POLITICS OF AESTHETICS: THE QUESTION OF CULTURE IN THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN KERALA

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled **"Politics of Aesthetics: The Question of Culture in the Communist Movement in Kerala"** submitted by Ardra N. G., of the Centre for Political Science, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of Doctor of Philosophy is an original work and carried out by the candidate under my supervision. It has not been submitted so far in part or in full for any other degree or diploma to this or any other University. It is hereby recommended that the thesis may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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DECLARATION

I, Ardra N. G. , hereby declare that the thesis titled, **"Politics of Aesthetics: The Question of Culture in the Communist Movement in Kerala"** submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Centre for Political Science, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University is a bona fide work. This work has not been submitted in part or in full for any degree or diploma to this or any other university.

ARDRA N.G.

DATE: 21-7-2017

ABBREVIATIONS

AIPWA	All Indian Progressive Writers Association
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist- Leninist)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CRC-CPIML	Central Reorganisation Committee Communist Party of India Marxist- Leninist
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
IPTA	Indian People's Theatre Association
JSS	Jeeval Sahitya Sangham
KPAC	Kerala People's Arts Club
NSS	Nair Service Society
PSS	Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana
Pu Ka Sa	Purogamana Kala-Sahitya Vedi
SNDP	Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam
Vedi	Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi

GLOSSARY

Atiyaan	The Dalit bonded labourer whose family was considered to be part of the assets of the landlord household
Janmi	The old-fashioned formal term for the landlord
Joli/ Pani/ Vela	Work, in a general sense either formal or informal, with/without wage
Karanavar	The eldest male head of the matrilineal Nair *tharavad*, who primarily had to look after his sisters and their children.
Karshakar	Peasants/ Cultivators
Katha	Story
Kavitha	Poetry
Kuti	Home, specifically the house of the tenant in the land owned by the landlord, it also means consuming alcohol
Kutiyaan	The tenant of a big landlord who cultivated the land on behalf of the landlord and paid him rent.
Mappila	The term used for Muslims in some regions and for Christians in some other regions.
Nair	The affluent upper caste in Kerala who used to be matrilineal in family arrangements and inheritance patterns

Namboodiri	Malayali Brahmins who are further subdivided into several sub-castes and groups like Namboodiripad, Bhattathiripad etc.
Natakam	Drama/ Play
Paattam	Rent to be paid by the tenant to the landlord after every harvest.
Parayan/ *Pulayan*	Two Dalit castes that used to form the vast majority of agricultural labourers in Travancore and Kochi regions
Prasthanam	The term used to denote any political/ social or intellectual movement.
Premam	Love, in a more strict sense as romantic, conjugal love.
Sahityam	Literature
Devalokam	The heavenly abode in which the heavenly creatures of Indian mythology Devas reside as opposed to the Pathalam where Asuras live, equivalent to the biblical imagination of the paradise.
Thamburan	Lord, mainly used by the lower caste labourers to address the upper caste landlord
Tharavadu	The large matrilineal Nair households where many families lived jointly
Thendi	A beggar/ Scoundrel
Thotti	The manual scavenger who removes human excreta from old-fashioned toilets and carries it to the night-soil depots
Thozhil	Labour/ occupation

Thozhilali	Labourer
Thozhilali Vargam	Labouring Class
Vairudhywadmakata	Dialectics
Vairudhywadmaka Bhautikavadam	Dialectical Materialism

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: POLITICS OF AESTHETICS IN THE COMMUNIST DISCOURSE IN MALAYALAM

> Politics is first of all a way of framing, among sensory data, a specific sphere of experience. It is a *partition of the sensible*, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking. The politics of literature thus means that *literature as literature* is involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable, in this intertwining of being, doing and saying that frames a polemical common world. (Rancière 2004a, 10, emphasis added)

Marxism was first introduced to the Malayalam public sphere in the form of a biography of Karl Marx written by K. Ramakrishna Pilla in 1912. This was one of the earliest such works published in any Indian languages. The spread of printing in Malayalam in the late nineteenth century had already paved way for the establishment of numerous political, social and literary publications including dailies, weeklies, magazines and other journals in the language. Thus, the news of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and a handful of writings on Lenin and Trotsky reached Kerala[1] from the articles published by editors of the time like C. Kesavan (*Mithavadi*), Ramakrishna Pilla (*Swadeshabhimani*) and A. Balakrishna Pilla (*Prabodhakan*, *Kesari*).

Emergence of the Left-Socialist group within the Congress and the formation of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1936 were milestones in the pre-history of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in Kerala. The caste and community reform movements had already strengthened the social critique on the other hand and many early communist leaders received their initial political training from these movements. It was in this matrix of contesting ideas of/ about social transformation and the socialist upheavals in the West that the communist party was moulded as an 'underground' formation in the late 1930s.

The political mobilisation of the early communist movement at the grass roots in different parts of Kerala is considered to have been responsible for the lasting electoral

[1] Before the linguistic state formation in 1956, Kerala existed as three major distinct regions; two princely states of Travancore and Kochi and the erstwhile district of the Madras Presidency of British India called Malabar. There were other smaller regions too that were annexed at the time of state formation like South Canara and parts of present Palakkad district.

presence of the left in the region, even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc and the decline of communist parties in other parts of the world. Moreover, throughout the last eight decades, the intellectual public sphere of Kerala is categorically marked by the presence of communist ideologues belonging to different political outfits and Marxist intellectuals without party affiliations. Their engagements have been crucial in the development of the polemical as well as academic discourses in disciplines ranging from political economy and sociology to history and literature.

The peculiar historical trajectory of the communist movement in Kerala has been studied by scholars of various disciplines, ranging from economics to sociology and anthropology to political science. The Kerala Development Model, short form for a range of policies conceived and implemented since the 1970s gained global academic attention as a unique model of social welfare and political participation.[2] The socio-political history of the communist party in Kerala and the 'movemental' and 'governmental' aspects of the communist rule also have been subjects of scholarly endeavours.[3] Nevertheless, the hegemonic presence of the communist movement in Kerala, both electorally and ideologically can only be comprehended with the mapping of another genealogy equally significant to the building and sustenance of this hegemony. This thesis attempts to map the aesthetic history of the communist movement in Kerala up to the 1980s after which certain significant shifts take place in the local, national and international contexts.

The specific focus of the work lies in the organised cultural interventions by various communist parties in Kerala in the decades since the inception of the communist movement in the late 1930s. It is significant to note that the aesthetic terrain has been given exceptional importance in the left political activities even before the creation of CPI in a secret meeting held in a village in North Malabar sometime in 1939. The communist leaders of the CSP had initiated the formation of a literary-cultural platform

[2] Kerala was identified by a range of scholars in the 1970s onwards as a peculiar case in the proportional indices of economic growth and human development in contrast to the other Indian states as despite low income levels the state has had high literacy rates, better life expectancy and low mortality rates and active political participation of citizens. A detailed discussion of the policies and their socio-political ramifications can be seen in the following works. M. A. Oommen (1999), Govindan Parayil (2000), K. P. Kannan (2005), K. Ravi Raman (2012), V. K. Ramachandran (1997).

[3] For the discussion of the emergence and growth of the communist movement in Kerala see Dilip Menon (1994), Robin Jeffrey (1978), T. J. Nossiter (1980), G. K. Lieten (1982).

in 1937 called the Jeeval Sahitya Sangham (JSS). The first generation communist activists including E. M. S. Namboodiripad and K. Damodaran were actively present in the debates of JSS. The initiative was inspired by the 'progressive literary discourse' taking place at the international and national levels.

Numerous cultural activists, writers and critics worked in alliance with the communist movement in the decades of 1940s and 50s that mark the first stage in the history of the progressive literary and cultural movement. Consequent fissures that took place in the communist party produced more platforms of aesthetic-cultural activities and debates throughout and the organisational and intellectual history of these 'cultural fronts' form a significant aspect of this thesis.

The significance of the cultural fronts in the context can be further articulated with an example from the history of the Naxalite movement in Kerala. Though the organisational presence of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML) was limited their intervention into the cultural sphere was considerable during the 1970s and early 80s, especially during and after the Emergency. The Janakiya Samskarika Vedi (hereafter Vedi) was a powerful platform formed under the aegis of the CPI (ML) that invigorated many a theoretical as well as practical activities in the cultural realm. The study aims at investigating these various streaks of organised left engagements on the one hand with the intellectual debates on culture, aesthetics and politics and on the other with the actual literary and artistic productions at a particular moment in Malayalam public sphere.

Apart from the historical and theoretical lives of the left cultural fronts this work attempts to inquire into the domain of creative writing in Malayalam that developed in conversation with these intellectual activities. A carefully chosen set of literary works produced by the writers associated with the left cultural activism and others who were fellow travellers of the communist movements in varying capacities form the major portion of the primary material of this dissertation.

A thematic exploration into these works would further enable us to review the relationship between mechanisms of aesthetic production and processes of politicisation that the left cultural activism in the region brought about. In other words, it attempts to reveal the complex engagements the communist movement (here, I take it to mean all the

different parties and their cultural fronts) have had in the cultural matrix of the region, especially in the literary and other aesthetic activities. In turn, it aspires to shed light into the larger debates surrounding the relationship between politics and aesthetics, primarily in the politico-philosophical discourse of Marxism. The discussion focuses largely on the written material including the literary works such as party documents, pamphlets, novels, short stories, essays, poetry and autobiographies.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The theoretical backdrop for this study is set in the Marxist philosophical discourse about the relationship between the categories of aesthetics and politics, more specifically the manners in which this relationship can be defined and put to work in analysing the works of art produced in a particular time and space. The field is populated by scholars belonging to various schools of Marxism and when accompanied by the diverse politico-aesthetic experiments that were carried out and the intellectual and cultural impact they generated in the regions where communists took over power, its complexity is further enhanced.

From Karl Marx and Frederick Engels to Plekhanov and Lenin and from the scholars belonged to the Frankfurt School to more contemporary thinkers like Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton and Jacques Rancière, every significant Marxist philosopher has investigated into the nature of this fundamental relationship. The historical 'experiments' in turn emanated from the interaction between the philosophical discourse available at a particular time and the local cultural milieu that produced its own 'vernacular theory' to deal with its specific problems. Whether the Soviet or Chinese experiments in culture or the Latin American experiences, any local communist history may provide compelling examples in this regard. Hence, it becomes essential to focus on the peculiar local trajectories of each communist movement along with the philosophical debates if one is to vividly understand the contextual ramifications of the concepts.

