently in different contexts. Classifications are made only for the limited purpose of revealing the background of the work done by each poet.

The list of books published in a year may include the com-

plete or selected works of elderly poets written over a long period and those of young writers who are still in the formative period of their career. All these works cannot be treated as examples of contemporary poetry. At the same time quite a number of noteworthy poems written by recognised writers in the relevant period might not have been published in the form of books because most of the Malayalam poets usually find it difficult to bring out collections regularly. The best thing to do in these circumstances would be to widen the scope of the survey so as to include all the poems published in periodicals also. But the recent growth in the number of periodicals and poems published in them makes such an exhaustive coverage almost impossible, especially in a short survey like this. Therefore it is proposed to rely on representative anthologies to get an idea of the trends which actually existed in the relevant period and base this survey generally on the works published in bookform.

Even though more than forty volumes of poetry were printed in 1982, the output is not encouraging when compared with that of novels. Moreover, nearly fifty percent of the

volumes are of little consequence, being the contributions of authors who have not succeeded in writing their own poetry. These authors include some new entrants to the field who appear to have been misled into believing that a poem is just an embellished metrical version of a high-sounding statement, narration or description, punctuated with emotional outbursts. It is rarely that the reader finds in these volumes a passage that is made memorable by the conveyance of an original poetic experience. Hence many of these volumes cannot be taken as indicating the condition of Malayalam poetry in 1982.

But that was not the case with all the new writers. There were at least a few who understood the real function of poetry and tried to express their aesthetic experiences in suitable forms. *Aatmahavyam* and *Upaasana* are two volumes of poems which bear witness to this encouraging fact. The former, the posthumous collection of a few short poems written by Kunchu Pillai, reveals the sharp sensibility and exceptional creative faculty of a young poet. It is extremely regrettable that he passed away at the age of thirty two. Sudha Variar's *Upaasana* is a collection of short poems characterised by sweetness of diction and

refreshing imagination. They are able to lift the reader to a world of lofty feelings. She follows the path of lyricism already laid by her romantic predecessors and is content with the depiction of her inner experiences in a manner that will produce emotional response in the readers. Hence She has avoided the heat associated with the complexities of modern life. But the stamp of her personality makes her poems touching.

The poems of Ezhumangalam Karunakaran represent a model that is being emulated by many other writers also. The declared purpose of such poetical works is to propagate certain ideas and ideals. This is achieved through a verbal depiction of episodes and a sequence of thoughts. The message of the poem is expressed in so many words, generally in the form of mere declaration of ideals. The writer appears to be conscious of the fact that such statements and declarations cannot by themselves offer a poetic experience to the reader. This weakness is sought to be compensated partly by the sentimentalisation of the content of the poem. The form is embellished with the help of superimposed techniques. This is the general pattern adopted by Karunakaran in the collection entitled *Naattarangu*. The form

borrowed by him to embellish some of his poems is that of folk songs.

Another group of published works belong to fairly well-known authors who have also preferred to adopt one recognised model or another with slight variations. To be precise, they follow the tradition moulded by poets like Vallathol, Changampuzha, Sankara Kurup, Edasseri, Vailoppilli and Vayalar Rama Varma in the recent past, the actual choice of model depending more or less on the age of each poet and the theme of each poem. *Darsanam* (C. A. Joseph), *Theranjedutha Kavithakal* (C. Krishnan Nair), *Krishna Pushpangal* (A. V. Sreekanta Poduval), *Krishnalila* (Krishnan Parappalli), *Aayiram naavulla maunam* (Yusuf Ali Kecheri), *Uthraada Vishadam* (K.G. Menon) and *Adimakalkku Oru Sanghaganam* (Somadasan) may be included in this category. Of these the first three remind the reader of the poetic culture that existed in Kerala a few decades ago. In fact, some of the pieces included in these volumes must have been written long ago. Hence the contemporary relevance of these poems is likely to be questioned. But the refinement of diction, the

loftiness of sentiments, the clarity of vision and the sense of values found in these poems cannot simply be dismissed as obsolete qualities. They do fill a vacuum felt by many a reader of modern literature. Such poems may also help the ordinary reader to retain a balanced approach to life and literature, instead of becoming a prisoner of the purely contemporary aspects of the modern tendencies. At the same time it has to be admitted that some of these writings are nothing more than conventional verses filled with either embellished platitudes or ornamental descriptions. There are also occasions when they present grossly distorted pictures of life under the cover of idealism.

The poems of Yusuf Ali Kecheri; Krishnan Parappalli and K. G. Menon belong to the romantic school that came into being in the days of Changampuzha and underwent a gradual transformation under the influence of poets like Sankara Kurup, Vayalar Ramavarma and Vailoppilli. In these poems the emphasis is on abstract ideas, common sentiments, colourful imagery and musical diction. The approach is idealistic. The themes range from the emotional experiences of the individual to his

reactions to social injustice. Very often the poems aim at a sentimental appeal. Philosophic and devotional self-expressions are not wanting. But they are more sensuous than spiritual. While some of the pieces are characterised by a note of pessimism, others project the dreams of the poet; many of them end in exhortations. This, according to a section of readers who believe in pious intentions, adds to the value of the poems. The refinement observed in the depiction of thoughts and feelings as well as in the language used enhances their apparent charm. But the complaint that they fail to stir the mind of the modern reader cannot be rejected or belittled. Excessive refinement seems to weaken even the irony employed by Yusuf Ali Kecheri in some of his works. The opening lines of the poem entitled *Misrepresentation* illustrate this weakness:

“Welcome to you, oh famine-
months
Who have come again
Singing the songs of
starvation.”

Undoubtedly, Yusuf Ali is the most successful of these poets, thanks to his superior craftsmanship.

Experimentation in form, such

as adaptation of structural patterns from ancient poetry and folksongs, superimposition of the growing social consciousness and attempts to depict more complex experiences, paved the way for the appearance of slightly different varieties of poems within the framework of lyricism. The volume brought out by Somadasan represents this tendency. The poems of Somadasan have certain characteristics in common with those of the late Vayalar RamaVarma. In combining concepts and images drawn from ancient Indian literature with those related to contemporary life, they are very close to each other. Their tendency to champion the cause of the suffering man in an explicit and chivalrous manner, to heighten the immediate emotional appeal of the poems even by romanticising the realities of day-to-day life, to express everything in an eloquent and highly colourful form and to make the diction perfectly musical—all these reveal their attachment to the romantic tradition. At the same time Somadasan has tried to transform this tradition by adopting the modernistic method of juxtaposing various aspects of life and by employing a variety of complex metrical patterns

which can intensify the effect of such depiction. Thus many of his poems acquire a novel appearance. Of course, their form is attractive and the content significant. But the ultimate poetic experience is not concrete, the imagery and vocabulary are vague and the total effect produced on the reader is not strong enough to be lasting. The concluding lines of *A Chorus for Slaves* exemplify this weakness.

“By the foams precipitated by
memory,
By the blood rushing out of
the eyes,
Let us record the story of our
pilgrimage
All along the edge of the
highways.”

P. Narayana Kurup the author of *Hamsadhvani* does not believe in glamorous poetry. He has neither made his poems sentimental, verbose and colourful, nor resorted to borrowed techniques in order to make them appealing to the casual reader. He just tries to bring out the central idea of each poem and develop it through a combination of verbal pictures which represent various phenomena of life. The value of the poem depends on the total effect of this combination. The poet does not

find it necessary to state his ideas and personal feelings explicitly. Most of his poems represent his strong reactions to social realities. He has relied on images drawn from the Indian tradition as well as those pertaining to contemporary life. But these images are brought in mainly as poetic devices meant to illustrate the ideas which the Poet wants to convey. They do not form part of a unified experience. Hence it will be no wonder if many a thing depicted in his significant poems like *The Story?*, *Biju Majumdar's Story* and *Under a Tree* fail to become soul-stirring experiences for the reader. This practice of making poetry a medium for illustrating predetermined ideas is a legacy left behind by the earlier generation of poets who wanted to exhibit their social consciousness.

Chemmanam Chacko, another poet who is keen on expressing his reactions to social realities through poetry, has succeeded in capturing the attention of the readers in general. But his success is not the result of following any set pattern. He has evolved his own unorthodox type of satire, through which he exposes all kinds of social evils prevalent in our country today.

The content of his poems may appear to be obvious facts pertaining to the general trends in social life. His mode of expression is very often unpoetic and even prosaic. But it is significant that he does not spare any section of society or any field of human activity and that he is able to imagine a situation or an idea which can expose the target of his ridicule totally and convincingly. The social criticism implied in it is quite different from the typical one borrowed by many of our writers from their political masters; the repetition of such criticism serves no purpose other than that of political propaganda and reflects only a partisan attitude. On the other hand Chacko is able to reveal the fraud that is being committed under the cover of impressive slogans. Had he gone deeper into the realities of life, tried to expose its undercurrents which defy a purely realistic or verbal representation and evolved a more suggestive and subtler mode of depicting them, his poems would have acquired a lasting value.

Balikkurippukal (Sacrificial Notes) is a collection of short poems by A. Ayyappan, one of the few poets of the younger generation who have established

their identity in the literary world after the advent of New Poetry, i.e., in an atmosphere dominated by the tendency to generalise and label all literary activities as modernistic or nonmodernistic. In a sense, the works of Ayyappan also can be included in the former category. But this young writer is a revolutionary in the fuller sense of the term, who would not like to subject his personality to any kind of general rules. Balachandran Chullikkad, the author of *Amaavaasi*, is another young Poet, perhaps the youngest, who has succeeded in developing an independent poetic personality even though he started his career as a gifted follower of New poetry. But there is a marked difference between these two writers both in their approach and in their style. Ayyappan's poetical works originate mainly from his strong reactions to contemporary life and a concept of literary expression based on his version of modern sensibility. His acquaintance with the art and literature of recent times has played a vital role in the shaping of his poetry. At the same time he does not hesitate to experiment with his own innovations. Anyway he has not drawn much either from the traditional poetic genius of

Malayalam or from the cultural heritage of Kerala. His rejection of the metrical form is almost total. Very often his poems are filled with highly personal images interwoven in an apparently illogical manner that is likely to baffle the ordinary reader. Yet the central concepts of most of the poems are so powerful as to unify the imagery and convey a strong experience to those who read them closely. On the other hand, the works of Balachandran symbolise a kind of sensibility based as much on the poetic culture inherited by him as on his direct experience in regard to contemporary life and art. He does not shun the traditional metres, but only uses them freely as adaptable rhythmic patterns. He too depicts his reactions to social realities and employs personal images in a manner that transcends ordinary logic; but the imagery as well as the experience conveyed through it is so concrete, vivid and suggestive that his poems are able to evoke favourable response in any reader. *Amaavaasi* is a collection of some of his most effective poems such as the one which bears the same title.

Among the top-ranking poets of today, only two have published works (in book - form) which come within the purview of this

survey. Twentyfive short poems of Sachidanandan were compiled in 1982 under the title *Venal Mazha* (Summer Rains). The second volume of the poetical works of Ayyappa Panickar also came out in that year. Their latest works deserve special attention because of the role played by them as the pioneers of New poetry in Malayalam. The poems collected in these two volumes reveal that these two poets have not tried to stick to the original concept and definition of New Poetry. On the other hand they have moved forward to evolve their own models of poetry. At the same time they have retained the modern sensibility acquired by them in the course of their experimentation with modernism and merged it with their new visions of life. It is this integrated sensibility that imparts strength and individuality to their respective varieties of poetic expression.

It is significant that Sachidanandan has found it necessary to repudiate the concept of New Poetry and question its relevance in the changed circumstances. In doing so he has been motivated by his theory of committed art which is conspicuously reflected in most of his recent poems like

the ones included in *Venal Mazha*. According to this theory a good poem is in itself a revolutionary act; i.e., as a creative activity it forms part of the struggle of the oppressed class to liberate themselves from their miserable predicament. He claims that this approach is quite different from the mechanical one according to which poetry is just a medium of expression used for propagating the idea of social revolution and inspiring the people to join the movement. In pursuance of this theory he tries to transform the day-to-day experience of the suffering man into an aesthetic experience that contributes to the process of revolution. Sachidanandan's earlier concept of poetry lends itself to such an adaptation because it accepted the view that poetry is the embodiment of an experience and not just a medium of propaganda. At present he recognises only one kind of experience; that is the difference. He has once again proved his capacity to create powerful poetry out of the ordinary realities of life by the suggestive usage of language and imagery. This creative faculty has made many of his 'committed poems' extremely fascinating and impressive. Yet when he

generalises a particular poetic experience, identifies it with a theoretical concept of life and repeats the same in different forms in all the poems with the help of different images, the effect of the poems is partially lost. That is what has happened in the case of some of the poems included in *Venal Mazha*. His theoretical approach has compelled the poet in him to recognise and project only one aspect of life in these poems. Having thus lost sight of the totality of life how can a poet impart a lasting sense of reality to the reader? Therefore Sachidanandan has slipped into such emotional outbursts, generalisations and idealisations as we find in the following lines of *The Jatha on a Calcutta Street*:

"The Bengal of unflinching
foot-steps,

The Bengal of such collective
valour

That defies the hot sun,
rainfall and hunger.