It is important to mention some of the conceptual as well as ideological difficulties embedded in the dominant scholarship around the study of the local communist movement. More often than not, the study of a communist movement is taken up as a 'case study' in order to prove or disprove some of the abstract generalisations that

has been already assumed by considering the movement international and national tendencies. Moreover, the given philosophical categories are employed to the study of a local movement in order to assess the degree of 'correctness' with which the local movement 'applied' these. This approach is rather reductive in understanding the complex and intermingling histories of ideas and political practices in a specific geographical region endowed with its peculiar historical and social configurations.

A detailed political sociology of a particular communist movement is then an essential component of any theoretical discourse on Marxism. Cultural interventions by the communist parties in all their respective contexts are central to the analysis of any particular communist movement as well as the broader theoretical study on Marxism and culture. The politics of aesthetics, as defined and propagated by various communist movements across the world had been a crucial aspect of their respective histories. This research aims at contributing to the scholarship on the cultural history and political sociology of the Kerala communist movement during the post-independence decades.

As mentioned above, this dissertation pertains to the two-pronged study; of history of the relationship between the 'cultural fronts' of the communist parties and the broader intellectual public sphere of the region and of the analysis of the literary products formed out of this engagement. When transported to new contexts, communist movements have to introduce as well as develop a new repertoire of imagination, not only of economic and political relationships, but also that of the more intimate ways in which we live, culturally and socially. In the process, communists try to persuade the society to change its ways of reading, writing, speaking and other creative expressions along with the ways of doing politics. Thus, the communist imagination develops in particular societies in ways and idioms that are peculiar to them through intricate processes of translation and adaptation.

The movement thus creates its spaces and spreads its discourses through various cultural registers, like arts, literature and aesthetics. One important consideration on this issue is the apparent congruence of approach various Marxist parties lately proclaim to have on the issues of aesthetic appreciation and cultural questions evading these as less-significant parts of their social analysis as opposed to debates surrounding issues of political economy like the mode of production or class structure of the society. It is

essential to take a closer look into this apparent congruence of approaches and see whether this carries a deeper divergence that in turn becomes a crucial determinant in their approaches to the matters of political economy and state.

Here, the idea of a cultural front is understood as the organs of a communist party that are constituted in order to intervene into the cultural and aesthetic life of a society whereby transforming the social relations involved in the processes of cultural production. The central concerns lie with the ways in which the party intervened into the existing intellectual discourse on literature and aesthetics, the manners in which it provoked the debate by politicising it, the way it formed an organised platform to deal with activity of cultural production in Malayalam and the details of its cultural policy formulation.

An interesting aspect of the Malayalam scene is the curious relationship between the communist ideologues and the dominant left intelligentsia in the public sphere. Modern Malayalam, since the time of its inception has cherished a vibrant and relatively large literary public sphere as a result of the widespread literacy, library movement, anti-caste community movements, initiatives in the field of journalism and publication, and later the mass mobilisation of the communist party. Even though the homogeneous and exclusive characteristics of this sphere, as pointed out by J. Devika (2007) is as the 'homo-aesthetic circles' is vital to our understanding, I want to suggest that when compared with similar histories of other Indian languages the Malayalam public sphere was rather wide and diverse. Here then, I would like to inquire into the specific nature of the relation between this intellectual/critical public sphere and the communist party organisations or the space occupied by the latter in the former.

On the one hand, there are instances to show there was a complimentary division of labour between these two sets of individuals whereby the communist ideas were upheld and strengthened by the critical intelligentsia that worked outside the party ambit. But, on the other hand, we come across many moments of frenzied quarrel between the two on various issues of cultural intervention and politics that became decisive in the construction of the left policy formulation on the same. This love hate relationship has to be studied in detail if one is to attain a vivid picture of the left cultural intervention in post-independent Kerala.

Another conceptual axis of the work pertains to the criticisms faced by the left owing to their cultural policies and positions from the emergent groups of Dalit scholars and other critics from marginalised locations since the early 1990s and their responses to these. This opens up a crucial aspect of left cultural intervention in Kerala vis-à-vis the questions of caste and gender that needs to be studied on order to figure out the tensions in the communist conceptualisation of the modern Malayali political in these decades. The various ways in which they tried to deal with the complexities involved in this project when faced with categories of caste and gender.

Above all, the myriad mechanisms that involved in the left approaches to culture and cultural productions that involved a thorough translation of various Marxist ideas and idioms need to be analysed while writing the political history of the movement in a vernacular context. On the one hand, there were actual translations into Malayalam of the seminal Marxist works that were available in English and published mainly by Soviet Union. A close reading of these texts may provide an understanding of the processes of adaptation and vernacularisation these concepts underwent. On the other hand, the formulation of a policy towards culture and aesthetics involved an intense translation of Marxism at the conceptual level. Translations of both these kinds are to be analysed here as an overarching discourse which can be further related to similar discourse in other regional contexts where Marxism played a significant role in politico-intellectual history.

Review of Literature

Here I would like to open up the existing debates on the questions I have raised in the previous section. As already mentioned, most of the academic discussions on the communist movement in Kerala have maintained their prime focus on the socio-political and economic dimensions till recently. The exhaustive material on the peculiar communist trajectory the region has witnessed emphasise the socio-economic policies undertaken by the communist ministries, named as the Kerala model of development and its multipronged approach to education, health and other social welfare fields. The matrilineal kinship and its transitions alongside the transformations in law, land relations, familial relations and the larger social structure had been another significant area of scholarship about Kerala.

More recent studies in Kerala history have opened up various analytical paths through the themes of the emergence of the modern Malayali subject, the Malayalam literary and intellectual public spheres and the more intricate aspects of the Malayali cultural life in the early twentieth century. However, a preliminary skimming through the available literature suggests that the relationship between the communist movement(s) and the cultural currents are hardly studied beyond certain superficial juxtapositions and abstract correlations.

This is surprising given the momentous attention the communist movement had paid to the cultural and literary fields of the region, beginning with their initiation of the JSS in 1938, two years before the commencement of party's full-fledged functioning. The profound reflections and verbal and written discourse by the party ideologues like E.M.S Namboodiripad (hereafter EMS) on Marxist philosophy and literature was based on their exhaustive reading of the contemporary Malayalam literature. The nature and scope of the activity of writing literature, its socio-political functions, the job of the writer, the interrelations between various aspects of literature like content and form etc. command scholarly commitment from us who are interested in the political and aesthetic history of the left movement and its impact over the cultural fabric of the region. The progressive literary movement that was actively present for many years in the intellectual public sphere of Malayalam had seminal bearing on the fields of writing as well as criticism. The political and social nature of the activity of writing and the products of that activity were recognised and were made an accepted topic in the debates on literature.

This lengthy introduction to the existing material was necessary in order to reveal the large gaps in the dominant scholarship and hence substantiate the significance of the topic under consideration. Now, we will go on to identify a set of writings that would help us contextualise our study both by opening up the arena in terms of the prevailing debates and by revealing the gulfs that need to be addressed further.

The existing literature related to this work can be divided into three major sections. The first set of writings deal with the theoretical discussions on the relationship between politics and aesthetics. I intend to read the political-philosophical works by some of the important scholars including Georg Lukács, Mikhail Bakhtin, Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, Pierre Macherey, Frederic Jameson, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno

and Jacques Rancière. The significant contributions of Karl Marx, Fredrick Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao in the field of literary criticism and culture would be analysed along with the above mentioned thinkers in order to have a vast range of philosophical insights in the field. Let me admit that I am yet to access and read through this entire body of literature. Here I shall confine the discussions to a few significant philosophers whose approaches to the question of the politics of aesthetics seem enormously interesting to me.

In his well-known work *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams (1977) offers several important insights into the analysis of literature as an aspect of the process of cultural production. His central attempt here is to reconcile the base-superstructure debate in a more nuanced and complex manner by rejecting the thesis that literature and arts belong to the superstructure and have a subordinate and determined relationship vis-à-vis the economic base. His analysis includes a wide range of themes as well as concepts related to both Marxism and literature, from language and ideology to forms, structures of feeling and commitment. He also rethinks the relationship between the social and the apparent individual activity of writing. The concept of 'structures of feeling' allows us to capture the idea of social experience in its articulation as literature or arts while rejecting a number of binaries nursed by orthodox Marxism (132). Williams helps to understand both language and the process of cultural production in their materiality. Thus, not just the content but the form itself has to be considered as emerging out of a particular social relationship and becoming a common property.

Then, any literary work needs to be analysed according to their ability to capture the structures of feeling of the emergent mode. The emergent mode of cultural practice is defined by Williams as against the dominant/hegemonic mode and the residual mode. The emergent mode tries to create new values, meanings, practices and relationships that are constantly opposed to the contemporary dominant mode and its productions (Williams 1977, 122). Through this innovative deployment of the concept of structure of feeling, Williams attempts to reconcile the structure-agency debate within Marxist philosophy, most importantly between E. P. Thompson and Louis Althusser.

Here, on the one hand, he is able to incorporate the affective register in the analysis by bringing in feelings that represent the dynamism of human life, and on the

other, understand them in a structural pattern. One might say that he manages to grasp the subjective without bringing in the free-willing subject or compromising on objectivity. He thus creates an analytical space for passion, humour and spirit without giving them the shape of idealist tropes or romantic indulgences. In Williams, these sensuous categories are pitched against the ideologically and materially 'alienated man' who is passively caught up in both false consciousness and mechanical repetitive labour under capitalism. He thus subtly initiates the possibility of a revolutionary subject markedly different from earlier conceptions.

According to Williams (1977), the figure of the author becomes crucial at the level of production as well as distribution of the literary work. At the level of distribution, issues related to the capitalist market such as the print media, copy right, intellectual property have raised significant new questions. More importantly, however, many issues arise in the process of production itself. Williams borrows the concept of 'collective subject' from Goldman, re-conceptualises it as the trans-individual to avoid the crude approaches of reducing the politics of literature into the class interest of the author (194-195). He focuses on the fact that notions of social formation, individual development as well as cultural creation need to be analysed side by side. It is not just the social relations in which the writer is placed that needs to be taken into account while assessing the determinations over the writing. The social relations that are embodied in the activity of writing i.e. the materiality of the activity itself have to be critically studied.