This Jatha is an ocean of
wrath

Which pervades the whole of
Bengal."

In another poem he has plainly recorded an ideological statement as follows:

usage of suggestive imagery and vocabulary and by a combination of lyrical and ironical styles of depiction. It is in this combination of diverse elements that Panickar's poems still retain the essential features of New Poetry. They are products of a new kind of unified sensibility. At the same time they have brought the 'post-modern' trend closer to the general course of Malayalam poetry. Now there is less justification than ever before for the complaint that his poems are unintelligible. A few poems in which his imagination soars high on the wings of a vision might pose some problems for the ordinary reader. But much of the bitter criticism of his poems is based on attempts to interpret every line of them separately. There is only one pertinent question that cannot be easily answered: ie., whether he has not over-played the possibilities of combining diverse elements in his longer poems and ironical sketches in the shorter ones.

Judged on the basis of the poems published in book form in 1982, those of Ayyappa Panickar, Sachidanandan, Balachandran, Ayyappan and Narayana Kurup were the most impressive poetical works of that period. The first four of them are writers who appeared

on the scene under the banner of New Poetry. The contributions of those poets who emulated the earlier models seem to be negligible. Above all, most of the recognised poets of the period appear to have made no contribution to literature in 1982. This picture, evidently, does not represent the real condition of Malayalam poetry in that year. It is in this context that the anthologies brought out by Kavita Samiti of Trivandrum and D. C. Books of Kottayam become important to a student of literature. They may not be exhaustive anthologies containing all the note-worthy poems of the relevant periods. But most of the authors who made significant contributions in that particular period are represented in these volumes by one poem each. Their poems also reveal the diversity of poetic trends and models which exists in contemporary Malayalam literature. The general quality of the works included in the anthologies is not very high. But they contain a number of poems worthy of being preserved.

Balamani Amma, the senior-most poet represented in these volumes has justified the top position usually assigned to her by maintaining

the originality of her works. Vailloppillil Sreedhara Menon's poetic personality also continued to be reflected in his recent poems, even though it had already lost some of its inspiring qualities. The leading poets of the transition period, namely Akkitham, N. V. Krishna Varier and M. Govindan were very much active. P. Bhaskaran and G. Kumara Pillai reasserted their right to play an important role in contemporary poetry. O. N. V. Kurup and Sugatha Kumari have preserved the emotional appeal, sweetness and chiselled perfection of their poetical works even when they react to unpleasant social realities. Among the poets who at one stage provided a link between lyricism and modernism, M. N. Palur and Vishnu Narayanan Namputhiri have turned to the past for inspiration and begun to uphold the human values which have been forgotten by the man of today. Other writers who have tried to revitalise the poetic tradition inherited from their immediate predecessors by associating it with new areas of experience include K. V. Ramakrishnan, Kadavanattu Kuttikrishnan, S. Ramesan Nair and N. K. Desam. It is interesting to note that the lyrical form of poetry and its off-shoots, which these

poets generally accepted as their models to begin with, have not retained their original characteristics in 1982. While some of the changes reflect the personal inclinations of the concerned writers and the altered social conditions, others are certainly due to the impact of the new trends in literature. Whatever be the nature of these changes, the works of these writers represent a deep-rooted poetic culture and it has to be admitted that in their absence contemporary poetry would have been much poorer.

Among the so-called modernists other than Ayyappa Panickar and Sachidanandan, Kadammannitta Ramakrishnan, the most popular poet of the seventies, has not written many poems from 1982 onwards. Still whatever he wrote bears the imprint of his personality and has been well-received. His recent poems are particularly effective when they are satirical; but the rustic vigour which characterised his earlier poems is not so conspicuous now. N. N. Kakkad whose poems are generally close to the original concept of New Poetry and at the same time draw strength from the Indian tradition, wrote some of his best works in and around 1982. Desamangalam Ramakrishnan, one of the

younger poets whose poems are structurally similar to those of Kakkad, has also made his presence felt. D. Vinaya Chandran, on the other hand, has evolved quite a number of new patterns, combining elements of the folk tradition with some of the latest concepts in world literature, to depict his reactions to contemporary life. The few poems written by K. G. Sankara Pillai are marked by the intensity of his reactions to the social situation, expressed through powerful images. Ravunni, the promising young poet, has tried to do the same in a more eloquent form. There are a number of other writers whose works represent various aspects of a composite poetic culture. The poems of Kunjunni, G. Kumara Pillai and R. Ramachandran which cannot be classified as modernistic even though they reflect a modern outlook, those of Kavalam Narayana Panickar who has revived the tradition of folk poetry to depict various aspects of life from a modern point of view and above all those of a number of new writers who have been exposed to all the literary trends of the last two decades – all these have found place in the anthologies because they too have enriched

the Malayalam poetry of 1982.

The diversity of approach and form found among the poems of this period is in itself the result of a process of evolution that has been going on for a long time. There were in fact more than two schools of poetry and each school had already undergone changes in the earlier years. Apart from that, poets who belonged to one and the same school wrote different kinds of poems. All these facts indicate that there was a strong tendency among the poets to respond to the realities of life according to their respective personalities and to explore the possibilities of expressing their experiences more effectively. But this did not result in the appearance of many poems of a high standard. Perhaps it was because most of the poets were compelled to make their poems conform to one general pattern or another in order to gain recognition and popularity. The atmosphere in which many poets had to rely very much on recognition and publicity for their survival could not have encouraged them either to deviate from the general trends or to concentrate on anything other than the means of immediate success. □

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15. — M.G. റോഡു്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം
16. — പഴവങ്ങാടി, തിരുവനന്തപുരം
17. — പെരുമ്പാവൂർ (ഉടൻ തുറക്കുന്നു)

ക്യാൻറീൻ:— തിരുവനന്തപുരം സെക്രട്ടറിയേറ്റിലും,
തൃശൂർ മെഡിക്കൽ കോളേജിലും.

ഡൽഹി ആൻഡ് ഇൻഡ്യാ കോഫീ വർക്കേഴ്സ് കോ-ഓപ്പറേറ്റീവ് സൊസൈറ്റീസ് ഫൈഡറേഷനിൽ സംയോജിപ്പിച്ചിട്ടുള്ളതു്

പി. എൻ. രാഘവൻനായർ
പ്രസിഡൻ്റ്.

കെ. ഗോപിനാഥൻ
സെക്രട്ടറി.

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Malayalam Drama, 1982

V. Aravindakshan

The number of plays published in Malayalam in the year under review (1982) comes to about sixty. Quite a large output, one may say. But there is nothing surprising about it, when one considers the demand for plays now-a-days. In every nook and corner of this small state we see multifarious dramatic activity. There are umpteen school-college 'youth festivals' in every one of which dramatic performances are a must. Each School-college team will be scouting for a prize-winning play. Then, there are the Fine Arts Societies in urban and semi-urban centres, patronized by upper middle class families. The so-called professional companies have taken upon themselves the duty of catering to this audience. Each of them looks out for a new play or two every season. There are also drama clubs of young enthusiasts who clamour for brand new plays composed in brand new styles and fashions. Further there are politically-oriented cultural organisations which ask for plays that will

satisfy their campaign purposes. Naturally, we have conventional plays, experimental plays, agit-prop plays, high-brow plays, and tear-jerkers and entertainers. The abundance of the harvest corresponds to the largeness of the demand.

We have had brisk experimental exercises in the world of drama during the last ten or twelve years. Our playwrights and producers (directors) have rediscovered the virtues of classical forms like Koodiyattam and Kathakali. They have come to know of exotic forms like Noh and Nautanki. They have also been hit hard by the latest in the west, from Beckett to Brecht. There have been attempts to imitate, to mix and to modify and thus evolve novel techniques and forms. From this new ferment have emerged a good number of plays in which symbolist devices and criticism of life go together.

Agni (Fire) by Prof. Vayala Vasudevan Pillai is a play of the symbolist genre. It is remarkable for its use of spectacular

devices drawn from primitive rituals, universality of theme, myth-like multi-dimensionality and poetic graces. Unni, the hero is an idealist. He left home under persecution from his two elder brothers and has been working as a ferry-man on the Ganges. He has come back to pay his homage to his deceased mother. No, he has not yet abandoned his pet idea of distributing the wealth of the family among the needy. This inflames the wrath of his properly conscious brothers. They stone him to death in the course of a play designed by a wise old man to bring about harmony among the brothers. Thus Unni, like Prometheus, embraces martyrdom for a noble cause. The fire of the myth of Prometheus is endowed with a contemporaneous significance in the context of fratricidal strife. In the sufferings and death of Unni "a terrible beauty is born."

Another significant drama of the year *Ira* (The Victim) by Prof. Narendra Prasad - has for its themes cupidity which is the root of all evil and unbridled lust. Ramankutty and Sheela are a happy couple. Two together, they live a cheerful life in spite of the poverty and squalour in which they are steeped. Of course, they are not without their frailties. In

moments of weakness they hanker for the good things of life. Suddenly there appears an aggressive young man with a store of garish allurements. The two lose their moral defences as their petty ambitions are roused. They fall a prey to the newly awakened desire for the good things of life. The end result is tragic for both. Sheela is ravished by a gang of hooligans who can pull the right strings in high places and Ramankutty falls into the clutches of the law and order authorities as a "murderer". The play is interesting for its deft mingling of the serious and the comic, its fast tempo and its sparkling dialogue. A great success on the stage, and rightly so.

Corruption, all pervasive corruption, is the theme of another interesting play of the year — *Padavi* (Status) by P. N. Damodaran Pillai. In this comedy set in Hell in the main, Pillai combines the natural and the fantastic to create a meaningful farce. He reveals the sordid world of the ugly rich. It is purposeful in intent and hilarious in manner.

Valmiki's *Ramayana* has always been a bounteous quarry for playwrights all through the history of Indian drama. K. Thayat is the last in our

language to draw on the epic. His labours have been amply rewarded. In *Manthara* the meddlesome maid of Kaikeyi who caused the disastrous banishment of Rama is presented with sincere sympathy. Now she is in solitary confinement in a jungle on the banks of the Sarayu. She is heavily guarded and held incommunicado under orders from Bharatha. It was for the deserved glory of the self-same prince that she had worked assiduously. She did it not motivated by love of intrigue, but solely by her sense of duty. She considered it her duty as a friend and well-wisher to remind Kaikeyi of the promise given her by the ageing and infirm but lust-tormented Dasharatha. But Kaikeyi herself has betrayed her, or at least does not care for her. As *Manthara* lives in her prison-cell in a world of illusory grandeur, her soul is tortured by rancour directed towards the 'foolish' prince Bharatha and his ungrateful mother. Thayat reveals the agonies of a fierce spirit. The play is a *tour de force*.

Shoorpanakha, another Ramayana play by Thayat, presents a sympathetic picture of another much-maligned character in the epic. According to the traditional story Shoorpanakha invited physical mutilation and odium upon herself by pursuing Lakshmana with her savage lust. The cruel

rebuff and insult she got from Lakshmana provoked the fury of her kinsfolk who went to war against Rama and Lakshmana. The upshot was the massacre of the Rakshasas. Now the armies of Rama have landed in Lanka. Ravana is half inclined to release Sita unconditionally and thus avoid the collapse of his kingdom and the ruin of his country. But to the chagrin of Mandodari, the mighty monarch is dissuaded from this peaceful course by his sister Shoorpanakha. She does this not because she is seeking revenge against Rama and Lakshmana. She thinks that if there is a war she can prevail upon Lakshmana to accept her. She has not yet abandoned her hope of winning him. She goes and meets him secretly in a moonlit night, but to no avail. It is her fierce and constant love for Lakshmana that directs her to this course which is to bring sure ruin to her country. The force of her love and her audacious disregard of public interest are both convincingly presented in the play.

We have considered here in this brief review, only a few of the more distinguished plays of the year. Some of them have commendable literary qualities while some others are good theatrical pieces. It is only in a few that the two virtues are united. That has always been so lately. □

Lakshadweep Sahitya Kala Academy

K. Gopinath

Lakshadweep is the smallest union territory in the country. The literal meaning of Lakshadweep is one lakh islands. But it comprises a cluster of twenty seven tiny islands. Of these, only ten are inhabited. Each island is a geological wonder. A mere thirtytwo square kilometres in area, these islands of diverse size and character are situated nearly 200 to 400 kilometres off the Kerala coast and at distances varying from 11 to 380 kilometres from one another. Surrounded by the vast ocean and surf washed coral sands these islands are extremely beautiful. But the most beautiful part of the island is the lagoon which is ideal for all kinds of aquatic sports. Unknown and neglected till recently, they are the beauty spots of the Arabian sea. This captivating archipelago has proved a tourist paradise because of its romantic beauty.

According to the 1981 census there are 40237 persons living here 20367 males and 19870

females. The growth rate works out to 26.49 percent over the decade from 1971 to 1981 as against 24.75 percent in the country. The density of population is 1257 per sq. km. as against only 221 in the country. The inhabitants are all Muslims classified as scheduled tribes. They observe caste distinctions. Inter-caste marriage was not permitted till recently. They are governed by 'Marumakkathayam' ie succession in the female line.

Malayalam and Mahl are the mother tongues of the inhabitants of these islands. The people in all the islands except Minicoy speak Malayalam with local variations which differ from island to island. But it is quite different from the Malayalam spoken in Kerala. The people of this islands lived in isolation for many centuries. Therefore their language was not influenced by the new developments which effected changes in the Malayalam used in Kerala. A great deal of Tamil, Hindi,

Urdu, Kannada and Arabic words are in common use in these islands.

The Minicoyites are a linguistic minority. Minicoy, the southernmost island in Lakshadweep is situated nearly 350 kilometres west of Trivandrum. Its area is only 4.4sq. km. and population 6658 according to the last census. Divehi popularly known as Mahl is the mother-tongue of the people of this island. It is a mixture of Urdu and Sinhalese. Its script Divehi Thana is written from right to left like Arabic and Urdu. Mahl is not spoken in any other part of the country. It is also the language of the people of Maldives. Ethnically the Minicoyites are of Maldivian stock. They are socially, racially and linguistically homogeneous. Owing to non-availability of any Mahl textbook and printing press the medium of instruction in Minicoy is also Malayalam. Thus Malayalam is the common language in Lakshadweep.

In olden days all the islands in Lakshadweep were uninhabited. The exact date of habitation is not known. Its history is shrouded in legends. According to a popular legend the last potentate of Kerala, known as Cheraman Perumal, embraced Islam and left for Mecca. An expedition of Hindus set out in

search of him at the instance of the various rulers of Kerala. The members of the expedition got marooned and perforce became settlers in the islands as a result of a shipwreck. They were converted to Islam by the Arab saint, Ubaidulla. According to different versions, the settlement took place in the 7th, 12th or 14th century. It still remains a matter of dispute.

Formation of these long neglected islands into a union territory in 1956 ushered in a new era of progress and prosperity. The islanders are now leading a more comfortable life than their counterparts in the mainland in view of the special consideration of the Government.

Long before independence the people in these isolated islands were generally illiterate, ignorant and superstitious. They did not devote any attention to the education of their children. But Koran classes were held in 'Madrassas' attached to the mosques. The children were taught to recite the Koran. The meaning of the Koran was, however, unknown to the teachers and students. 'Vattezhuthu' was also in use to a limited extent. Just after mass conversion to Islam the people there began to write Malayalam

in Arabic script. Thus Arabic Malayalam came into use. The pronunciation of Malayalam here had therefore undergone many changes. Their spoken language, idioms and phrases need special study and research. In 1956 there were only nine primary schools. The staff consisted of 28 island teachers mostly untrained or reemployed persons. But the number of educational institutions in Lakshadweep at present is 52 including two Junior Colleges and nine High schools. Education is free at all levels. The teacher - pupil ratio is 1 to 25. The percentage of literacy is 54.72 as against 36.17 in the country. This territory has the sixth rank in India in literacy. Because of the facilities for higher education the younger generation is able to handle modern Malayalam language and literature.

The folk-lore and handicrafts of Lakshadweep are rich in their own way with a naive and rugged beauty. They are captivating. They are the best reflections of their mind and culture. The folk-lore nurtured adopted and adapted to suit their simple tastes, represents the spontaneous expressions of their joys, sorrows and expectations. The folk poets mostly remain anonymous.

As in the case of folk songs obtaining elsewhere these too are evidently composed by ordinary folk with no formal education whatsoever. The simple yet highly evocative expressions, of rustic vigour convey the changing moods of nature with an arresting spontaneity. But their charm needs special mention. Folk dances are performed only by men in all the islands.

The handicrafts of Lakshadweep add a new dimension to the vast panorama of Indian culture and art. Simplicity and dynamism are the essential qualities of the crafts of this region. Symmetry of shape, rhythm in the curves of the carvings of the objects and stylisation seen in many cases have lent dignity and charm to the incomparable local crafts which have retained a large measure of simplicity and directness of approach so peculiarly characteristic of island life.

With the onset of modernity the traditional culture, folk-lore and handicrafts of the islanders are gradually dying out. In order to revive them and to promote literature, fine arts and culture in general, the intermingling of the people of different parts of the country

is quite essential. Literary men have a special role in quickening the pace of this movement. In view of this, the Lakshadweep Administration organised a three day national integration seminar at Kavaratti in January 1983. Many eminent writers from the mainland and delegates from the various islands actively participated in the seminar. The seminar successfully ended with the unanimous recommendation that an academy might be set up in Lakshadweep to give encouragement to literature, arts and culture. The Lakshadweep Administration took necessary steps immediately to implement this recommendation.

A new chapter was opened in the history of Lakshadweep on the last Gandhi Jayanthi Day. Lakshadweep Sahitya Kala Academy was born on October 2, 1983. The Academy was inaugurated on that day at a colourful function held at Kavaratti, the head quarters of the territory by the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Shri P. Ventakata Subbaiah. It is the youngest Sahitya Academy in the country. Really it is the younger sister of the three academies in Kerala in view of the striking resemblance between the customs, manners, language and habits of the people of Laksha-

dweep and Kerala. Intimate co-operation and co-ordination among these academies will go a long way towards cultural progress of the islands.

The main objects of the Lakshadweep Sahitya Kala Academy are to promote teaching and study of regional language art and culture and co-operation among men of letters for the development of Hindi, Malayalam, Arabic - Malayalam and Mahl and their literatures. The Academy will encourage or arrange translations of literary works from other Indian and non-Indian languages into Mahl and Malayalam and publish or assist associations or individuals in publishing literary works. It will hold literary conferences, seminars and exhibitions and give prizes and awards to individual writers and artists for outstanding work. It will promote research in the fields of language, literature, art and culture and collect and preserve documents, records, films and other materials connected with local language, literature art and culture. Cultural exchanges with other states and establishment of relationship with the academies at the centre and in the states will be encouraged and timely assistance to literary and artistic

works, both creative and critical will be extended. Production of children's literature, books for neo-literates and reference books and promotion of the study of folk-lore and folk literature besides financial assistance to literary men and artists in indigent circumstances are also envisaged.

The general council of the Academy consists of 21 members.

The Administrator of the territory Shri Omesh Saigal who is also a man of letters in Hindi and English is the first president of the Academy. A seven-member Executive Board and a three-member Finance Committee are also being constituted. The term of each Committee is three years. This new Academy is a milestone in the cultural history of the country.

ദി കേരളാ സാഹിത്യ അക്കാദമിയിൽ എൻറേജ്മെന്റ് ലിമിറ്റഡ്

(കേരള സർക്കാർ സ്ഥാപനം)

“ഭദ്രത”, മ്യൂസിയം റോഡ്, തൃശ്ശൂർ 680 020

പ്രതിമാസ നിക്ഷേപത്തിലൂടെ വൻതുകകൾ കരസ്ഥമാക്കാൻ ഞങ്ങളുടെ ചിട്ടികളും ജീവിത സൗകര്യങ്ങൾ വർദ്ധിപ്പിക്കാൻ ഹയർ പർപ്പേയ്ക്ക് പദ്ധതിയും അല്ലെങ്കിൽ ഒരു ഭാവി കുറേപ്പേർ ഭദ്രത സാമൂഹ്യ സുരക്ഷിതത്വപദ്ധതിയും.

ഏറ്റവും സഹായകമാണ്

Long Ago in Kerala

K. N. Nair

The Kerala coast, to which sailed King Solomon's ships a thousand years before Christ was the region in India to have the earliest contacts with the West. It was probably the land in trying to discover which Columbus found America. It was here that Christianity found its first converts on the sub-continent, the Muslims some of their earliest adherents and the Jews their most secure haven. The Egyptians, the Romans, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, and the Arabs had regular trade with Kerala centuries before the advent of the Portuguese who were the first western power to establish factories on the Indian soil.

As a result of this special position, today Kerala can claim to have the oldest European church, the oldest European fort, the oldest mosque and the oldest synagouge in the whole of India.

Oldest Church

The St. Francis Church built during the 16th century in the historic city of Cochin,

the earliest European settlement in India, is the oldest existing European church in this country. As T. W. Venn has remarked it is "the masonry cradle of Roman Catholicism" in India. "From this choir for the first time in Hindustan resounded the sonorous chants of Rome, as also from its pulpit was thundered out the grim gospel of Calvinism—Total Depravity, Particular Redemption, Irresistible Grave"

Like the city of Cochin, this ancient church has also passed through many vicissitudes. The St. Francis Church stands over the site of the St. Bartholomew's, a wooden structure built by the five Friars who accompanied Alfonso da Albuquerque to Cochin in 1503. The present edifice was constructed by Franciscan missionaries who dedicated it to St. Antony in 1516.

The mortal remains of Vasco-da-Gama who died at Cochin in 1524 during his second visit to the city, were interned in the chancel of this church with all pomp and fanfare. But it

remained only a temporary sepulchre of the Portuguese leader as his body was later conveyed to Portugal by his son Pedro-da-Silva-da-Gama.

From 1510 to 1663 this church was officially called "the Conventional church of the Order of St. Francis of Assissi" by the Portuguese. When it came under the control of the Dutch who professed the "reformed religion" they made some changes in the name and structure of the church and did some restoration work in 1779. After the advent of the English it was the "Government Protestant Church" from 1819 to 1846. It was only after the substantial restoration carried out by the English in 1886-87 that this edifice became the "St. Francis Church." Now it is an Anglican Church within the fold of the Church of South India.

Inside the church, on the ground to the southern side can still be seen the stone from Vasco-da-Gama's grave enclosed by polished brass railings. A small brass plate inscription proclaims: "Here lay buried Vasco-da-Gama who died on the Christmas eve of the year 1524 A.D. at Cochin, until his remains were removed to Portugal fourteen years later".

Other ancient grave stones mostly Portuguese and Dutch,

taken from the floor of the grave, can be seen embedded in the walls; most of them elaborately carved and with colourful family crests. Elsewhere can be seen brass tablets in memory of other Europeans especially British.

Some old 'cadjan leaf' manuscripts preserved in this church give interesting information about the lives of the Portuguese and Dutch settlers here. The cemetery attached to the church contains tomb stones with names of many European military officers who lie buried there.

This ancient monument is now under the control of the Archaeological Department of the Government of India. In the square near the church, one can see imposing cottages of European style built by the Dutch who destroyed all Catholic archives and buildings except the St. Francis Church.

Oldest Fort

In the village of Pallippuram, on the northern extremity of the 15-mile-long Vypin Island stretching between the Cochin Port and the Cranganore Bar on the Kerala Coast, stands a small hexagonal fort which is the oldest existing European monument in India. This fort in Pallippuram (otherwise

known as Palliport in olden days) forming part of the princely State of Cochin was built in 1503 by the Portuguese as an out-post. Though the first fortress ever constructed by the Europeans in India was the Manuel Fort (1503) in the City of Cochin named after the King of Portugal, not a trace of it is left now. So, among the existing European forts in the country today, the fort at Pallippuram is the oldest.

At the time of its construction and subsequently, this fort was known by the name Azhikotta or Ayakotta which literally means "the fort at the river-mouth". The Portuguese also built here a college "for the instruction of Christian youth"

The Dutch who drove away the Portuguese from the Kerala coast in the 17th century captured this fort in 1661 and converted the college into a leper asylum. (This leper asylum had been functioning till the thirties of the present century.) The Dutch later sold this fort along with another fort at Cranganore a few miles away to the Maharaja of Travancore for a sum of Rs. 3 lakhs.

The Pallippuram fort is even today in a fair state of preservation. As one of the

protected monuments in the country it reminds the people of the chequered history of the area.

Oldest Synagogue

The oldest existing Jewish synagogue in India also stands in the city of Cochin. The earliest Jews came to Kerala with the ships of King Solomon. Later, fleeing from Jerusalem after the destruction of their second Temple by the Romans "in the 3828th year of creation and the 68th year of the Christian Era", they landed at Cranganore the then Kerala capital and settled there. They had to migrate from Cranganore to Cochin in 1565 to escape persecution at the hands of the Portuguese. The Maharaja of Cochin received them and provided them with a site close to his palace where they built their settlement and the historic synagogue now known as the White Jews' Synagogue or the Paradesi Synagogue.

It was built in 1567. About a century later, in 1664 the Portuguese partially destroyed the original synagogue. But it was rebuilt after the Portuguese were defeated and the Dutch returned to Cochin. The clock-tower of this synagogue was built in 1667.