Hence, for Williams, commitment and alignment of the writer is highly specific and variable in contrast to the more reductive and orthodox versions where the task of the writer is to propagate the popular/proletarian interest as against the hegemonic bourgeois cultural productions. The commitment of the author should be towards the 'social reality' where creative activity can neither be celebrated metaphysically nor could it be confined to pure representation, reflection and ideology. It should be seen as a socio-historical process, where Williams asks us to focus on the importance of the concept of mediation. In contrast to the approach of drawing direct linkages between economy and creative activities where the connection is seen as immediate, here one sees the mediations involved in this complex process. It is a process of active reproduction, which is the social itself, not above or below it.

Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) discussion of the 'carnivalesque' brings in a completely new manner of imagining and analysing the political, especially with regard to the working classes. Carnival, as the festivity of the under-classes, allows them to carve out a day of freedom and laughter in the daily routine of subordination and humiliation. Thus, the carnival signifies an important moment of experiencing the political differently, where existing power relations are turned upside down and the under-classes 'make fun of' the dominant classes including the clergy, nobility and aristocracy (Bakhtin 1994, 200). As Bakhtin describes, the carnival or feast is a 'temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers among men and of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life' (Ibid, 203). Their laughter, according to Bakhtin, destabilised the existing status quo as it overcame fear, 'for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations' (Ibid, 209). This laughter actively imagined a utopian, universal and free community of 'fellow-drinkers and of all men'. Bakhtin asks us to listen to this laughter as the expression of a popular sovereignty where it no longer is confined to the day of the carnival.

Through the notion of the carnivalesque, he proposes a possibility of imagining such spaces in the everyday lives of under-classes where they destabilise and challenge domination and oppression. The carnivalesque is that actual and potential space and time where the day-to-day existence and struggle of the people would contest the 'official' truth and certainty. Through gestures of lampooning, making fun and laughing at, they open up more and more moments of freedom and liberation. As he writes, 'laughter liberates not only from the external censorship, but first of all from the great interior censors' i.e. the 'fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power'. Here we can see how Bakhtin opens up another kind of affective world, through humour and laughter that becomes critical to analysing and understanding the political, without romanticism or 'indulgence'. Not unlike Williams, Bakhtin tries to make his approach more nuanced and insightful by creating a way to capture the subjective, or rather the inter-subjective, without the individual figuration of the human subject. He thus manages to politicise the hitherto mundane, so-called apolitical spheres - of laughter, of fearless bodies of men and women in the carnival, and of the drunkard, as the closest expressions of being free.

Another significant thinker in this regard is Pierre Macherey whose celebrated work, *A Theory of Literary Production* (2006), according to many commentators elaborated the 'Althusserian literary criticism' most vividly. This book strongly argues for a reconsideration of the two major ways used to analyse a literary product hitherto. They are the 'reflection' and 'representation/ expression' theories of literary criticism prevalent in the field of Marxist thought since the time of Plekhanov and Lenin. A literary text has no depth, centre, unity or singular point of origin and is not a product of any authorial genius but of a process of production that involves human labour as in any other production. Hence as Terry Eagleton (2002) points out literary criticism can no longer be a reflection of the work but a 'work *upon* it' (12). Macherey (2006) adopts the method of symptomatic reading and argues that it is the 'unconscious' or 'the hidden underside' of a text that needs to be revealed. One has to look for what is absent from it rather than what it has explicitly portrayed. A text's relation to politics and history is most clearly proclaimed in its symptomatic repressions, evasions, slippages, self-contradictions and silences (12).

Macherey argues throughout the text that if the term structure is to be used at all, it is only to be used in a sense diametrically opposed to the meaning given to it in structuralist discourse. As if to continue the dialogue with Althusser, Macherey writes: 'If there is a structure, it is not in the book, concealed in its depths: the work pertains to it but does not contain it. Thus the fact that the work can be related to a structure does not imply that it is itself unified; structure governs the work in so far as it is diverse, scattered and irregular' (Macherey 2006, 151). Of all the concepts available to literary analysis, that of structure alone would appear to allow us to escape the illusions of manifest or latent order, harmony and coherence; structure alone 'can think irregularity' (Ibid). 'The concealed order of the work is thus less significant than its real determinate disorder (its disarray). The order which it professes is merely an imagined order, projected on to disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, and a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter of the text where incoherence and incompleteness burst forth' (Ibid, 155).

He also analyses the various factors that go into the production of any literary text like subject and object, positive and negative judgment, improvisation, structure and

necessity, autonomy and independence, image and concept interior and exterior, depth and complexity etc. in neatly divided sections and subsections in his book. Ideology is seen as a daily lived experience here and literature carries out a paradoxical affair with regard to ideology. On the one hand literary form gives shape to ideology that is shapeless but on the other hand in doing so it forces it to reveal its discrepancies and ambiguities (Macherey 2006).

In his exemplary inquiry into the relationship between politics and aesthetics, Jacques Rancière (2004b) poses several challenges to the existing ways of understanding this relation. He argues that any investigation into the nature of this relationship has to begin by defining the categories themselves newly. The need is to define what aesthetics is and what it is not and thus to state the conditions of intelligibility of a debate on politics and aesthetics.

According to him, aesthetics refers to a 'specific regime' for identifying artistic productions and reflecting on them as a mode of articulation between 'the ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility and possible ways of thinking about their relationship' (Rancière 2004b, 4). One needs to overcome certain conceptual prejudices and temporal delimitations that have come to be seen as historical and conceptual determinations in thinking of these categories, in order to start afresh. One of the most important such delimiting concept is that of modernity, he argues. Many centuries, many writers, artists and philosophers are jumbled into this concept and woven together to fit into the presupposed framework that makes it easier for the scholar.

Another axis that needs to be rethought about is the relationship between 'practice' and 'discourse' which is central to Marxist thinking. How does a discourse influence the practice and how does a practice reform the discourse? Only by reformulating our answers to this question we can reach to nuanced relationship between political discourse of the communist party and the actual literary practice.

According to Rancière (2004a), politics is the field of the 'distribution of the sensible'. It shows both the common or shared aspects of a community and the exclusive plains of the same. This system has an always-already fabric that determines what presents itself to sense perception. Thus, aesthetics has to be seen as working at the core of politics whereby their network that gets to decide what remains visible and what is

shared based on the time, space and the activity one is associated with. It is a 'delimitation of the visible and the sensible, shared and exclusive, noise and speech and ultimately the place and stakes of politics as a form of experience' (Rancière 2004b, 8) In this manner, artistic practices are ways of doing/making that intervene in the general ways of doing/making and in the relationship between them modes of visibility and sensibility.

He goes onto suggest the radical potential of writing as a particular aesthetic activity. Writing destroys the legitimate ways of circulation of words by 'stealing [them] away to wander aimlessly without knowing who to speak to or who not to speak to'. The relationship between the effects of language and the positions of bodies in shared space is an important concern here and Rancière contends that it is prejudicially related to a regime of politics based on indetermination of identities, delimitations of positions of speech, the deregulation of partitions of space and time (Ibid, 9). He might call this regime of politics democracy where the partition between sayable and visible that is crucial in maintaining the order of the society is disrupted. Another barrier that gets ruptured here is the one between works of pure art and other mundane products of labour.

To reflect on artists' political intervention one needs to define the relationship between aesthetics and politics at the level of the sensible delimitation of what is common to a community, the form of its visibility and of its organisation. Rancière puts that 'art can only lend that to other projects that it shares with them' and substantiates it by referring to factors like bodily positions and movements, functions of speech and the distribution of the visible and the invisible (Ranciere 2004,a 13). The autonomy of these projects rest on the same factors. Hence, any abstract discussion on the autonomy of art or their submission to politics is futile until one recognises this potential of art as having the ability to intervene into the partition of the sensible in a particular regime of doing or making.

The intellectual debates in the larger national context had influenced the various vernacular discourses and in the second set of literature I intend to look at the writings of various scholars who work with the literary and cultural aspects of regional communist movements such as the Hindi, Bengali or Marathi ones. This section also includes writers who conceptualised the left cultural intervention at the national level. Many scholars like

P. C. Joshi, Sumit Sarkar, Sudipta Kaviraj, Partha Chatterjee, K. N. Panikkar, Sudhir Chandra, Sudhi Pradhan, Francesca Orsini, Tithi Bhattacharya, Malini Bhattacharya, Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya, Rajarshi Dasgupta and Ross Mallick have written about the various aspects of the radical socialist-communist movements in different regions. Some of them have given an overview of these movements in terms of their nature and characteristics in the national scenario whereas some others have discussed the specific cultural engagements of these movements in respective contexts.

P. C. Joshi (2014) had argued that India's cultural problem arose out of mental colonialism and was applicable to all colonised countries. The close relation between politics and culture emanated from the great cultural renaissance that in turn was the product of the Great Indian Denial. He defined this great denial as the simultaneous erosion of the traditional value system and the lack of opportunity to grow modern. This situation was indeed produced by the contradiction inherent in the colonial version of Western liberal principles whereby all human beings were to be equal and free yet the colonised practically remained outside the purview of this.

The first generation of western educated class carried this intellectual burden and hence devalued the tradition by aspired for these liberal ideals to be applicable to their lives as well. Nevertheless, the next generation had to fight this contradiction more radically and regain self-respect. P. C. Joshi argues that the idea of a 'patriotic karma yogi' became central to their thinking and this ideal is epitomised in the life and activities of Radha Kumar Mukherjee an important Indian intellectual in the colonial period (Chakravartty 2014). According to Joshi, this generation had only three options in order to intervene into the situation and contribute intellectually; one was to become a poet/writer who inspires masses, the second was to become a historian, and the third option was becoming an economist. In either way the idea was to demystify the colonial domination and instil hope and self-respect among the masses.

When we come to the first generation of communists in the late colonial period, the cultural activity/work becomes more central to their activity. Art or literature was not merely about recreation or entertainment for the people; rather it had deeper political significance for the activists as well as the masses and the academic or political work had cultural significance too. Joshi theorises about a particular relationship between politics

and culture looking at the late colonial era where cultural movements nourished the political movement from which the critical national consciousness arose. Hence the relation between culture and politics is extended to include a relation between culture and the nation, which precipitated the idea of India as a cultural community. It was not some anachronistic or chauvinistic impulse that motivated the communist cultural activists towards the ideal of national independence. Rather it was the understanding of the dialectical relation between the two categories of politics and culture, from which their revolutionary national imagination was produced. He adds that the process of nation building was to be centred upon the two axes of science and culture. He provides the examples of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) and the Parichaya Group in this context where the communist intellectuals gathered together to form the progressive cultural front that would work as the vanguard that is instrumental in raising the consciousness of the masses.

K. N. Panikkar (1997) contends that the left cultural intervention is essentially political and progressive because of the 'transformatory' and 'emancipatory' perspectives it espouses (761). He conceives the relationship between politics and culture getting operationalised in a non-deterministic understanding of the base-superstructure link whereby all the elements in the superstructure are interrelated and integral to each other's working. Hence, culture and politics draw upon each other and sustain and enrich each other.

Panikker further argues that the essential concern of left cultural intervention revolves around creating a mass consciousness that would enable a radical social transformation. It is contingent upon the 'language of real life, material life'. It has to be materialised through active human intervention. He identifies two key Marxist approaches to culture namely instrumentalist and transformatory. He argues that when cultural activities are utilised to fulfil immediate political needs like mass mobilisation as 'a vehicle to communicate radical political messages' it amounts to an instrumentalist approach to culture (Ibid, 761). He considers the early left cultural initiatives like the IPTA and PWA and other such platforms in the 1930s and 40s consciously belonged to this approach. It obscured the mutuality between politics and culture and privileges the former and creates a rather restrictive relationship between the two.

Nevertheless, this was not the sole perspective of the left cultural intervention in history. There had been endeavours that tried to transform the existing system. The long-term efforts towards building a democratic culture and creating a radical national cultural consciousness have been transformatory in a deeper sense. Both these approaches are connected in the larger domain and needs to be complemented in the struggle against the ruling class strategies of cultural exclusion and cultural imposition. The long history of enculturation has blurred the boundaries between mass/ popular culture and ruling class culture and there is a need to develop a national people's culture by integrating cultural practices and artists from both locations. Panikkar reiterates the argument by EMS in the same vein about establishing a united front of cultural activities, especially in the era of communalism and globalisation where the people's culture is assaulted from both sides. So the communist movement should show the political will to enhance the field of culture beyond class contradictions and build cultural confidence and solidarity among masses by reinvigorating the indigenous cultural forms (Panikkar 1997).

The third set of literature includes studies on the political history of the modern Kerala society through its transitions in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These recent analyses help contextualising our study in this historical perspective. Some of them have worked particularly on the communist movement and its multi-faceted history there while some others have dealt with many other dimensions of the Kerala history and politics. Some of the writers who have contributed to this set of readings are Dilip Menon, J. Devika, Udaya Kumar, G. Arunima, B. Rajeevan, Sunil P. Elayidam, K. E. N. Kunjahammad, P. P. Raveendran, Ayyappa Panicker, K. Satchidanandan, and M. N. Vijayan. Some of the works included in this section are published in English while others are in Malayalam and they will be discussed in various contexts throughout the work.

Methodology

The central focus of this study will be the reading and analysis of various archival and other textual materials in manner embedded in the conceptual framework delineated above. Firstly, let me outline the two distinct kinds of texts I would like to analyse as part of this research. As I have already mentioned the ideological debates that existed both within the party organisations and between them and 'outsiders' in the larger framework

of understanding literature forms the theoretical core of the work. Hence, the first group of primary materials would involve the archival documents of these debates. On the one hand the party archives would be used to collect official documents, pamphlets, minutes of discussions, speeches, resolutions etc. related to the approach of the party towards the question of culture. On the other, we would look into the bigger corpus of literary criticism and the debates that happened in the intellectual public sphere between the party ideologues and other contemporary critics and thinkers. A second set of primary materials would consist of the actual literary works that would be chosen on the basis of certain criterion.

I would like to divide this second set of primary texts into three major categories based on the approach the organised left critique had towards them. The classical literary canon that was in existence by the time of these debates was reviewed by the party intellectuals. This was a common practice among the communist cultural organisations and one has to keep in mind here the Soviet examples of re-reading older Russian poets and writers as to assess their relevance and status in the contemporary period. In the Malayalam context, the works of medieval poet-performers like Kunchan Nambiar and early modern poets like Kumaran Asan and Changampuzha Krishna Pilla were revisited thoroughly by these critics and this analysis formed an integral part of their approach to literature and aesthetics.

The second set of literary works would consist of the 'alternative canon', projected by the communist party as 'people's literature' that embody the real spirit of progress and revolution. They were the model texts of the time according to the party critics. There were many poets and prose writers whose works were hailed as the real voice of the people like K. P. G. Namboodiri, Cherukad Govinda Pisharody etc. The theoretical diagnosis that went into the labelling of these texts as 'models' require some close analysis that would in turn reveal the aesthetic proclivities of the party.

There is another set of significant literary texts that became objects of animated critique from not only the party quarters but from various sections of the literary public sphere as they represented an extremely diverse and complex range of socio-political aesthetic orientations. They could not be easily adopted as progressive or praised as models, yet they could not be ignored as their presence in the terrain of aesthetic

sensibilities was so strong and destabilising. There were a great number of writers in Malayalam throughout the post-independence decades who were categorised under various labels at different points and who could not be 'critiqued' in the straitjacketing method of 'progressive vs. reactionary'. Pattathuvila Karunakaran and M. Sukumaran represent such locations in Malayalam literature that cannot be accommodated comfortably into the organised left critique and hence shows its intellectual as well as aesthetic limits.

The selection of the particular writers and texts in each of these distinct categories will be done on the basis of certain criteria. As already mentioned above, some of the texts would be representing the larger trend of its times and would entail all the generic characteristics of the spirit of the moment as identified and projected by the intellectuals whether it be that of realism, socialist realism, humanism, modernism and such broader genres identified by the critics of the times. These generic terms have to be revisited if one is to grasp the dynamics of actual vernacular processes of cultural production. Some other texts would be chosen for their outstanding location among the contemporary literature owing to various reasons including that of their literary peculiarities, readership, critical reception etc. In other words, individual writers and their texts will be analysed in terms of their position vis-à-vis the organised communist intervention in the larger literary public sphere. Any discussion on the diverse nature of the literary/ artistic productions of these times necessitates an inquiry into the different moments of this trajectory. Nevertheless, the general logic behind the selection of these literary texts is related to their representative as well as exemplary status in the trajectory of Malayalam literature and literary criticism depending on the period of their publication and the reception it enjoyed after that. Beyond that, the nature of their continued presence or conspicuous absence in the contemporary scene would also work as a decisive factor here. Moreover, I have extensively translated from the Malayalam primary materials in the work and all translations are mine unless mentioned otherwise.

In brief, following Raymond Williams' (1977) conceptualisation of the three different modes of culture that can be identified in any society at a given time, such as the *dominant*, *residual* and *emergent* modes, one could identify various works of art and literature belonging to each of these types in the case of Malayalam and further delineate

the engagement the communist intellectuals had with them within the larger literary public sphere.

Chapterisation

This introductory chapter is titled 'Introduction: Politics of Aesthetics and Communist Discourse in Malayalam' and it lays out the conceptual framework and theoretical relevance of the questions this study follow. In Chapter 2, titled 'History of Marxist Aesthetics in Malayalam: The Cultural Legacy of the Communist Movement Rethought' an aspect of the intellectual history of the left cultural organisations in Kerala in the post-independence period is disucssed. The focus shall be on the theoretical debates that took place between the activists of these and the larger intellectual public sphere of Kerala around questions of literature, art and aesthetics. Various moments during this period are to be identified and studied in accordance with the thematic transformations that have happened both within and outside of the party organisations.

Starting from a vibrant progressive literary movement and its decisive interventions in the field of creative writing and criticism, the left cultural intervention has gone through a number of phases in the decades that followed independence. The consecutive splits in the organised communist party had given way to a number of dominant as well as marginal left cultural initiatives that require a close analysis. The cultural policies prescribed by these groups at various moments are to be studied whereby we can formulate a complex understanding of the manner in which the politics of aesthetics was envisioned and put into practice by these communist organs. The major archival source would be that of the respective parties and organisations like the Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sanghatana (PuKaSa) where the pamphlets, minutes of discussions, resolutions and texts of important speeches that are archived.

Chapter 3 titled 'Writing the Modern Social in Malayalam: The Communist Narrative of Family, Morality and Sexuality' looks at the literary works during 1950s-1980s that engage with the intimate aspects of the modern social transformation in Kerala. Questions of family, morality and sexual relations become very significant in Kerala given the nature of societal transformation the society underwent in the earlier times. Themes of love, desire and camaraderie will be closely analysed in order to map

the normative as well as moralistic underpinnings of the communist imagination in different phases.

Chapter 4 titled 'Caste and Communist Literature in Malayalam: Narrative of Hegemony and Resistance' tries to delineate the dominant mechanisms used in left literature to mark caste, as a problem to be dealt with as part of the transformatory politics it tried to aesthetically strengthen, and as part of the realist portrayal of the society. There were diverse means by which issues of untouchability, caste-based and hereditary labour, humiliation and exploitation were addressed by left writers of various groups. We shall attempt to map the distinct approaches that left literature of the post independence decades up to the 1980s developed in this regard. For this, we shall take up a few works of fiction from the communist literary corpus in Malayalam belonging to different periods and genres that engage with the category of caste in varied ways. We shall also closely read some of the Dalit writings from same time periods that depict the communist politics in the region and its engagement with caste.

Chapter 5 is titled 'Nature, Modernisation and History in Marxism: Changing Landscape of the Malayalam Left Literature'. Modernity and Marxism shares a tense relationship, especially in the post-colonial societies where the latter's presence was mediated through the colonial knowledge apparatus. There are differing approaches to the issues of modernity, tradition and history within Marxism and it is important to see the nuanced and more local experiences of communist politics to understand more about it. A set of related themes of development, environment and the processes of modernisation also arise here which needs nuanced analysis. Hence, here we will closely analyse engagement the leftist literature has had with the material transformations that the region underwent especially the changes in the production relations, living patterns and approach to nature and natural resources. The concluding chapter is titled 'Conclusion: The Modern Malayali Political Subject and its Conceptual Contours in the Left Imagination' and it summarises the thesis and contextualises it in the contemporary.