The historic Copper Plate Grant of the Chera Emperor Bhaskara Ravi Varman I (962-1019 A. D.) dated 1000 A.D. is still preserved in this synagogue. It records the royal gift to the Jewish Chief, Joseph Rabban, of the rights of the *Anchuvannam* along with 72 proprietary rights which included the collection of tolls and other kinds of revenue and the perpetual right to use a palanquin for himself and his successors. This Grant made at the time of the Chola-Chera war reveals that the Jews had been an important commercial class within the Empire and rendered some substantial help to the Emperor for repelling the foreign aggression. This Copper Plate Grant is the earliest unmistakable reference to the Jewish community in India. A golden crown presented by the Maharaja of Travancore in 1805 is also one of the interesting exhibits preserved here. There are also some silver lamps in this synagogue which were presented in 1808 by Col. Macaulay, the first British Resident for Travancore and Cochin. The well-known blue and white willow-pattern tiles forming the pavement were got down from Canton in China and they always attract the attention of visitors to the synagogue. These tiles were presented to the synagogue

in 1763 by one Ezekiel Rabbi, a rich Jewish merchant in those days. The tiles are hand-painted and number approximately 256. The scene depicted on each tile is different from the others.

The cemetery attached to the synagogue contains many tombstones with inscriptions in Hebrew script. The synagogue is administered by a trust formed by the White Jews themselves.

Oldest Mosque

The first mosque founded in the whole of India stands in the small coastal town of Cranganore (Kodungallur) in Trichur district of Kerala. Though now just a taluk headquarters, Cranganore was the capital of Kerala in the Sangam Era. Situated at the confluence of the river Periyar with the Arabian sea, it was a great emporium of international trade even before the dawn of the Christian era. The Jews, the Christians and the Muslims all alike claim it as the place of their first settlement in the country.

It is assumed that the first batch of Arab Muslims reached Kerala early in the 8th century A. D. According to historians this batch was led by Maliq Ibn Dinar who landed at Cranganore in 712 A. D. He was warmly welcomed by the Perumal (Emperor) who gave all help

and patronage for the propagation of Islam and for the establishment of a mosque in his capital city. As a mark of gratitude to the liberal - minded and tolerant monarch, Maliq Ibn Dinar is believed to have named this first mosque "Cheraman Mosque" after the Kerala Emperor (Cheraman Perumal).

Unlike other mosques it does not face Mecca but faces East. It is typically Keralite in its architecture. As Fergusson has

remarked: "Here one sees no minarets. And the mosque is much in the style of the Hindu temple, even to the adoption of the turret - like edifice". Numerous wooden carvings can be seen in this mosque. A huge age - old bronze lamp hung inside is lighted every day.

Renovated and well preserved, Cheraman Mosque is a protected monument which attracts pilgrims, tourists and research scholars alike.

THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE HANDSOME

By UROOB

Translated by Dr. Suseela Mishra

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Music for a Poetic Film

Dr S. P. Ramesh

I have no pretences to proficiency as a music composer; much less as a performer. I was diffident at first, a fact that was perhaps adequately concealed by my face which has a deceptive confidence about it. I think I was inspired by the fact that the film itself was unique in many respects and it was Mankada Ravi Varma's maiden feature film. If M. Govindan the poet and Ravi Varma thought I was good enough, then it was all right with me. That was how I began to direct the music for the film based on M. Govindan's poem *Nokkukuthi* (The Scarecrow)

I was extremely unsure of the technique that was going to be employed in visualizing the poem *Nokkukuthi* — a peculiar piece which has an organic rustic character. I remember those days (nights) when I used to sit with Govindan discussing the nature of the execution of the work. I always used to argue a lot, the discussion extending to late nights and

sometimes early mornings. I was still not convinced of the plan of the script, but Govindan, I now realize, had other ideas. And finally when I was scanning through the script, I was amazed. The script had dispelled all my doubts and apprehensions and had silenced all my arguments. I honestly feel the script has to be published. The structure of the script has an intriguing, cyclical, labyrinthine quality — quite dynamic and ever evolving. It has a basic rigid structure; nevertheless it offers the necessary openings to an imaginative director.

The poem was going to be transformed into a film; the written word was to be visualized and accompanied by music. I admit I had no clear idea as to what was to be the structure or pattern of the music. But, I was sure of one thing — that the music had to be simple and that it should never dominate the visual. This aspect did help me quite a bit while approaching the task. My thoughts wandered around

various forms and slowly flowed into a simple folk form where it lingered a bit and then rested—never to depart. Yes, that should be the simple stylization required for poetry. No one should applaud the music; at the same time no one should be disturbed while following the visual. The music should be stealthy and soothing but it should serve the visual with the sure steps of a loyal housemaid.

Of course I had some involvement with Govindan and his poems much before the film. Govindan has a peculiar way of encouraging one to think for oneself. My acquaintance with him had certainly pushed me a step or two towards my involvement with the poem and its transformation into a musical piece. Yes, that way I was clearly much ahead of a fresher. I had once recited parts of his *Kurinjippattu* and to my surprise, the rendering was much appreciated. In fact I was urged on to it by P. K. A. Rahim and R. R. Nayar two of my very close friends without whose encouragement I am sure I would not have attempted it. And when Aravindan (the brilliant director) who has one of the most sensitive ears told me that he liked my way of rendering *Kurinjippattu* my

diffidence slowly began to melt. I honestly believe that rendering *Kurinjippattu* had a lot to do with Govindan's asking me to conduct music for *Nokkukuthi*.

I had my problems. I like music much more than I like poetry. I have had no training in music and I cannot play any instrument. I was aware that there should be the right blending of verse and music so that the verse should not be distorted. The word was not to sacrificed for music especially in a film in which there was no prose dialogue. I knew I had to resort to traditional music and not Carnatic or Hindustani music so that the verses retained their native quality. Our music - the traditional form - is very simple and sweet and you know being simple is the most difficult thing. To be frank the traditional art forms - music and visuals - in our part of the state (Central Travancore) are far inferior to their counterparts in North Kerala. I knew both Govindan and Ravi Varma were quite well tuned to the traditional forms of music of North Kerala even though they did not betray it even once. All these things set a serious challenge to me. I even had fears if I would be responsible for distorting the face of the film with my patchy music.

Nokkukuthi the poem has more than one level even though the atmosphere is purely and wholly Malayali. It apparently has a central theme based on the fate of an aristocratic Namboodiri youth and a Warier (a caste of temple servants) girl who fall in love, their love not finding fulfilment in marriage. The girl is assassinated by the power-hungry caste-conscious aristocratic Namboodiris and her lover commits suicide. This is the story of a Namboodiri who wielded power too. The tragedy is set against the background of the age - old legends of Kerala—the superstitions, the caste systems, Pakkanar and the legends associated with him. The texture of the poem is rich with the exciting natural beauty of Kerala. The focus is not so much on the tragedy as it is on the struggle of the downtrodden against the power-wielding aristocrats. The inevitable triumph of the rulers over the ruled is depicted in an objective, almost philosophical way. The poet feels that the story is a never-ending struggle, a cycle. Thus the story is much more than a personal tragedy; it assumes a universal significance. According to custom the eldest Namboodiri, in this story Akkiran, the aristocratic youth, should marry only a Namboodiri

girl so that power and property should remain with the Namboodiris. The language used is very simple, sharp and apt, but at times colloquial. The story is a legend which has many versions and the poem uncovers the legend as Murukayyan (the vagabond Kuravan) sees it. Govindan's nostalgia (he has been living outside Kerala for a long long time) for his homeland and its language is perhaps the strength behind the beautiful narration. I feel, the life of the Late V. T. Bhatathiripad, the genuinely great social reformer, also must have influenced him. "Akkiran is not just a lover passionately in love with Chirutheyi; he is much more than that. Chirutheyi may be a flower but Akkiran is not a butterfly. He is a star"—Govindan used to say. Again Pakkanar, the Paraya, is an oracle, almost a prophet. The association and affinity between the aristocratic Akkiran and the chandala Pakkanar is also very significant. In his madness (Akkiran loses his bearings after Chirutheyi's death) Akkiran goes to Pakkanar, carrying Chirutheyi's skull and it is Pakkanar who in his own sarcastic way pleads with the aristocrats for the good of humanity. Thus the story of Akkiran and Chirutheyi

serves only as an opening to wider and greater issues of universal relevance.

Ravi Varma has a long and close association with Govindan and it must have helped him to develop a wholesome concept of the film. In addition to being an accomplished cinematographer he has a fine taste for art and literature. He himself belongs to an aristocratic ruling class. This fact must have helped him to a realistic understanding of the theme. Long ago, one of the most popular Malayalam poems by one of the most famous Malayalam poets, was filmed and it enriched neither poetry nor film. I am alluding to Changampuzha's *Ramanan*. But I am sure, irrespective of the reception it gets, *Nokkukuthi* will bring poetry and film much closer than they are at present. Ravi Varma should be credited with the achievement almost as much as Govindan.

Coming to the music, the story in verse form is narrated by a number of people. Murukayyan the Kuravan (played by the popular poet Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan) is the chief narrator. Then there are various groups who narrate parts of the story; the Chavittukali, Kaikottikkali, Sanghakkali, Thiruvathira

kali, Kathakali and Kattathallal—these folk art forms are thus used as an integral part of the film corpus. The film refers to two different times, two generations. The Kuravan belongs to the present but the story is placed in the past with all its feudal paraphernalia. The two main characters of the story which is enclosed within the total film structure are Akkiranman, the aristocratic Namboodiri and Chirutheyi, his sweetheart. Akkiranman, the youth, is not only accomplished but almost enlightened and Chirutheyi is in her teens with all the associated freshness and innocence though at times she talks a lot of sense. Then again are verses narrating the visuals establishing shots of nature, and pieces rendered by comparatively unimportant characters. The other major character is Pakkanar played by the chronicler himself.

There was no problem with the traditional groups as they were encouraged to sing in their own natural way. Kadammanitta who has a lot of natural force also was left undirected. The main compositions were the off frame voices of narration accompanying the visuals, the rendering of Akkiranman and Chirutheyi, and the pieces rendered by Pakkanar.

Though all the verses have been set to certain ragas I have consciously avoided flourishes, thereby simplifying them. The full range of the ragas was never used so that it may not be easy to identify them. Since I do not know the structure of the ragas, most of the verses would sound as a mixture of similar ragas. I have gone by the mood of the verses and have not concentrated on the raga itself. I have also avoided frank imitations of folk music as well, but have stuck to its essence - simplicity. Thus it is obvious that the music cannot be technically perfect.

While setting the verses for Akkiranman who is an accomplished aristocrat, I think I was closer to Carnatic classical music. During the period when he is sober, he always sings in Sahanā; when he is mad and in fantasy I have used a variety of ragas like Vasantham, Yamuna kallyani, and Bilahari. As for Chirutheyi I have used only Anandabhairavi. The shot that establishes Chirutheyi is accom-

panied by a verse set to Anandabhairavi.

As I felt that Pakkanar's verses were prophetic, I used Bhoopalam, an early morning raga as the base. As Akkiranman joins Pakkanar he also sings in Bhoopalam.

For the off frame voice I used many ragas like Ananda Bhairavi, Misra Sivaranjini, Mohanam, Pahady, Arabhi, Hindolam, Bageswari, Sreeraga, Vrindavana Sarangi, Ameer Kallyani, Hamsadhwani, Bairagi Bhairav and Hamsanandi. For the Ashtapadi (written by Govindan himself) I have used Neelambari.

Well, I am sure, the learned will forgive me my mistakes. All I have attempted by way of music in the film is an accompaniment to the visuals, always trying to be a step behind. At least the attempt has made me aware of my own limitations and that way the experience was useful. □

VISHAKANYAKA

By S. K. Pottekkatt

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A Malayalam Anthology from America

Dr. K. Sreenivasan

[*Malayalam Anthology Parts I & II*, Published by *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Asian Studies Centre, Michigan State University. Guest Editors: K. Ayyappa Panikkar & Zacharia P- Thundy.]

This is an anthology in two volumes, of Malayalam literature, covering the last one hundred years, which happens to be a period of hectic growth and many-sided achievements. As the Introduction pertinently mentions, "One of the reasons for selecting this particular period for our anthology is that the works of this period are clearly marked by the impact of the West...on all aspects of life and customs".

The publication provides in English translation representative pieces which sound the characteristic notes of each succeeding phase of growth. Part I covers novels and short stories, and the second part poetry, drama and criticism. This priority pattern is owing to the good reason that *Indulekha* published in 1889 was the first piece to show the full

impact of English literature. The poetical tradition which started earlier with Ezhuthachan, felt by the end of the 19th century, the rejuvenating effect of contact with the West. The Editors' aim "of making available to a non-Malayalam reading public the best that has been produced in this language during the last century" is fully accomplished by this work. With this excellent material to fall back upon, it is easy to organise a course in Modern Malayalam Literature in a foreign university.