Chapter 2

HISTORY OF MARXIST AESTHETICS IN MALAYALAM: THE CULTURAL LEGACY OF THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT RETHOUGHT

> The modern political animal is first a literary animal, caught in the circuit of a literariness that undoes the relationships between the order of words and the order of bodies that determine the place of each (Rancière 1999, 37).

This chapter intends to trace the cultural-aesthetic history of the communist movement in the region in the post-independence period. It is essential to begin by asking what entails the communist discourse of aesthetics in Malayalam that emerged in conversation with other existing debates from the late 1930s. The queries of this chapter mainly pertain to the ways in which the ideologues and writers associated with the left cultural movement negotiated with the existing aesthetic terrain of the language and its literature in order to pave way for a different conception and practice of producing art and literature. We will closely analyse the major mechanisms by which they established certain intellectual and cultural hegemony that in turn enabled the movement to retain its political grip even after the decline of the left ideology in other parts of the country and the world. Unless we intend to trace the deeper aesthetic roots of this hegemony, we will not be able to conceive a more realistic understanding of the contemporary situation with regard to the continuing electoral presence of the left in Kerala and some of the crises of this hegemonic presence.

Here we will closely analyse the theoretical debates on aesthetics and literary criticism that took place in the Malayalam public sphere, through the political and ideological journey of the local communist movement during the post-independence decades. We will try to map the vernacular[4] aesthetic discourse produced by both within and outside of the cultural fronts of the parties. If the political-cultural history of the communist movement in Kerala is to be studied, different aesthetic expressions, initiated

[4] Here the term 'vernacular' is used in order to distinguish the orthodox approach to regional communist movements that consider them simply as variants of the more authentic international (or at best national) communism represented theoretically by the corpus of European Marxist engagements and in practice by the Soviet or Chinese histories. I intend to argue that the process of conceptual translation of Marxist philosophy and the practical evolution of communist politics in any local context needs to be studied for the 'original' socio-historical problematic it confronts and the peculiar political-cultural path it adopts.

and nurtured by the movement, as well as discredited and attacked by them need to be accounted for. The central thread of this inquiry is the evolution of the Marxist idea of dialectics in the field of literature and aesthetics in Malayalam in the different phases of local communism. The methods of 'applying' of dialectics (*vairudhyaatmakata*, literally contradictoriness) onto the field of literature has been the nodal point of contestation in the left aesthetic discourse that evolved in the communist cultural fronts from the late 1930s onwards, according to EMS (Namboodiripad 1974, 13).

As we have discussed in the introductory chapter of the thesis, the history of the left cultural fronts in Kerala is fragmented as a result of the multiple divisions the movement underwent thanks to various events in the national and international communist movements. The first major split in the Indian communist movement took place in 1964 when several of its members left the CPI and formed CPI (M) on the grounds of differing opinions, primarily about the Sino-Soviet rift. Soon after its inception in 1964, the CPI (M) began to organize a new nation-wide mass movement of its own, including a distinct cultural front.

Thus, the consecutive splits in the organized communist parties paved way to a number of mainstream as well as marginal left cultural initiatives that require close scrutiny. The cultural 'policies' prescribed by these groups in changing circumstances are to be studied to formulate a complex understanding of the manner in which the politics of aesthetics was envisioned and put into practice by these communist organs.

This chapter attempts to cover the multi-layered history of the left cultural organisations in Kerala in the post-independence period. The focus shall be on the theoretical debates that took place within the platforms organised 'to discuss literature' between the activists of the communist parties and other intellectuals of the larger public sphere. Various moments during this period are to be identified and studied in accordance with the political-organisational transformations, starting from the 'progressive literary movement' of the 1940s and 50s.[5]

Different phases of the literary and aesthetic interventions of these left cultural fronts mainly in terms of formulating guidelines for writing, organizing literary camps for

[5] For a detailed analysis of the 'progressive cultural movement' in the Hindi-Urdu context during the same period, see Priyamvada Gopal (2005).

budding writers, marking out the contours of 'progressive' and 'regressive' literature and above all, proposing a larger aesthetic framework for the mass mobilization of the respective communist parties will be analyzed in this chapter. To begin with, the material and organisational lives of these cultural fronts, their functions, issues debated and nature and trajectory of these debates through the decades under consideration will be described in some detail. Then, we will look at the direct cultural productions of these organisations and their peculiarities like genres used, themes, their reach and the impact they have had in the regional cultural life. Their patterns of mobilization and overall relationship to the 'parent party' are also to be discussed based on the available documents of their activities and writings of the activists.

In the following section, the relationship between the activists of the cultural fronts and the non-party intellectuals and writers/artists and their engagement in the broader sphere of cultural production and criticism are discussed. We will enter into the prominent theoretical issues dealt by these groups and the specific mechanisms used to 'translate' the Marxist ideas into the vernacular in the third section. The section that follows will contextualise the life of these cultural fronts and their theoretical discourse in the larger activities of the respective communist parties and trace their inter-connected histories throughout these decades. This part attempts to chalk out the ways in which these theoretical debates as well as the works of literature emanated out of this discourse helped the parties in their mobilization and deepening of roots in the region.

Finally, the chapter will look at the peculiar relationship that was constructed between the aesthetic and the political in the vernacular communist history of Kerala from late 1940s to 1980s. It will methodologically extrapolate the hitherto under-recognised threads of the communist intellectual history that aesthetically reconfigured the modern Malayalam social and cultural spaces. Pamphlets and notices published by these organisations, resolutions adopted in their meetings, contemporary or later articles or books written by the active members of these groups will form the bulk of the primary materials for this chapter.

Before entering into the theoretical debates we need to briefly lay out the historical passage of these cultural fronts from the time of their inception to the 1980s, the last phase in the purview of this thesis. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the

Eastern Bloc and the seemingly triumphant capitalist mode of production raised fundamental doubts regarding communist politics and Marxist philosophy across the globe. In the national context, the end of 1980s marked a radical shift in the political-economic scenario in more than one way with the implementation of LPG policies, Mandal Commission and the political upheaval that followed and the demolition of Babri Masjid and strengthening of the Hindutva politics.

In Kerala the decade was a watershed period as the mechanisms of political mobilization in the region changed rather irrevocably. The implementation of Panchayati Raj and the 'People's Planning' campaign of decentralization in the 1990s introduced a different governmental paradigm in the state as many scholars have pointed out.[6] Inflow of the global capital, especially in the service sectors had the most sweeping impact in Kerala as it represented the most educated and skilled cheap labour in the country. The national and international events mentioned above too have had clear socio-political impact in the region.

Now let us briefly describe the eventful and fragmented journey of the communist cultural fronts in Kerala from the late 1930s when it was initiated for the first time to the late 1980s. Though our focus lies in the post-independence decades to the 1980s, it is not possible to fully understand this history without tracing its roots to 1937, when a cultural organisation was formed even before the communist party was officially established. Let us begin by discussing the notion of the cultural front vis-à-vis the history of communist movements in different parts of the world and their influence on the Indian scenario.

2.1. Cultural Front and the Communist Party: Where the Cultural and the Political Meet

The notion of the cultural front, in the Marxist political programme is closely associated with the idea of the class struggle. Cultural front of a communist party is the embodiment of the relation between culture and politics. They carry a peculiar understanding of both these terms namely culture and politics. From Karl Marx and Frederick Engels to Lenin, Antonio Gramsci and Mao, the efforts at bridging the gap between the existing people's culture and the emergent revolutionary culture have a long intellectual trajectory in

[6] See T. M. Thomas Isaac and Richard W. Franke (2002), K. P. Kannan (2000), J. Devika and Binitha V Thampi (2012), Gilbert Sebastian (2008)

Marxist framework. The dilemma presented by the complacency or lack of resistance from the oppressed against the hegemony of the oppressor vexed the leaders and intellectuals of the various communist movements throughout. Why do the toiling classes accept the feudal, bourgeois dominance in the cultural spheres while being exploited by the same tools? Why is it difficult for the communists to break this hegemony and communicate with the masses to whom they have dedicated their lives' work?

While finding answers to some of these questions, all Marxist thinkers have identified building a popular revolutionary cultural language to destroy the hegemony as the most important task in this direction. Gramsci was one of the first thinkers to propose the construction of alternative working class hegemony as opposed to the hegemony of the ruling class (Gramsci 1985). The cultural front of the communist movement is presented as the sole instrument of the revolutionary vanguard in promoting communist ideas and mobilising the masses in the class struggle against the dominant classes. Here we will briefly discuss some of the approaches of the communist movements on the issue of the cultural front as explored in different contexts and times.

In an article he wrote for the Piedmont edition of *Avanti* as early as in 1917, Antonio Gramsci mentions the significance of a cultural association that has 'class aims and limits'.[7] He conceived it as a proletarian institution seeking definite goals which would be initiated by the proletariat in a certain stage in their development in order to deal with the complexity of their lives. In a region where the working class socio-political and economic organisations are strong there needs to be a platform that does not only work in order to immediately solve the current crises. Then, the function of the cultural association is to take the debates into a deeper philosophical level, without immediate concerns, in a 'disinterested way' keeping in mind the long term interests of the proletariat. These affairs are easily put aside as 'spiritual' problems and more sophisticated than the working people could afford to dwell upon. Yet, it is extremely important in Gramsci's perspective to confront each of these complex issues of emotion and spirituality because 'socialism is an integral vision of life' (Gramsci 1985, 21-3).

[7] *Avanti!* was the organ of the Italian Socialist Party established in 1896 and had taken internationalist positions regarding the two World Wars and in turn was banned during the fascist regime of Mussolini.

For him, these associations can also provide a space for the intellectuals in the party as they were considered to be 'dead weight' without specific responsibilities befitting their capabilities. Even though Gramsci is not particularly writing about a cultural front where mass mobilization was the major aim, the manner in which he juxtaposes it with the existing religious and congregational platforms in the Italian society point towards the imagination of an alternative cultural group that could initiate the development of an alternative and revolutionary culture in the society.

We are more familiar with the Soviet experiences of cultural fronts and propagandist initiatives, especially under the cultural commissar-ship of Andre Zhdanov that ideologically divided the world into two huge camps and termed the bloc led by the Soviet Union as 'democratic' as against the 'imperialist' one led by the US. This bipolar idea of democracy and division of the world order had long running implications for the artistic and literary production not only in the Soviet Union but in several parts of the world where communist movements had begun gaining strength. In the following sections we shall look at the Zhdanovist philosophy that influenced the aesthetic discourse in Kerala.

The central conceptual framework of this aesthetics was that of socialist realism, inaugurated by Maxim Gorky and officially recognized in 1934, in the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers as 'truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development' (Quoted in Weir 1992, 135). Weir argues that socialist realism is a 'form of literary romanticism' because it always carry a 'positive hero' and a 'happy ending' both pointing towards the future socialist society (Ibid). The diverse positions regarding art and literature existed in the Soviet intellectual sphere as represented by Leon Trotsky, Nikolai Bukharin, Anatoly Lunacharsky and Mikhail Bakhtin were erased systematically from the public intellectual debates and they were homogenized during the Stalinist era.

Ann Demaitre in one of the earliest critical analyses of the Soviet aesthetic model has identified the mid 1950s as the period of the 'Great Debate on Socialist Realism'. Most of the critical works on the topic have emerged only after the de-Stalinisation turn that occurred in the 1960s in Soviet Union and Demaitre's article was published in 1966. She also points out that this Debate was influential in places where communist rule did

not exist like in Italian, Austrian and French intellectual spheres. There were heated debates in many communist circles around this question and it reflected the earlier debate on 'art for art's sake vs. art for society'.[8] She analyses the aesthetics of the Stalin era as certain 'artistic orthodoxy' that attempted to distinguish between the works of socialist realism and those of 'bourgeois decadence', a position best represented by B. Suchkov (Quoted in Demaitre 1966, 263).

One of the significant Marxist opponents of this position was an intellectual of the French Communist Party, Roger Garaudy and he supported the 'modernist' and avant-garde literature that was debunked by Suchkov as 'mere manifestations of a continuing process of decadence and degeneration' (Ibid, 264). Other scholars have argued that in socialist realist works the content of the creative works had to be based on the lives of the working classes and peasants and works had to be written for them. Yet, the realistic potential of the work had to be limited as to gesture towards a future society and not indulge in the portrayal of the decay that is present in the contemporary society. The notion of socialist realism was the blanket term under which orthodox tendencies were propagated like the valorisation of ideal heroes, glorification of the ascetic as against the sexualized and juxtaposition of the sexual against the productive and denigration of the complex modes of artistic and literary expressions.[9] In the thesis, these ideas will be discussed in detail at different points.

One of the most significant works in this regard is Boris Groys' book *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, in which he discusses on what aesthetic principles the new Russian society was built after the Revolution and how the total aesthetic authority over the soviet society was achieved by the state. Groys compares the Russian Revolution and its 'merciless destruction of the past' to the revolutions in Europe that could not restructure their societies so radically (Groys 1992,

[8] The art for art's sake debate has its roots in the nineteenth century French (figures like Gustav Flaubert, Stéphene Mallarmé and Charles Baudelaire) and later British (Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater) aesthetic movements whose proponents argued that art had an intrinsic value as well as logic to it irrespective of the themes it deal with whether society, religion, morality or politics. In the twentieth century this idea was back to the aesthetic debates around the autonomy and commitment of art as two irreconcilable poles. A series of avant-garde opponents of this idea emphasised on the inevitable relation between the social life and art and later the post-war movements argued against the apparent 'falsity' of the art for art's sake proposition.

[9] For diverse discussions around the Soviet aesthetic experiments and the debate around socialist realism see Michael Kelly (1983), Susan E. Reid (2001), Richard Taylor (1983).

4). He discusses the 'well-educated and experienced elites' of the avant-garde movement in the 1920s and 30s in Russia who formulated socialist realism in the name of the masses and hence 'it had nothing to do with the actual tastes and demands of the masses' (Ibid, 9). He also draws parallels between the Soviet socialist realism and other European avant-garde movements of the same period.

Ultimately, these forms were disintegrated and the official culture was propagated through the leading publications that transformed the public sphere dramatically whereby the processes of aesthetic production was converted into a regime of state censorship over the artists. In such a context, the cultural front was redundant as the possibility of dissent was erased by the state completely and the particular ministries of the central government had taken up the job of mass propaganda through the channels of policy and governance. The means of mobilisation used in the period preceding the revolution were no longer necessary and in fact they became obstacles in the path of efficient governance.

After a brief discussion of the experience of Cultural Revolution in China and Mao's position regarding the issue of cultural fronts we will focus on the various Indian leaders and scholars who have contributed to the idea and the movement. Mao's address at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Arts held in 1942, mentions the two fronts of struggle as 'one by gun and another by pen'. He argued that the military is not enough in winning a revolution and a cultural army is crucial. The Yenan Forum put forth two major thrust areas. First of all at the level of content the lives of the peasants and toiling masses should take the first seat and they are the readership/audience for whom the writer/artist should produce. Secondly, the sphere of the art/literature/culture should aid politics and specifically socialist political ideals. Both these are initially borrowed from the international discourse on art and later moulded by Mao in order to fit the peculiar conditions of the Chinese society. We will discuss it in detail along with the cultural turn in Malayalam in the 1970s and 80s which was in turn was inspired by the writings of Mao and the news of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

The history of the left (including the socialist and communist) cultural fronts in India posits some new problems alongside the issues we encountered in the international history. P. C. Joshi is considered to be the central figure in the formation and development of the left cultural fronts in India in the 1940s by creating a broad spectrum

of cultural activities and conceptual innovations involving the wide range of artists, writers and performers from all over the sub-continent.

As many scholars have argued the 'Joshi line' or the 'United Front' line that effectuated the above mentioned mass cultural mobilizations remain at the foundational space which could explain the hegemonic presence of the left ideology in the intellectual sphere of the country despite the minor presence at the national level. The first section of the chapter looks at the period from the early-1940s to the mid-1960s before the eruption of the Naxalite movement by closely reading the documents of the communist movement including resolutions regarding the cultural front.

An Indian Marxist historian K. N. Panikkar argues that the Indian left cultural intervention have had two major strands, both at times being mutually contradictory and at others complementary. The first strand of instrumentalist intervention perceived the cultural activities as mere instruments of mass mobilisation and a means to the end of getting people to join the political formation of the communist party. He argues that in this method, culture is a 'vehicle to communicate the political message' and it is valued only in terms of its 'immediate political use and mobilisational strategies' (Panikkar 1997, 761).

He goes to add that the formative period of the Indian left cultural activism as was dominated by this approach to culture thereby making it subservient to politics. He believes that this phase in fact distorted the relationship between culture and politics that restricted the experimental thrust of art, theatre and literature of this period and many years to come. But this was not the sole approach of the left cultural platforms had towards this relationship between politics and culture. They also had a transformatory agenda that went beyond the immediate mobilisational needs and dealt with broader problems of form and issues of transforming the cultural consciousness of the masses. He further argues that the success of the left cultural activism depended upon the ability of the cultural front to maintain relative autonomy from the political organisation and venture into new arenas of culture and give them 'new meanings' (Panikkar 1997).

Joshi was among the pioneers of the cultural intervention of the communist movement in the country and his years as the General Secretary of the undivided CPI from 1936 to 1948 saw the broadening of the mass base among the 'students, workers,

and peasants' of the party and the journey from 'insignificant small Left local groups into a centralized all-India political party' (Chakravartty 2014, 5). In the Introduction co-authored by Gargi Chakravartty and Rajarshi Dasgupta for the seminal volume of the life and works of Joshi they point towards the fact that his focus on culture and art among the party activists was 'misconstrued' by other leaders as an attempt to reduce party into a petty bourgeois cultural platform. Yet, his rendezvous with folk culture and knowledge of a variety of artistic and cultural mores from across the globe along with the disarming charm of his personality enabled him to bring together a large number of talented artists and writers under the umbrella of the cultural front.

Let us confine the present discussion on Joshi's contribution to the cultural front of the communist party to his engagement with folk culture and the way he made it possible for the enrichment of both the streams those of folk tradition and progressive movement by the cultural exchange. In his words, the influence the left cultural front has had on the folk culture enriched the content of these songs/poems by popularising the 'modern liberationist ideas' among the folk poets. On the other hand the progressive movement and its artists who hailed mainly from the urban middle classes were given the opportunity to get in touch with the lost folk heritage from which 'they were fast becoming alien' (Chakravartty 2014, 209-10). He adds that the lack of experiences of both groups of the other's lives and ideas make it difficult for the organic growth of a 'syncretised' aesthetics between the folk and the modern. Yet he points towards emerging poets like Nagarjun who have tried to talk of the progressive ideas through the folk idioms as a step in that direction. He also indicates that the strength of the cultural activities of the Chinese communist movement lies in their ability to make use of the 'traditional cultural forms' in order to reach to the peasant masses and educate them of the modern idea of communism and its associated concepts.[10]

Even in times of political turmoil and repression from the state the cultural fronts remained active in many regions like Bombay, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Kerala in the 1940s. Coming to the scenario in Kerala, it is clear that the cultural intervention

[1010] Here the distinction is made between the university educated elite writers and intellectuals and the poets and performers from the rural areas. Joshi emphasised upon the importance of bringing the novel and revolutionary content in the works of the former with the indigenous forms and styles of the latter in order to reach the masses. Apart from this, Joshi also promoted the experimentation with different formal and stylistic combinations between the Classical, Folk, Western and other influences.

and aesthetic ruminations have claimed a considerable space in the agenda of the communist movement even before the formalization of the party structure. EMS' political life as an activist from the early days of the undivided CPI, later, Chief Minister of the state of Kerala, General Secretary of the CPI (M), and party strategist is complemented by his role as a theoretician, ideologue and cultural critic for over six decades. Even his ideological opponents in the sphere of aesthetic and cultural debates agree to the fact that his was the most vocal, informed and consistent presence in the field where the opposing segments came and went with the passing of time. Hence, his works occupy a significant position in my work.

In the later part of the chapter we will discuss the political and intellectual lives of the cultural fronts of different communist parties in a periodic manner and then go on to shortlist a number of important themes of aesthetics and literary criticism that were discussed by these groups and engage with them at the level of their conceptual translation and vernacularisation. Before that a summary of the literary traditions and aesthetic engagements in the period preceding the left cultural intervention would not be amiss.