The Introduction by the Editors itself is a significant survey of the period covered. It gives penetrating comments on each genre included, and suggests also the reasons why particular authors and pieces find a place in this anthology.

By and large, these preferences reflect a broad consensus which is unexceptionable. Part I contains selections from six novels and double the number of short stories. The reason is: "The short story became a full-fledged literary form only during the past fifty years; but already in this field we have produced some of the best work of fiction in the language" Further our story tellers "may hold comparison with some of the best masters of the short story the world over". (Introduction)

We get self-contained excerpts from *Indulekha*, *Marthanda Varma*, *Neighbours*, *The Ladder*, *The Crowd* and *Half a Moment*, in good translations. Among the short stories five represent the stalwarts of the earlier generation, while the others, seven in number, introduce the more modern modes. Many had, of course, to be left out, owing, perhaps, to considerations of space. The category-wise choice seems to suggest in a subtle way, the forte of each writer, as almost every one of them has written both novels and short stories. For example, Basheer is rated appropriately as a short story writer, and not as a novelist. The editors deserve to be specially congratulated for including the letter of

Chandu Menon to W. Demergue, his translator. This is, perhaps, the best commentary so far on *Indulekha* itself.

Part II is lengthier and rightly too, for it covers poetry, drama and criticism. There are 33 poems, 5 full plays and four pieces of literary criticism. The poems chosen reflect more or less the genius of each poet, and highlight the significance of his or her contribution to the art of poetry. However, if such is the yard stick, Asan's muse might opt for a better piece than 'Reflections of a Thiyya Boy'. One wonders what aspect of Asan's poetry is sought to be projected by this casual piece. In fact, many poets of distinction are kept out of this roll call of honour. The editors could have accommodated a few of them also, if they had followed the principle of choosing only one poem of a poet.

In the section allotted to drama, there is an unpardonable omission viz Prof. N. Krishna Pillai, who, according to the Editors themselves, demonstrated "the basic elements of drama, both in theory and in practice" (Introduction). Bringing out an anthology of modern Malayalam literature without a piece from our most original playwright is like forgetting to tie the *itali*

in the hurry of the wedding ceremony. Further the observation about literary criticism is also likely to be challenged. And as if to justify the blanket claim that criticism is "the least well-developed branch of Malayalam literature at this point in time", (Introduction) the Editors have included two of their own pieces. One cannot fail to note that right from Kerala Varma onwards, there has been consistent attempts by creative writers as well as critics to enhance our understanding and enjoyment of literature. A carefully edited anthology of literary criticism in Malayalam will show how profound and penetrating have been the sensibilities of our critics. It is also disappointing to find that A. R. RajaRaja Varma finds no place in this panoramic survey of the Malayalam literary scene.

More than the choice of the pieces, it is the effectiveness of their translation, which vouches for the success of such a venture as this. Through translation we manage to preserve in another tongue the carcass, while the quickening core of it is lost in the process. Apparently the Editors have identified the right translators. And even the poems rendered into English, seem to

have retained a good part of their original freshness and savour. One dissenting note is about *the Peacock Messenger*. The Editors chose to include the rendering in heroic couplet by no less a person than Ulloor, which, however, is bereft of the sweep, splendour and sonorousness of the original. A word also about the notes on contributors. They are written rather in an amateurish way. The largest and best among them is about Zacharia P. Thundy, in which apparently all that can be said about him is covered. These should have been phrased better. A word or two could have suggested the salient feature of an author. In the inane phraseology of the note-maker, Asan is "the earliest of the three renaissance poets", Ulloor is "the second of the three renaissance poets", and Vallathol "the youngest of the three renaissance poets." One is intrigued as well as amazed by the epithet. Another such unfathomable phrase is "the untouchable saint, Narayana Guru". (p 292.) I don't think a Keralite who is not insensitive to his culture and heritage would choose to use such crude and unintelligible adjectives when he deigns to introduce to a foreign readership one of the eminent sons of our land.

On the whole, this is a piece of yeoman service to Kerala and Malayalam literature. The fact that our achievements do not lag far behind those of the best in world literature is amply borne out by this anthology. *The Journal of South Asian Literature* and its sponsors deserve our gratitude. That they

managed to get the assistance of the versatile Dr. Panikkar has guaranteed in advance the success of their venture. Let us hope that with his help and collaboration, the Asian Studies Centre of Michigan University will bring out another volume which takes care of the earlier phase of Malayalam literature.

□

HOUSE UNFINISHED

By Parappurath

Translated by Prof. K. M. Tharakan

Jose belongs to a poverty - stricken family in Kerala. He finds a job in the Military Accounts Department in Nainital, and divides his life between his office and the godown he lives in.

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A Glimpse into a Masterpiece

K. M. P. Varier

[*THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE HANDSOME* by Uroob-Kerala Sahitya Akademi Trichur—Rs. 35.00]

If critics and connoisseurs are asked to suggest the best five Malayalam novels published since the latter half of this century, Uroob's (1915-1979: Real name: P. C. Kuttikrishnan) *Sundarikalum Sundaranmaaram* (The Beautiful and the Handsome) would necessarily find a place in the list, though regarding the remaining four the selections could differ. When this novel was published in 1959 soon after its serialisation in a weekly, it was enthusiastically acclaimed as a remarkable achievement and a trend-setter too. The author had already created a sensation with the publication of his first big novel, *Ummaachu*, in 1954. The two novels, though similar in their socio-psychological contents, differ considerably in their structures. The earlier novel is based on a single-stringed plot and revolves around a central character. The present one thematically has a complex structure

having at least four sub-plots. The entire saga in this novel, therefore, consists of four threads of different colours, dexterously entwined to form a single multi-coloured thicker cord.

When most of the forefront writers of his day touched upon socio-economic problems with verve and fervour, Uroob consistently kept aloof from such a commitment and allowed his faculties to explore the deep and dark corners of the human mind. Never did he come up with characters whose overall credentials created disdain and disapproval among his readers. Even the undesirable conduct of humans is viewed as inevitable foibles necessitated by unavoidable vicissitudes. Man is only an instrument and not a deliberately conscious instigator of calamities. His in-born psychological nature and the unsympathetic environments into which he is forcibly thrown force

himself to become a victim of self-made tragedies. The title of the present novel symbolically suggests this attitude. Because of this attitude the novelist never turns up as a fatalist or pessimist. The atmosphere in Uroob's short-stories and novels, by and large, is that of a South Malabar village or town. He has not been enamoured by the captivations of the urban culture. The unsophisticated and unpretentious raw people living in rural areas are depicted realistically in his works.

The story of the present novel is set against a period ranging through a quarter century of the pre-independence days (1921-1946). The backdrop of the incidents consists of the Muslim revolt of 1921, the transition of the feudal authority of landlords to the evolving capitalistic power of industrialists, the appearance of the trade union movement, the emergence of the communist party and the concomitant transformations in society and the outlooks of individuals.

When the 'Mopla Rebellion' broke out, first in the largely Muslim populated Eranadu taluk of South Malabar, several Hindu families were uprooted and many were forcibly converted into Islam, one among them being

Govindan Nair who became Sulaiman. Kunchukutti who was carrying Govindan Nair's child within her was rescued by a school teacher, Raman Nair, under the shelter of whose family she gave birth to a male child but soon after bid farewell to this world. The child, Viswam, grew up in the company of the teacher's children. He was a peculiar character, reserved, moody and ever-curious. Once he left the house in quest of 'the end of the earth'. Not knowing that there was no terminal point for this globe, his adventurous journey ended in exhaustion soon to be spotted by a rich lady, Lakshmi-kutti, in whose house he got the second shelter. When years pass, Viswam and Santha, daughter of the matron, respond to teacher's singular attentions. The events take a sudden turn as Santha is given in marriage to a business magnate and the young man, Viswam, is once again on his aimless quest. His despondency drives him to sink his life in the rolling waves but Sulaiman's presence on the spot changes the full-stop into a comma. Sulaiman recognises that the young man whom he rescued is none other than his own son. Meanwhile Radha, Raman Nair's daughter, marries Kunhiraman, a communist party

worker who at the break of the second world war enlists himself in the army, soon to be devoured by the war monster. Radha is left alone to stare at her bleak future. Viswam is trying to adjust himself to the tilting environment. The finale of the story takes us to an unexpected climactic twist. Viswam's proposal to Radha is far from ordinary: 'I will not force you. There is no need for that because I am not infatuated. I am very fond of you and I feel that we can live together in love and companionship. Do you agree?'

The skeletal fabric of the story content of this novel, summarised above, fails to reveal the soft and embellishing texture of Uroob's style. The original

version of this novel is written in the inimitable style of 'a master, poetic and refreshingly coloured with localisms and colloquial idioms. The rustic slangs of different communities are faithfully reproduced in the dialogues. A translator, therefore, is against heavy odds in attempting to retain at least a certain degree of the flavour of the original narration. Dr. Susheela Misra's recreation is commendable. The atmospheric grandeur of the original has come out in the English version though the lustre and effervescence of Uroob's language are absent here. Though this English translation lacks the same impact it had on the original readers, others can have a glimpse of a masterpiece in this version.

From *The Hindu* □

BEHOLD HE COMES AGAIN

By C. J. Thomas

Translated by Ramji

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Renaissance of Buddhism in Bengal and Kumaran Asan

Even from my younger days, I used to read the works of the great poet, Kumaran Asan and later on, it appeared to me that he was very much influenced by Bengal and particularly, the renaissance of Buddhism there. Those who are familiar with his biography know that he had a marked slant towards Buddhism: as early as from 1903 he began translating *The Light of Asia* written by Edwin Arnold. And, the themes of *Chandalabhikshuki* and *Karuna* have been borrowed from Buddhist literature. So, in my humble way I began to make some sort of a research to find out the exact nature of the influence Buddhism had on him. I gathered some knowledge of Buddhism and tried to contact some people of Bengal through whom I hoped to gather information which would help me confirm my view. I also used to read the *Mahabodhi*, the organ of the Mahabodhi Society of India with its headquarters at Calcutta.

It may be recalled that the biographers of Asan have pointed out that he studied under Kamakhyanatha Tarka Vageesa of the Sanskrit College at Calcutta; but he could not complete the course as plague broke out in that area. In 1971 in the October-November issue of the *Mahabodhi*, I happened to come across an article entitled 'Renaissance of Buddhism of Bengal' written by one Professor Sukomal Chaudhuri. It was very interesting reading, but I felt that it was not sufficient to satisfy my curiosity. It indeed contained some details of the Buddhist activities in Bengal during the 1890-1900 period, which should have shed some light on the impact that movement would have made on Asan.

So, I wrote in 1973 to the General Secretary of the Mahabodhi Society requesting him to help me find out more about the Buddhist activities during the 1890s, and he, in

reply directed me to contact the above mentioned Dr. Sukomal Chaudhuri of the Government Sanskrit College, Calcutta. In compliance with this direction, I wrote to him; among other things, I mentioned in my letter that the late Kumaran Asan, a great poet of Kerala, had spent a few years at Calcutta studying Sanskrit; that it was presumed that he had been greatly influenced by Buddhist literature as also the Buddhist activities there at that period; and that Kamakhyanatha Taraka Vageesa was Asan's teacher. I also mentioned some of the books he had written in Malayalam, namely, *Sreebuddha-charitam*, *Chandalabhihshuki* and *Karuna*, pointing out that the poet adopted an episode from the 'Essence of Buddhism' of Prof. Lakshminarasu for *Chandalabhihshuki* and another episode from *the Gospel of the Buddha* of Paul Carus for *Karuna*. I further indicated that he had also been influenced by the Brahmo Samaj as also the teachings of Sree Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and the writings of Tagore. And in that letter I requested him to let me know whether Asan could have been influenced by the wave of Buddhistic renaissance wrought by the Mahabodhi Society which was founded in 1892 under the

leadership of Ven. Anagarika Dharmapala.

Dr. Chaudhuri was kind enough to acknowledge the receipt of my letter and promise to reply to me in due course. And later on, on 2-10-'73 he wrote to me in detail: I am quoting below a major portion of his letter.

"For the last few months I was busy with multifarious works, say editing and seeing through the press of two magazines, publishing my book entitled "Bengla deshe Buddha Dharm O Samscriti" (Buddhism and Buddhist Culture in Bengal) and in compiling a portion of "A Critical Pali Dictionary". All these I had to finish before Puja Vacation. So, would you kindly excuse me for this delay?

I am sure that this letter with some information regarding the wave of Buddhist renaissance that swept Calcutta during the period 1890-1900 would be of no help to you now as I think that your purpose has already been served some how long before Yet I am writing these few lines to show my respect and honour to the late Kumaran Asan a distinguished poet of Kerala whose

birth centenary you have been celebrating in your State this year with grandeur. We are fortunate enough and feel ourselves proud that a noble man like him, a distinguished poet like him, had been a student of Government Sanscrit College, Calcutta, in the period 1890-1900. As a Buddhist, I am personally indebted and grateful to him for his three poetical works on Buddhism, viz., "Light of Asia" (in Malayalam) "Chandala Bhikshuki" and "Karuna" which have an eminent place in the literature of Kerala.