2.2. Aesthetic Canons in Malayalam: A Glimpse of the Era Preceding JSS

Let us begin by tracing some of the dominant canons of Malayalam literature preceding the progressive movement that began in the late 1930s. The first Malayalam text, *Ramacharitam* is believed to have been written in the fourteenth century. Even though Malayalam did not have a distinct Bhakti Movement in contrast to Tamil or the North-Indian languages during the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, yet there were a significant number of poets like Thunjath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan (c. 1495-1575) and Cherussery Namboodiri (c. 1375 to 1475) wrote extensively on the theme of *bhakti*.[11] In fact they worked on the formation of the modern Malayalam language through their vernacular adaptations and translations of epic *kavyas* like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and

[11] The *Bhakti* movement in the medieval period is a contested area of scholarship with more nuanced translations from the medieval period. For some differing perspectives see Diana Eck and Francoise Mallison, *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India*, Paris: Ecole Francaise D'Extreme-Orient, 1991, Karen Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, Savitri Chandra Shobha, *Medieval India and Hindi Bhakti Poetry: A Social-Cultural Study*. New Delhi: Har Anand Publications, 1996.

Bhagavata. Ezhuthachan is conventionally known as the 'father of the modern Malayalam language'. Kunchan Nambiar unleashed a strong counter cultural initiative to the classical tradition through his Thullal Prasthanam that for the first time brought a performing art out of the sacralised and caste-ridden temple spaces (Satchidanandan 2007).

By the late nineteenth century a sudden and radical upheaval took place in Malayalam literature. 'Pachamalayala Prasthanam' led by the Venmani poets, for instance, asserted that Malayalam in its 'purest' form devoid of the domination of Sanskrit had to be used for literature. This emerged as an opposition to the high Sanskrit influence in Malayalam literature till then. Translations of Kalidasa's works and other pieces written in the *sandesa kavya* style following Kalidasa's *Meghadootam* were highly Sanskrit-dependent both in terms of content and form. Thus, the kind of legitimacy claimed by the advocates of Pachamalayala Prasthanam for Malayalam to be a language that is capable of producing 'high literature' paved way for further experiments and revolutionary turns in the language (Pillai 1958). There were continuous aesthetic and linguistic debates in the scene between the Sanskrit and Malayalam poets and dramatists like the one around *dwitiyaksharaprasam*[12].

O. Chandu Menon published the novel *Indulekha* in 1889 and it became a milestone not only in the Malayalam literary tradition as the first formally perfect novel (*lakshanayuktham*) but also in the society in general with its strong socio-cultural critique of the contemporary Kerala. A recent study of Potheri Kunjambu's novel *Saraswativijayam* (1893) points out education as the central theme in the lower caste literature of the late nineteenth century. (Menon 2006, 110-144).

Moreover, the social reform movements in various communities were strengthened during these decades. Irrespective of the differences and even mutually antithetical positions some of these movements, all of them insisted on education as the primary and most important step towards the upliftment of their respective communities.

[12] *Dwitiyaksharaprasam* was a convention of repeating the second syllable in each line of the entire poem in order to create rhyme which was challenged by a group of critics for its relevance to the quality and depth of the poem in the late nineteenth century. This debate managed to divide the contemporary intellectual circle into two major groups; the group who supported it included Kerala Varma Valiyakoyil Thampuran, Kodungalloor Kunjikkuttan Thampuran and Ulloor S. Parameswara Aiyer, and the opposite camp included A.R. Rajaraja Varma, K.C. Kesava Pillai and Punnasseri Neelaknada Sharma.

Reforms in the intimate spheres regarding family structure, marriage and inheritance etc. were central to these movements (Kunjahammad 2009, 204). These reform movements in the early twentieth century produced directly political and propagandist writings including plays, short stories and poems. For instance, 'the women's question' was one of the most important issues in the Namboodiri community and most of the literature was pertained to this theme. Some of the historic plays like *Adukkalayil ninnu Arangathekk* (From the Kitchen, to the Stage) by V. T. Bhattathiripad, *Aphante Makal* (Paternal Uncle's Daughter) by Muthiringot Bhavathratan Namboodiripad, *Rithumati* (The Pubescent Girl) by Premji and *Marakkudaykkullile Mahanarakam* (The Hell Beneath the Cadjan Umbrella) by M. R. Bhattathiripad were published in the 1930s, all provocatively dealing with the issues of women's education, widow re-marriage, intra-caste marriage as against *sambandham*[13]. These plays were staged all over the region as part of the reform initiatives and helped to develop a new debate about the relation between art, social progress and politics, thus setting a stage for the progressive movement in the decades to follow. Some of the works from this period like the poetry of Kumaran Asan will be discussed later in relevant sections.

2.3. The Historical Trajectory of the Communist Cultural Fronts in Kerala

The left wing of the Congress party went on to form the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in the 1930s and the first generation of Malayali communist leaders came from CSP. They worked within CSP for the first couple of years, until in the late 1930s when the CPI was established in Kerala. The internationalist character of the party and its concerns complicated its position regarding the national movement at many instances. The support extended to the British efforts in the Second World War after Soviet Union joining the Allied forces and the consequent dissociation from the Quit India struggle was the most striking example in this regard. This aspiration to be an international movement while

[13] *Sambandham* a form of marital alliance that existed in Kerala until the mid twentieth century whereby only the eldest son of the Namboodiri household is allowed to marry from his own caste. The younger sons entered into *sambandhams* with either the matrilineal Kshatriyas or the shudra castes like the Nairs or Ambalavasis. This prevented the Namboodiri household from dividing the assets as the children born out of *sambandham* had no substantial claims on their father's (all the younger sons in the Namboodiri families are called *aphans*) family or household. So the eldest son used to marry up to four Namboodiri women as the women could not marry outside the caste.

being situated in a colony forced the Indian communist movement to constantly defend and proclaim their position vis-à-vis the anti-colonial national movement.

In the international scenario, the Great Depression of the inter-war years was manifested as the crises of capitalism. The emergence of fascism in Europe and intensification of the anti-colonial movements in the colonies were also significant developments of the times. The worldwide upheaval against fascism and the initiative by the Soviet writer Maxim Gorky against fascism 'to rescue culture' paved the initial way for the formation of an exclusively writers' group in 1935, in Paris. On the other hand, the strengthening and stabilization of Soviet Union with regard to economy and politics seemed to offer an alternative to these anti-democratic and exploitative structures. Building cultural hegemony seemed crucial to the efforts of socialist transformation. Creative literature and its political significance had been addressed in a serious manner in the Soviet circles as already discussed.

As far as the Indian context is concerned, the belief that art and literature, through its peculiar relations with politics can be used to mould the society into progressive directions was being strengthened. Priyamvada Gopal has pointed out that the unique partnerships between aesthetics and politics were experimented with and its different modalities were thoroughly debated upon throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s (Gopal 2005, 2). The question of representation and its relationship to political consciousness of the masses was framed in a number of distinct ways by different writers and artists. The activist potential of the writer, going beyond the reformist questions of nineteenth century literature, was to be emphasised. Many categories, like caste, gender, religion, class and nation began to complicate the terrain of arts and literature in this period. Two of the eminent Indian writers of that period, Mulk Raj Anand and Sajjad Zaheer participated in the Paris Conference of Writers, in 1935 and later initiated a similar platform for Indian authors namely the All Indian Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA) in 1936.

On April 20, 1937, the Jeeval Sahithya Sangham (JSS, translated as 'Living Literature Movement' by P. Govinda Pillai) was established in a meeting held at Thrissur. The meeting was attended by around one hundred representatives from Travancore, Kochi and Malabar. Major figures of modern Malayalam literature as well as socialist leaders including P. Kesava Dev, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran, and

K. P. G. Namboodiri were part of the delegation from their respective regions. JSS was not exclusively a communist vanguard organisation; yet, the initiative was taken by communist activists. Their effort was to create a new political consensus among the new writers of the period, who were taking interest in the social issues related to caste and class. A thorough reworking of all aspects of literature (and arts) had to be taken up at this instance. Both at the level of content and form the existing aesthetic parameters had to be overcome and new techniques developed.

Kesari A. Balakrishna Pillai, (henceforth Kesari) a prominent contemporary thinker appreciated the JSS effort by terming it as a social force that could help in the 'forward movement' of the society (Pillai 1984, 307). The polemic JSS had inaugurated was primarily between the so-called traditionalist-aestheticians and the 'new generation radicals'. EMS who was the most vocal presence in this polemic has not named any traditionalist in particular though many of the existing journals carried the positions of the traditionalists including Kuttikrishna Marar.

Even though at the prelude, the new generation radicals seemed a homogeneous category against the traditionalists, in the later years, especially after independence this group was divided due to the severe infighting in the organisation. I shall argue in this chapter that this initial homogeneity was only superficial and certain elements embedded in the debate of this period grew into the reason behind the eventual deactivation of the organisation.

The Socialist members could not participate in the third meeting of the JSS in 1939 as a result of a recent divide in the party which led to the formation of the CPI in the region. When Second World War broke out, British Government banned the CPI and arrested most of its activists. This in turn restricted the effective working of the JSS until 1944 when it was renamed and expanded into the Purogamana Sahithya Sanghatana (PSS). The base of the forum was broadened by the inclusion of more writers like G. Sankara Kurup, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and Ponkunnam Varkey and literary critics like Joseph Mundassery and M. P. Paul.

A severe ideological debate began in the association during 1947-1948 between the writers affiliated to the communist party and the rest, following which the latter group of writers dissociated themselves from the PSS. As S. Sreekumari points out, the Thrissur

Conference of PSS in 1947 became the first step towards the sharp and long-lasting split in the progressive literature movement in Kerala. By the time the issues were resolved and the joint platform was resumed, the movement had begun to lose its earlier strength (Sreekumari 2007, 105). In 1947-1948, the Indian communist movement underwent two major phases of militancy both eventually crushed by the state.[14] This has to be read along with the simultaneous ousting of P. C. Joshi from the helm of the party affairs and the systematic overturn of the wide cultural and intellectual network created under the leadership of PC during the previous decade.

Coming to the simultaneous local events in 'progressive literature movement' in Malayalam, in the State Conference of PSS held at Thrissur in 1947, the well-known literary critic Joseph Mundassery and his peers, who were intellectual followers of Kesari, presented a new concern in terms of the formal qualities of progressive literary works. They contended that some writers were trying to 'blow politics into literature' thereby compromising on the formal quality of literature. This accusation was dismissed by the party ideologues as 'cowardice' that restricted these 'arm-chair' intellectuals from taking clear political positions in a period of social unrest.