While in Calcutta as a student of the Government Sanscrit College, he was no doubt greatly influenced by the wave of renaissance of Buddhism in Bengal at that time. Ven. Anagarika Dharmapala came from Ceylon to propagate Buddhism in India, the holy place of its origin, and for that purpose, he started publishing "The Mahabodhi", the famous Buddhist monthly in the globe from the year 1892.

Not only that, the headquarters of Mahabodhi Society of India founded by him in 1892 was shifted to Calcutta in 1894.

The Mahabodhi temple is just adjacent to the Sanscrit College. For the same purpose Ven. Kripasarana Mahasthavir, a Bengalee Buddhist saint from

East Bengal, now Bengla Desh, came to Calcutta and founded the Bengal Buddhist Association in 1892. Like Dharmapala, Kripasarana too had made a great contribution in the renaissance of Buddhism in Bengal. In this noble cause, Sir Asuthosh Mookherjee, founder of the University of Calcutta and the 'Tiger of Bengal' too contributed much. He had been a life-long friend and companion of Kripasarana and helped the latter in all possible ways for the propagation of Buddhism in India.

In 1899 Sir Asuthosh Mookherjee introduced the teaching of Pali in Calcutta University.

Not only that, Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Das, C. I. E., founded the Buddhist Text Society in 1893. Rai Bahadur Das was the founder Secretary of the Buddhist Text Society, while Sri. Satis Chandra Vidya-booshan, who later on became the Principal of the Sanscrit College, was its Assistant Secretary. The Society published a good number of journals in which valuable articles on Buddhism were printed. We therefore observe that there have been a triangular effort for the renaissance of Buddhism in Bengal, Calcutta being its headquarters.

In this period Rabindranath Takur too contributed much for the cause of Buddhism. His famous poems, viz. 'Sreethabhiksha', 'Mastak Vikray', 'Pujarini', 'Abhisar', 'Prishodh', 'Samanya Ksati', 'Mulyaprapti' 'Nagar Lakshmi', etc., and his famous drama "Malini" – all were published in this period. These were all based on Buddhistic themes.

Krishnabihar Sen published his "Asoka Charita" in 1892; Dwijendranath Takur published a book comparing Aryadharma with Baudha-dharma; Ramdas Sen published his "Buddhadev", Haraprasad Shastri published his famous book "Discovery of living Buddhism in Bengal" in 1897, and so on.

All these might have influenced the poet Kumaran Asan while he was in Calcutta in that period.

I think, your inference is correct that Buddhistic philosophy and teachings have influenced him most as a result of which in his later ages (*sic*) he could produce such brilliant poetical works on Buddhism."

It may be seen that his letter is invaluable in that it throws a flood of light on those factors which must have strongly influenced Asan during his stay in Calcutta. This letter was with me for a rather long time, and I thought that it should see the

light of day lest it be lost to us. I wanted to see that those interested in exploring the facts and circumstances which shaped the genius of Asan were benefited by it. I do know that further investigations would certainly bring to light more details about the salubrious forces which had shaped the philosophy of Asan.

And I hope that it will be pertinent to mention that Buddhism had exerted its sway over Kerala for a few centuries till it was swept away by Hinduism, the powerfull onslaughts of which could not be resisted by the non-militant Buddhism; but however, the moral and social philosophy delineated by it cannot be said to have failed to leave its strands in the social fabric of Kerala and it is but common knowledge that many of our present traditions have their roots in the Buddhistic past.

And, let me now conclude by availing myself of this occasion to express my deep debt of gratitude to Dr. Sukomal Chaudhuri for having supplied me with these details, which probably none else would have cared to find out and communicate to me. And I am sure that other lovers of Malayalam literature also will be thankful to Dr. Chaudhuri for the pains he has so willingly taken to illuminate a not-well-known aspect of Kumaran Asan's life. □

—P. O. KunjuPanicker

Seminar on the Historical Novel in India

Kadangot Prabhakaran

C. V. Raman Pillai is a name to conjure with in the realm of the Malayalam novel. No writer in Malayalam has left so marked an impact on the growth and development of the novel as C. V. has.

The 125th birth anniversary of this veteran novelist was celebrated on 10th and 11th of September, 1983 at the Kerala Sahitya Akademi under the joint auspices of the Central Sahitya Akademi (New Delhi) and the Kerala Sahitya Akademi.

Apart from a seminar, a book-exhibition and a public meeting followed by a cultural programme were the highlights of the celebration.

The seminar held at the Akademi hall was attended by a good number of writers and students of literature from all parts of Kerala and outside. 'The Vision and Craft of Indian Historical Novels' was the theme of the seminar.

On September 10, at 10 A. M. Dr. V. K. Gokak, renowned writer and Chairman of the Central Sahitya Akademi inaugurated the seminar. Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, President of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, presided over the function.

Shri P. S. Gopalakrishnan, Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi (Southern Region, Madras), welcomed the gathering.

In his inaugural address Dr. Gokak spoke in general about the development of the Indian historical novel, and in particular, about C. V. Raman Pillai who enriched the historical novel in Malayalam. Drawing on the beginning of the historical novels in India, Dr. Gokak observed that it was owing to the pioneering efforts of eminent writers like C. V. Raman Pillai in Kerala, Bankim in Bengal, H. N. Apte in Maharashtra, Vasudevachar Karur in Karnataka and K. M. Munshi

in Gujarat that the historical novel had come into its own in India.

Dr. Gokak asked whether the Indian historical novel had produced any masterpiece like *War and Peace*. "To know this we have to study together the most esteemed novels produced in modern India. Comparative studies of this kind are the need of the hour", he observed.

Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai in his presidential address depicted C. V. as the patriarch of Malayalam fiction writers. "Within the broad circumference of historical truth C. V. has portrayed a vivid picture of Travancore and its people." -Shri Thakazhi remarked: "The characterisation is very clear. We can feel the breath of those characters on our shoulders. No writer in Malayalam could create such characters after him".

Shri Pavanam, Secretary of Kerala Sahitya Akademi, proposed a vote of thanks.

There were mainly three sessions in all during the period of two days and 9 papers were presented. These papers gave a splendid opportunity for a review of the history and the current trends of historical novels in India.

The first session was held immediately after the inaugural function. Dr. Gokak himself initiated the proceedings of the first session.

Professor S. Guptan Nair, the veteran Malayalam critic, presented a paper on the subject 'C.V and His Vision of History'. He pointed out that C. V. was one of those very few novelists who conceived the novel as epic and succeeded. "He wrote epics, in the grand style, in huge proportions"-Prof. Guptan Nair said and added: "He was a master of dialects and an explorer of the poetry of the native idiom. What he valued most was character and human endeavour and to him to be patriotic was to have the noblest ideal".

Professor T. Koteeswara Rao, Telugu scholar and researcher, read a paper on 'The Century-Old Historical Fiction of Telugu (1879-1982)!' Rich in detail and comprehensive in scope, the paper served the purpose of an ideal introduction to the historical fiction of Telugu Literature. According to Prof. Rao the historical fiction of Telugu has undergone a wonderful change in the past and it still goes on with "murmuring sounds and tinkling noises of the anklets like a perennial brook that never dries in the desert".

In the discussion which followed, eminent writers like Dr. K. M. George, Prof. G. Kumara Pillai and Shri Iyyengode Sreedharan actively participated.

The second session of the seminar was conducted at 2 P.M. Dr. K. M. George, Vice-President of Kerala Sahitya Akademi was in the chair. Three notable papers were presented in this session.

Dr. Sukumar Azhicode, distinguished critic and scholar, presented a brilliant paper on 'The Style and Craft of C. V. 's Novels' Touching pointedly and fluently on details of comparison and contrast Dr. Azhicode briefly discussed the craftsmanship of C.V. "C.V. was a perfect genius who made his unique contributions in the realm of novel", Dr. Azhicode remarked. He added: "The splendour of his language is something not attained by any other author. By the sheer force of his superb imagination and an inimitable artistry of words C. V. could add new dimensions to the art of fiction and thereby a new direction to historical novels"

Shri Shankar Mokashi Pune-
kar, the well known Kannada
writer, read a paper on 'The
Vision and Design in Kannada
Historical Fiction'. He gave a
detailed account of the historical

fiction in Kannada. "Karnataka
history has produced many
scholars; but few novelists" —
He said. "The advent of
Gandhiji in the twenties changed
the very tone of Kannada his-
toricals. The rhetoric of the
Gandhian age brought about
transformations in the very tone
and attitude of Kannada writers.
The enlightened age expressed
itself in a thousand ways and
extended the field of signif-
icance"

Presenting his paper on
'C. V. and Malayalam Novel'
Prof. K. M. Tharakan, well-
known Malayalam critic and
scholar, commented that the his-
torical novels of C. V. formed an
inexhaustible mine of ingenious
literary techniques and exquisite
literary sensibility. "C. V.
firmly believed that good is
indestructible"—Prof. Tharakan
pointed out: "His historical
romances are veritable verbal
icons to this grand vision of
history and human existence".

In the discussion which
followed Dr. B. Gopala
Reddy, Prof. S. Guptan Nair,
Dr. K. M. George and other
eminent scholars participated.

The final session of the semi-
nar was held at 10 A. M. on
September 11. Mr. R. S. Sudar-
sanam was in the chair in this
session. Altogether three papers
were presented in this session.

Shri Neela Padmanabhan, famous Tamil novelist, read an interesting paper on 'The Vision and Craft of Historical Fiction in Tamil'. He opined that in Tamil, historical fiction had not attained any respectable position, though the Tamil readers were eager to read historical novels. "Most of the historical novels in Tamil are born out of the desire to compensate for the present day fall in cultural values," he said. "While dealing with the past it is easy to ignore the unpleasant realities and to concentrate on ideals. There is more idealism than realism in the historical novels of Tamil".

Dr. M. Leelavathy, eminent Malayalam critic, presented a paper on 'Women Characters in the Historical Novels of C. V'. Dr. Leelavathy observed that C. V's women characters belonged to all categories from the highest strata of society to the lowest. "Each of these women characters possesses her own idiolect which helps to identify her in any crowd. C. V. has bestowed a distinctive idiolect upon every character" - Dr. Leelavathy said.

The topic of the paper presented by Dr. G. Lalitha, Professor, Queen Mary's College, Madras, was 'The Vision and Design in Telugu Historical Novel'. "Though fiction is a leading literary form in Telugu,

historical fiction has less votaries than non-historical fiction. The historical fiction in Telugu is a male dominated area and the exceptions are very few" Dr. Lalitha reviewed.

Dr. Shankar Mokashi Pune-
kar, Dr. R. S. Sudarsanam,
Prof. S. Guptan Nair,
Shri. Pavanan, Dr. Gokak,
Dr. B. Gopala Reddy and
Smt. Sugathakumari took part
in the discussion.

Dr. Sudarsanam concluded the discussion with his presidential address.

The public meeting was held at 5 P.M. at the Akademi auditorium. Shri. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai delivered the welcome speech. Shri K. Karunakaran, Chief Minister of Kerala, inaugurated the meeting. Dr. V. K. Gokak presided over the function and the main speakers on the occasion were Dr. B. Gopala Reddy, Dr. Sukumar Azhicode and Shri. Neela Padmanabhan.

At night was staged a Malayalam version of the drama "Exception and the Rule" by Bertolt Brecht directed by Maya Tangburg and performed by 'CULT' of the Calicut University's School of Drama. It was highly appreciated by the audience.

The book exhibition held under the auspices of the Central and Kerala Sahitya Akademis as part of the celebration attracted hundreds of enthusiasts of literature. □

Akademi News And Literary Notes

Akademi Treasurer

Shri Rudhra Gangadharan IAS., District Collector of Trichur and ex-officio Treasurer of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, has been relieved of the Akademi's Treasurership on his new assignment as Director of Collegiate Education. The Executive Board gave him a cordial send-off.

Shri C. H. Damodaran Nambiar, the newly appointed Collector of Trichur, took charge of the Treasurership of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi on 30th July.

Lalithakala Akademi

The State Government has reactivated the Kerala Lalitha Kala Akademi by appointing an ad hoc managing committee for it. Shri C. K. Ramakrishnan Nair is the Chairman of the Committee.

Shri P. Thomas is 75

The 75th birthday of the wellknown Indo-Anglian writer and former Hon. Editor of *Malayalam Literary Survey*, Shri P. Thomas, was celebrated on 18th July under the auspices

of a committee representing the public of Trichur. The felicitation meeting held at the Akademi auditorium was presided over by Shri C. Achutha Menon. Those who felicitated the writer include Prof. Syed Mooheyuddin Sha, Prof. G. Kumara Pillai, Dr. K. K. Rahulan, Shri K. B. Veerachandra Menon, Shri P. Sreedharan and Shri P. K. Raghupathi. Shri P. Thomas, in a fitting reply, thanked the public and the organizers of the celebrations for the affection and regard shown to him.

Shri Pavanam welcomed the audience and Sri A.S. Divakaran proposed a vote of thanks.

National Monument

The house of Mahakavi Vallathol at Cheruthuruthy is to be turned into a national monument. The State Government has decided to buy this house for the purpose.

Regional Office of Film Certification

A regional office of the Central Board of Film Certification has been opened at Trivandrum.

Homage to Kesava Dev

The Malayali Association of Delhi held a meeting on 15th July to mourn the death of the novelist P. Kesava Dev. Shri E. M. S. Namboodiripad, Shri M. Mukundan, Shri N. N. Pillai and others paid rich tributes to the memory of the novelist and presented a critical appreciation of his work. Shri K. T. Sivadas, General Secretary of the Association, presided over the meeting.

New York Malayalee Association

The first anniversary to New York Malayalee Association was celebrated on July 2, 3 and 4. Many eminent writers from Kerala were invited to attend the function. Those who participated include Dr. S. K. Nair, Shri M. P. Veerendrakumar, Dr. Puthusseri Ramachandran, Shri D. C. Kizhakemuri, Shri T. K. G. Nair and Shri V. K. Madhavankutty.

Bharatheeya Bhasha Prasthanam

An organization, 'Bharatheeya Bhasha Prasthanam' by name, has started functioning at Trivandrum with the aim of promoting and encouraging the mother-tongue in all its aspects. The governing board of this organization is headed by Prof. Vayala Vasudevan Pillai

and the members are Shri S. Rajasekharan, Shri N. V. Krishna Warriar, Shri P. T. Bhaskara Paniker, Shri Thayat Sankaran, Prof. G. Kumara Pillai, Dr. Vellayani Arjunan, Dr. A. N. P. Ummerkutty, Shri M. Prabha, Shri Vishnu Narayanan Namboodiri, Dr. K. Madhavankutty and Shri D. Vinayachandran.

Death Anniversary of S. K. Pottekkatt

The first death anniversary of S. K. Pottekkatt, the eminent novelist, was observed on August 6, at the Kalpaka Hotel Auditorium, Calicut, under the auspices of S. K. Smaraka Samithi. Dr. Sukumar Azhicode presided over the function and Prof. S. Guptan Nair delivered the S. K. Memorial Lecture. Dr. M. Leelavathy inaugurated the literary workshop organized by the Samithi. Shri M. T. Vasudevan Nair welcomed the gathering and Shri A. Sujanapal proposed a vote of thanks.

Literary Camp at Payyannur

Under the auspices of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi and with the co-operation of the Payyannur Samskarika Vedi, a three-day literary camp for the young writers of Cannanore, Calicut, Wynad and Malappuram Districts of Kerala was conducted at Payyannur on

October 7, 8 and 9. The inaugural function was presided over by Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, President of the Akademi and Prof. S. Guptan Nair delivered the inaugural address.

30 young writers participated in the camp. The camp directors were Dr. Sukumar Azhicode and Shri C. P. Sreedharan. Shri Pavanan was the camp officer.

In the concluding function, Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai presided. Shri C. P. Sreedharan, Prof. G. Kumara Pillai and Dr. M. Leelavathy spoke.

Research Scholarships

Shri P. K. Gopalakrishnan, Shri K. A. Kodungalloor, Shri C. K. Thomas, and Shri P. Bhaskaranunni have been selected by the Akademi for its research scholarships for the year 1984-85. The research scholarship is of the value of Rs. 500/- per month.

Prof. S. Guptan Nair

Prof. S. Guptan Nair has been nominated as a member of the General Council and Executive Committee of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi by the Government in the vacancy caused by the death of N. Sreekantan Nair.

Travel Grant

Shri M. K. Madhavan Nair, Shri Mangalat Raghavan,

Shri C. P. Sivasadan, Shri K. L. Mohana Varma and Shri Anappuzha Chandra Mohan have been selected by the Akademi for its travel grant for the year.

State Language Institute

The 15th anniversary of the State Institute of Languages was celebrated at Trivandrum on 15 and 16 of September. Seminars, discussions and a public meeting were the highlights of the celebration. The seminar was inaugurated by Prof. N. Krishna Pillai with Shri R. Ramachandran Nair I. A. S. in the chair. The concluding session of the seminar was inaugurated by Shri K. M. Mani, Minister for Finance, Kerala. Dr. P. K. Narayana Pillai presided. The public meeting was inaugurated by Shri P. Ramachandran, Governor of Kerala. Shri K. Karunakaran, Chief Minister, Kerala, chaired the meeting.

Workshop for Journalists

A three-day workshop for journalists was held at Sivagiri on October 22, 23 and 24. The workshop under the auspices of the Kerala Press Akademi was inaugurated by Shri K. Karunakaran, Chief Minister of Kerala. Shri T. K. G. Nair, Chairman of the Press Akademi, presided over the function.

105th Birth Anniversary of Vallathol

The 105th birthday of the late Mahakavi Vallathol was celebrated on November 9 at Kerala Kalamandalam. The celebration was inaugurated by Shri T. M. Jacob, Education Minister of Kerala, Shri Olappamanna, Chairman, Kerala Kalamandalam, presided.

Mundassery Memorial

The inauguration of the Prof. Joseph Mundassery Memorial at Trichur was held on October 29. Shri K. Karunakaran, Chief Minister of Kerala, inaugurated the Memorial. Shri Baby John, former Minister of Education, presided over the function. A portrait of Prof. Mundassery was unveiled by Mahakavi Vyloppillil Sreedhara Menon at the meeting. Dr. K. Gopalan, Vice-Chancellor, Cochin University, Shri T. N. Jayachandran, Vice-chancellor, Calicut University and Shri M. K. Menon (Vilasini), novelist, spoke on the occasion.

There was a poet's meet, a symposium and a public meeting as part of the function. The poets' meet was presided over by Prof. O. N. V. Kurup. The main paper on Mundassery's style of criticism was presented by Prof. S. K. Vasanthan. The

public meeting was inaugurated by Shri E. K. Nayanar and presided over by Shri C. Achutha Menon.

Commemoration of K. P. S. Menon

A function to commemorate the late K. P. S. Menon was held under the auspices of Indo-Soviet Cultural Society at the auditorium of the Akademi on October 26. The meeting was presided over by Shri C. Achutha Menon. Dr. Mithrokhin, Shri C. R. Kesavan Vaidyar and Prof. K. P. Sasidharan were the main speakers on the occasion.

Death Anniversary of Cherukadu

The 7th death anniversary of Cherukadu the eminent novelist was observed on October 7 at Perinthalmanna under the auspices of the Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham. Shri V. P. Gopalan Vaidyar presided over the function and Sarvashri P. Govinda Pillai, Thayat Sankaran, T. P. Sukumaran, C. P. Narayanan, Kochanuja Pisharadi, V. K. Balachandran and Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai spoke on the occasion.

Kootiyattam Festival

A Kootiyattam festival was conducted at Sree Vadakkumnatha Temple, Trichur, from October 31 to November 14 under the joint auspices of

Ammannur Chachu Chakyar Smarka Gurukula of Irinjalakuda and the Central Sangeetha Nataka Akademi.

Museum of Kerala History

A museum, Kerala Charithra Samskara Museum by name, has started functioning under the auspices of the History Department of Calicut University. Shri T. N. Jayachandran, Vice-Chancellor of the University, inaugurated the Museum on November 1.

Literary Camp

A three-day literary camp for poetry was held at Payyannur on December 9, 10 and 11 under the auspices of Kerala Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham. Shri N. V. Krishna Warriar inaugurated the camp. Shri P. Appukkuttan presided. A poets' meet, cultural procession, drama performance and an art exhibition were also held as part of the camp.

Grameenotsavam

A Grameenotsavam (Festival of Rural Arts) was conducted by the School of Drama, Trichur, at Alunthara in Trivandrum District on December 9, 10 and 11. The festival was inaugurated by Shri P. Bhaskaran, Chairman, Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi.

Ezhuthachan Memorial Lecture

This year's K. N. Ezhuthachan Memorial Lecture was delivered by Dr. M. Leelavathy on December 8 at Pattambi Government Sanskrit College. Prof. Bharathi presided over the function.

G. Sankara Kurup Memorial

The Cochin Corporation has decided to erect a small town hall at Gandhi Nagar, Cochin, in memory of the late G. Sankara Kurup, the veteran poet of Malayalam who won the first Jnanapith Award.

Endowment

The Folklore Fellows of Malabar Trust decided at a meeting held at Calicut in November to institute two endowments of Rs. 25,000/- each to mark the memory of the late Kambisseri Karunakaran and Chirakkal T. Balakrishnan Nair.

Karunakaran Nambiar Memorial Award

The Kerala Press Akademi has instituted an award in honour of the late V. Karunakaran Nambiar who was editor of the Malayalam daily, the *Express*. The award which carries a cash prize of Rs. 2500/- and a medal is given every year for distinguished achievement in the field of journalism.

To institute this award, the Express Journalists' Union has entrusted the Press Akademi with an amount of Rs. 25000/-

Survey of Folk Arts

A conference of the Sangeetha Nataka Akademis of South India held in the first week of December at Trivandrum has decided to conduct a National Survey of Folk Arts.

Kalamandalam General Council

Shri C. MadhavaKurup, son of Mahakavi Vallathol, and Shri J. Krishna Pillai, Joint Secretary, Department of Culture (Kerala), have been nominated as members of the General Council of Kalamandalam by the Government.

Camp for Short Story Writers

A three-day literary camp for short-story writers was held at the Pamba Devaswam Board College, Parumala, on September 9, 10 and 11 under the auspices of the Kerala Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham.

Samskara Central Library

The inaugural function of Samskara Central Library, Trichur, was held at the Kerala Sahitya Akademi auditorium on October 16. Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai inaugurated the library. A seminar on 'The existentialism of Sartre' was also conducted in

connection with the inaugural function.

Prof. S. Guptan Nair,
S. P. C. S. President

Prof. S. Guptan Nair has been elected President of S. P. C. S. (Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd. Kottayam); Shri C. Radhakrishnan is its Vice-President.

Birth Centenary of Malayalam Drama

The year-long celebrations of the birth centenary of Malayalam drama concluded on November 13 at Trivandrum. The inaugural function of the concluding programme was presided over by Shri P. Bhaskaran, Chairman, Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi. Shri. P. Ramachandran, Governor of Kerala, delivered the inaugural address. Fellowships and Awards were conferred on renowned artistes as part of the function.

Konniyur Narendranath

Shri Konniyur Narendranath, a well-known Malayalam writer, took charge of the post of Station Director of All India Radio, Madras, on August 1.

Annie Thayyil

Smt. Annie Thayyil, eminent Malayalam writer, has been nominated as a member of the Minority Commission instituted

recently by the Government of India.

Focus

The art lovers of Trichur have given birth to an organization Focus by name. Shri Matampu Kunjukuttan, well-known novelist, is the President of the organization.

V. D. Krishnan Nambiar

Shri V.D. Krishnan Nambiar, well-known writer in Malayalam and Hindi, was nominated as a member of the advisory board for Hindi in the Central Education Ministry.

International Malayalam Foundation

The International Malayalam Foundation has been instituted at New York under the auspices of the New York Malayalee Association. The aim of the institution is to promote Malayalam language and literature.

Literary Camp

A three-day literary camp was held at Veli Youth Hostel, Trivandrum, on August 25, 26 and 27 for young writers. The camp, under the auspices of the Kerala University Union, was inaugurated by Dr. K. Ayyappa Panicker. Sri T. Saratchandra Prasad, University Union Chairman, presided over the function.

T. K. Koshi

Shri T. K. Koshi has been appointed Pro-Vice Chancellor of the newly started Gandhiji University at Kottayam.

Film about Guruvayurappan

The State Film Development Corporation has decided to produce a feature film about Guruvayurappan in five languages. The direction of this film will be done by Shri P. Bhaskaran.

Commemoration of Kesava Dev

A function to commemorate the late P. Kesava Dev was held under the auspices of the School of Aesthetics, Trivandrum, on September 30. Shri E. M. S. Namboodiripad delivered the commemoration address.

125th birthday of Punnasseri Nambi

The 125th birth anniversary of Punnasseri Nambi Neelakanta Sarma, the great Sanskrit scholar was celebrated at Government Sanskrit College, Pattambi, under the joint auspices of Kerala Sahitya Akademi and the local celebration committee on December 19 and 20. A commemoration speech, public meeting, Vakyarthasadda and cultural programme were the highlights of the function. The public meeting was inaugurated by Shri P. Ramachandran,

Governor of Kerala, and presided over by Shri P. T. Bhaskara Panicker. Shri Pavanam and Shri T. C. Balakrishnan Nair spoke on the occasion.

Akademi Awards

The Kerala Sahitya Akademi Awards for 1983 have been announced. This year's winners are: Shri M. N. Paloor (*Kalikalam*, Poetry); Shri Matampu Kunjukuttan (*Mahaprasthanam*, Novel); Shri C. V. Sreeraman (*Vastuhara*, Short story); Shri Vayala Vasudevan Pillai (*Agni*, Drama); Dr. K. Ayyappa Panicker (*Ayyappapanickarute Lekhanangal*, Literary Criticism); Dr. K. Velayudhan Nair (*Aravinda darsanam*, Miscellaneous section); Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai (*Arthathinte Athirithikal*, C. B. Kumar Award); Dr. J. V. Vilanilam (*Parasyam*, I. C. Chacko Award); Shri Ottoor Unni Namboodiripad (*Sree Bhagavanuvacha*, K. R. Namboodiri Award); Shri T. K. D. Muzhappilangadu (*Unnikuttanum Kathakaliyum*, Children's Literature, Shri Padmanabha SwamiPrize).

The Akademi Awards are of Rs. 3000/- each. The C. B. Kumar Award is of Rs. 1500/-; the I. C. Chacko Award, K. R. Namboodiri Award and Shri

Padmanabha Swami Prize are of Rs. 1000/- each.)

Central Sangeetha Nataka Akademi Award

The 1983 Central Sangeetha Nataka Akademi Awards were declared for 19 artists. Shri Kavalam Narayana Panicker, well known dramatist, won the award for his contributions in the field of Malayalam drama. The award carries a cash prize of Rs. 10000/- and a 'Tamrapatra'

Edasseri Award

The Edasseri Award for 1983 was given to Shri S. Ramesan Nair for his collection of poem, *Sooryahridayam*. Instituted in memory of the late Edasseri Govindan Nair, eminent poet, the award amount is Rs. 2000/-. The award was presented to the poet in a function held at the Kerala Sahitya Akademi on October 16. Shri C. Achutha Menon inaugurated the function. Shri Akkitham Achuthan Namboodiri presided. Dr. K. K. Rahulan, Shri Pavanam, Prof. S. K. Vasanthan and Shri Gopi Kodungalloor spoke. Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai delivered the commemoration speech. The poet's meet held in this connection earlier was presided over by Shri C. A. Joseph and inaugurated by Shri N. N. Kakkad.

Krishnaswami Kumkumam Award

The 1982 Krishnaswami Kumkumam Novel awards were distributed by Shri P. Subramaniam Potti, Chief Justice of Gujarat, in a public meeting held on October 16 at Shri Vidyadhiraja Memorial Hall, Anandavalleeswaram, Quilon. Dr. K. Gopalan, Vice-Chancellor, Cochin University, presided over the function.

The first prize which carries a cash amount of Rs. 11,111/- was given to Shri S. Joy for his novel *Savangal Izhayunna Thazhvara* and the second prize of Rs. 5001/- was presented to Shri V. Krishna Vadhyar for his novel *Devli*.

Vayalar Award

The prestigious Vayalar Award (in memory of the late Vayalar Rama Varma) for the year was given to Shri M. K. Menon (Vilasini) for his novel *Avakasikal*. The award was presented to the novelist at a colourful function held at Cochin on 27th October by Giyani Zail Singh, President of India. The award carries a cash prize of Rs. 25000/-. Vilasini is the recipient of many literary awards like Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, Central Sahitya Akademi Award, Odakkuzhal Award etc.

Thakazhi honoured

The third World Hindi Meet held at New Delhi in the fourth week of October honoured 40 eminent writers including Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, President of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi.

Sakthi Award

The 'Cherukadu Smaraka Sakthi Award' for 1983 was given to Shri P. M. Taj for his play *Kutukka Athava Visakunnavarute Vedantam*. The award has been instituted in memory of Cherukadu, a well-known novelist in Malayalam.

Kairali Children's Book Trust Award

Shri C. G. Santhakumar was given the Kairali Children's Book Trust Award of 1981-82 for his book *Appuvinte Science Corner*. The book was published by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi. The award carries a cash prize of Rs. 2500/-

Rotary Club Award

Shri C. L. Jose received the Trichur Rotary Club award of the year. It is in honour of the valuable services rendered by Shri Jose for the development of Malayalam drama.

Homage to P. Kesava Dev and E. M. Kovoov

To commemorate P. Kesava

Dev and E. M. Kovoov, the distinguished Malayalam novelists who died during the year, a function was organised under the auspices of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi on September 9 at the Akademi auditorium.

The opening session which started at 3 P. M. was devoted to E. M. Kovoov. Dr. K. M. George presided over the function. Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai, Prof. Thumpamon Thomas, Prof. G. Kumara Pillai and Shri C. P. Sreedharan spoke on

the occasion. Dr. M.M. Basheer welcomed the audience and Shri John Kunnappalli proposed the vote of thanks.

In the commemoration meeting of P Kesava Dev held at 5.30 P M. Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai was in the chair. Shri C. Achutha Menon, Shri M. K. Menon (Vilasini), Prof. S. K. Vasanthan and Prof. K. M. Tharakan spoke. Shri M. N. Kurup welcomed the gathering. Shri P. Appukuttan proposed a vote of thanks.

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Obituary

V. Gopalan Nair

V. Gopalan Nair, former Secretary of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi and former Director of Collegiate Education, passed away at Calicut on April 16. He was 67. A member of the Madras Educational Service, he had worked as Professor and Principal in various Government Colleges before he became Director of Collegiate Education, Kerala. After his retirement also he had worked as Visiting Professor in various institutions including the Calicut University. He had done much in promoting the Akademi to its present stature.

Bharathi Udayabhanu

Bharathi Udayabhanu, Malayalam litterateur and wife of Shri A. P. Udayabhanu, passed away at Trivandrum on April 23. She was a member of Parliament from 1952 to 1962. She had enriched Malayalam literature by her valuable writings. She was the recipient of awards from the Kerala Sahitya Akademi and the S. P. C. S. She had to her credit three books including *From Kitchen to Parliament*.

S. K. Nair

S. K. Nair, well-known publisher and litterateur, passed away on July 16 at Trivandrum. He was the founder of New India Publications, a firm which owns a number of popular periodicals like the *Malayalanadu*. He had produced four films under the banner of New India Films.

N. Sreekantan Nair



N. Sreekantan Nair, freedom fighter, trade union leader and Malayalam litterateur, passed away at Changanacherry on July 20. He was 68. For over five decades he was ranked among the frontline leaders in the political field of Kerala and was the foremost among our trade union organizers. He was a Member of Parliament for

several terms. He also served as a member of the Senate and Syndicate of Kerala University.

He took an active part in the promotion of literature. He was closely associated with the Kerala Sahitya Akademi for many years as a member of the General Council and the Executive Board. He was also on the Editorial Board of the *Sahityalokam*, the quarterly publication of the Sahitya Akademi in Malayalam. A well-known writer both in English and Malayalam, he had 6 books to his credit. He is survived by his wife, Maheswari Amma, an active political and social worker.

In Sreekantan Nair's demise Kerala Sahitya Akademi has lost a senior member whose sense of dedication is a shining example for others.

Erkara Raman Namboodiri

Vedaratnam Erkara Raman Namboodiri, renowned scholar, died on July 20 at Mukkuthala. He was 85. His knowledge of Sanskrit and the Vedas was unrivalled and astounding. He was a recipient of the K. R. Namboodiri Award of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi. He had also received an award from the President of India for his scholarship in Sanskrit. He was

awarded the 'Vedaratnam' title at a meeting of scholars held at Sanskrit College, Pattambi, in 1966. Erkara was the editor of *Anadi*, a monthly magazine devoted to the upholding of Vedic culture in its essence.

C. Balakrishna Kurup

C. Balakrishna Kurup, eldest son of Mahakavi Vallathol, died on August 16 at Trichur. He was 78. A keen student of culture and art, C. Balakrishna Kurup had done much for the development and propagation of Kathakali. He was a member of the General Council of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi and the Kerala Kalamandalam.

C. H. Mohammed Koya



C. H. Mohammed Koya, Deputy Chief Minister of Kerala and a well-known writer and journalist, passed away on September 28 at Hyderabad. He was 54. For the last many years

he was ranked among the front-line leaders of Kerala and he was once Chief Minister for a short period.

C. H. was one of the founders of the University of Calicut. He had 7 books to his credit. He made a mark as a writer of travelogue. C. H. was closely associated with the Kerala Sahitya Akademi.

M. S. Namboodiri

M. S. Namboodiri, well-known stage actor and director, passed away on October 27 at Irinjalakkuda. He was 73. As an actor he had served the stage for about six decades. The dramas he had directed had won great recognition. He had appeared in some films also. He was a recipient of the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi Award. □

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Our Contributors

[Biographical notes on some of our contributors have appeared in previous issues and in such cases details are not repeated]



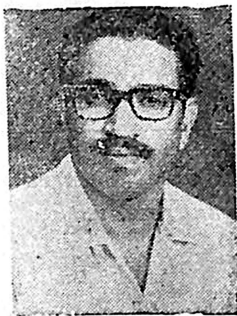
V. K. Gokak: Vinayak Krishna Gokak (b. 1909) who is currently President of the Central Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, is an eminent writer, scholar and educationist. As a writer in Kannada and in English he has won acclaim in the fields of poetry, fiction and literary criticism.

Educated at Bombay and Oxford, he was Professor of English and Principal in several institutions before he became Director, Central Institute of English; Vice-Chancellor, Bangalore University; Director, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies and Vice-Chancellor, Shri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning.

He has won many honours including Doctorates from many Universities, the Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry and the Padmashree title.

Dr. K. M. George (b. 1914) is a renowned scholar and critic; he is now Vice-President of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi and Chief Editor of the Akademi's prestigious publication, *Comparative Indian Literature*.

C. Achutha Menon (b. 1913) who was Chief Minister of Kerala from 1970 to 1976 is a senior communist leader and a highly respected elder statesman. He is also a well-known writer on political, social and literary topics.



Pavanan: (b. 1926): Currently Secretary of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, he is a well-known journalist and writer. An ardent champion of causes like rationalism, progressive literature and politics of the left, he has been an activist in many fields. He is now President of the Kerala Rationalist Association. Pavanan has twentyseven books to his credit and his special areas are social criticism and literary criticism. He has received many prizes and awards including the *Soviet Land* Nehru Award which he won twice.



Vennikkulam Gopala Kurup (1902-1980) was one of the illustrious poets who belonged to the generation of G. Sankara Kurup who is better known outside Kerala. In writing short lyrics and story poems in a simple melodious style, he had few equals. His shorter poems have been collected in some twenty volumes. He won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967 and the Central Sahitya Akademi Award in 1974. He was also a great translator who enriched Malayalam with excellent versions of classics like *Thulasidasa Ramayana* (Hindi) and *Thirukkural* (Tamil).

C. A. Joseph (b. 1910) who has translated the poem is a well-known poet in Malayalam and in English.

R. Ramachandran (b. 1924) who writes rarely is a very sensitive poet who tries in subtle ways to evoke elusive moods and intangible states of mind. He was formerly Professor of Malayalam, Malabar Christian College, Calicut.

R. Viswanathan who has translated the poems is Ramachandran's younger brother. He teaches English at the University of Calicut and is himself a poet.

P. Kesava Dev (See P 4)

Dr. N. Ramachandran Nair who has translated the extract from Dev teaches English at the University of Calicut.

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer (b. 1910) is one of the greatest story-writers in Malayalam.

Dr. S. Velayudhan who has translated the story is now Director Regional Institute of English, Bangalore.

K. M. Tharakan (b. 1930) is a prominent critic and literary historian in Malayalam. He was formerly a Professor of English.

Dr. M. Leelayathy (b. 1927) is a prominent critic in Malayalam. She was formerly a Professor of Malayalam and retired as a government college Principal.

K. S. Narayana Pillai (b. 1930) is a well-known critic especially of modern literature in Malayalam. A former Professor of Malayalam and private college Principal, he now works at the State Institute of Languages, Trivandrum. He has half a dozen books to his credit and of these the study on the poet, Changampuzha, is the most famous.

V. Aravindakshan (b. 1930) who teaches English in Shree Kerala Varma College, Trichur, is a critic and a translator.

K. Gopinath (b. 1923) is a freelance journalist; he was formerly in the service of All India Radio.

K. N. Nair (b. 1923) is a veteran journalist and a former official of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Dr S. P. Ramesh (b. 1945) who did the music for the recent film *Nokkukuthi*, had earlier collaborated with G. Aravindan in doing the script for the film *Pokkuveyil*. A psychiatrist by profession, he has published short stories in Malayalam and articles on film and music in English and in Malayalam.

Dr. K. Sreenivasan (b. 1923), widely known as 'Sreeni', is a literary critic in English and Malayalam. He is a former Professor of English.

K. M. P. Variar (b. 1933), Professor of Malayalam in the University of Madras, is a critic and scholar of repute.

Kadangot Prabhakaran is Editorial Assistant in the Kerala Sahitya Akademi.

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