In 1949 the left leaders of PSS conducted its meeting without the non-party writers, whereupon which the latter formed a new group called Purogamana Sahithya Samiti. All those efforts towards a re-union culminated in the joint conference in 1954 and 1956 which marked the end of this phase in the history of Malayalam progressive literature movement. K. E. N. Kunjahammed argues that the ideological climate produced by the 'Movement for Liberation' (*vimochana samaram*) significantly diminished the secular temperament that was unleashed by this progressive movement (Kunjahammed 2009).[15] Finally, before entering the aesthetic debates let us discuss two internal critiques

[14] In 1948, in a resolution popularly known as Calcutta Thesis, B.T. Ranadive and other leaders decided that the correct path of Indian revolution will be in the Russian model, in which the revolution begins in the city centre and spreads to the peripheries gradually 'penetrating and transforming the rural societies'. This decision was followed by the militant trade union uprisings like large-scale railway strike and it was crushed brutally by the central government within weeks after its inception. Hence, the Russian model stood failed and the party began to look for another model and in a few months, after the middle of the same year, the party decided to follow the Chinese path of revolution that would have its beginning amidst the rural peasants and these villages would engulf the cities from outside. The Telangana rebellion was the aftermath which was again defeated violently and hundreds of people were killed.

[15] Vimochana Samaram was led by upper caste landed interests, church and the anti-Stalinist intelligentsia against the first communist ministry that came into power in 1957. It led to the expulsion of the ministry by

of this diminished phase of left cultural activism in addition to the *vimochana samaram* and counter-revolutionary activities of the anti-communist forces in the state.[16]

A well-known communist writer Cherukad Govinda Pisharody (popularly known as Cherukad) in the Foreword to his novel *Devalokam*, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, raises some concerns regarding this period after 1957. As his novel was being serialised in the *Deshabhimani Weekly* he received large number of letters from the readers and party comrades and friends regarding the novel. In his own words, 'one of the different opinions I heard about *Devalokam* is as follows: I failed as a writer in this novel as I could not portray even a single courageous, upright and model character in *Devalokam* unlike my earlier novels and characters' (Pisharody 2013, 11). He responded to the above accusation by pointing towards the changing times and changing nature of the communist party that is marked by an absence of motivating struggles led by the communist party in contrast to the earlier phases of the movement (Pisharody 2013).

This argument is further connected to the positions of power and comfort at parliament and assemblies, 'various governmental committees and academies and foreign trips' enjoyed by the leadership without leading any actual struggle of workers', women's, peasants', students' and teachers' fronts (Ibid). This degeneration has obviously reflected in and intensified the above mentioned 'lull' in the activities of the cultural front too. He confesses of his inability to write 'inorganically' and develop characters out of proportion as the 'political climate sustained by the communist party' had not been favourable to the growth of powerful proletariat characters any more.

Cherukad offers us an intimate and forceful account of anger and disillusionment with regard to the governmental role of the party since 1957. If Cherukad's immanent criticism of the communist movement in the decades following its rise to the government in 1957 opens up an important aspect of the absence of vigorous cultural activities from

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the central government in 1959. The radical policies in questions of land, education, and health that were put forth by the communist government fuelled the anger these upper class landed elite already had against the communist party.

[16] There are not many scholarly accounts for this period (from 1960 to mid-1970s) and in a compilation of the significant documents of the progressive movement published by the Chintha Publications in 2013, a decade and half is missing in terms of having had serious discussions in the forum. Chintha Publications was established in 1973 as the publishing house of the CPI (M). They have published almost all the works of the party leaders, activists and writers who were associated with the party.

the cultural front, now we will encounter a recent critique of the systematic negligence faced by certain kind of cultural activities during the 1960s owing to its fundamentally different relationship with the masses.

Ameet Parameswaran in his analysis of 'kathaprasangam'[17] and a performer of Kathaprasangam called Sambasivan, argues that in fact those 'missing years' of the 1960s were precisely the years in which Sambasivan and kathaprasangam became the most popular feature of the cultural life of Kerala.

> The reasons for the absence of critical enquiry into kathaprasangam lies in this positing of the form as one that belongs to the 'mass' – prone to over-demonstrations of the erotic, which are sometimes even regarded as obscene, an overt voicing of the divisive politics, adaptation of biographies, even of historical personalities... and working with affective registers that seemed to belong to melodrama (Parameswaran 2017, 118).

He goes on to add that the lack of attention given to Sambasivan and kathaprasangam as such can be understood in terms of the inability of the left cultural sphere to account for what Parameswaran identifies as the 'gestural mode' due to the dominance given to the category of 'action' in constructing the relationship between the aesthetic and the political. He argues that it is important to understand this peculiar phase and the gestural mode it embodies through Sambasivan's performances if one attempts to gauge the scopes and limits of the left cultural imagination in the region.

Even though an independent detailed study of this period and it's conspicuous absence from both the official histories of the cultural left and most of the scholarly endeavours in the field would be very exciting, we have to confine it as only one of the aspects of our work due to the vastness of the period under our consideration and paucity of space. Now let us take a look at the early 1970s which marks the rejuvenated working of the cultural and literary associations organically linked to the communist parties.

The Deshabhimani Study Circle was formed in 1971 that tried to resume some of the earlier debates around progressive arts and literature, although this was a more homogenous CPI (M) platform. The Circle has also ventured into the field of publishing with the support of Chintha Publishing House, Shakthi Publishers and Deshabhimani Book Stall. Another effort has been the collection and compilation of folk literary traditions like songs and performances with the support of the Kerala Folklore Society.

[17] Kathaprasangam is a story-telling performance, where a single performer with some accompanists narrate a story interspersed with a lot of songs and performed in various large gatherings

Though the activities of the cultural fronts had weakened and the scholarly attention paid to the left cultural interventions during 1960s is negligible, towards the end of 1960s an innovative aesthetic was on its way with the ushering in of the modernist style.[18] This also resulted in a revival of the literary and cultural fields drawing energy from the global anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist student, worker and cultural movements. The Naxalite movement of the late 1960s became an inspiration to this revival and the 'progressive criticism', steeped in certain notions of progress and decadence had a difficult relationship with the terrain of modernism.

In the post-emergency period, there was a resurgence of the Naxalite sympathisers and activists who tried to expand their ideological reach among the masses using the 'instrument of culture'. Vedi was formed in the early 1980s by some of the sympathisers of the Naxalite movement. As Sreejith K. (2005) points out, after the brutal setback faced by the Naxalite movement in the 1970s all over the country, some of the remaining groups reorganised themselves into the Central Reorganisation Committee Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (hereafter CRC-CPI-ML). They were intellectually inspired by the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

The Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s provoked the criticism of the 'revisionist' literary initiatives of the progressive movement by the ML faction and their cultural platform, the Vedi. When they resumed the publication of their party organ *Comrade*, they had a broader reach in the society as more individuals, mainly artists, writers and intellectuals joined their discussions and other programs. In 1977, another magazine *Prerana* was started, which later became the organ of Vedi (Ibid). In May 1977, in Olarikkara, Thrissur a camp was held for artists and cultural activists where a *Manifesto of the Radical Cultural Activists* was discussed and passed (Manifesto July 1979, 4-8). In August 1980 in Anthikkad, Thrissur, the State Convention of the Vedi activists was held and the question regarding the relationship between the revolutionary party and the cultural front was discussed (Balan Sept-Oct 1980, 29-30). Numerous theoretical debates

[18] Fiction writers like O.V. Vijayan, M. Mukundan, Kakkanadan, Paul Zachariah, VKN, M.P. Narayana Pillaii and Sethu, Punathil Kunhabdulla, C.V. Sreeraman, Vaisakhan (followed later by talented writers like V.P. Shivakumar, Maythil Radhakrishnan, who was also a fine poet) and poets like M. Govindan, Madhavan Ayyappath, Cheriyan K. Cheriyan, M.N. Paloor, Attoor Ravivarma and Kadammanitta, Ayyappa Paniker, N.N. Kakkad and playwrights like C.J. Thomas, C.N. Sreekantan Nair, Kavalam Narayana Paniker, G. Sankara Pillaii and R. Narendra Prasad are only the more prominent names in the list of the modernist writers who totally transformed the aesthetic in Malayalam.

took place in Prerana following these conventions and most of them tried to critique the mainstream revisionist tendencies of 'the progressive literature' and to forge a revolutionary alternative.

The fellow travellers of the Naxalite movement like M. Sukumaran, U P Jayaraj, and Pattathuvila Karunakaran intervened into this modernist literary field and wrote short stories that later came to be known as political modernist writing. Malayalam poetry too underwent a radical change during this phase with poets like K. G. Sankara Pillai, K. Satchidanandan, Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan and Attoor Ravi Varma who transformed the idioms and affective registers of the existing poetry and generated a renewed sense in which politics was infused into the poetic. Similarly, Malayalam theatre witnessed an era of indigenous experiments by dramatists like Kavalam Narayana Panikker and G. Sankara Pillai. A 'new wave' was introduced in cinema as well by directors like John Abraham, Aravindan, Pavithran and Raveendran.

In the following chapters we shall closely look at some of these works along with the works from the earlier periods of progressive literature in order to understand the engagement they had with changing definitions and conditions of politics. In this chapter, I mainly focus on the intellectual debates in *Prerana* during the years from 1978-1984 and some other material on the workings of the Vedi. Civic Chandran, B. Rajeevan and K. Venu are among the major intellectual contributors of this moment through their articles in *Prerana* as well as other 'little' publications like *Yenan*, *Samasya* and *Prasakthi*.

In 1981, August 14, the Purogamana Kala-Sahithya Sangham (Pu Ka Sa, Progressive Art-Literature Association) was formed in a meeting of the PSS held at Ernakulam. Renowned Malayalam poet Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon chaired the inaugural meeting of Pu Ka Sa, which remains active to date. In 1985, a resolution titled 'Challenges of Our Times and Writers' was passed by Pu Ka Sa and the legacies of JSS (1937), PSS (1944), and Deshabhimani Study Circle (1971) were acknowledged.

The protagonists of the debate in this chapter are these cultural fronts of the different communist parties in Kerala and their ideologues. We will analyze their workings, debates within and among these groups and with the broader intellectual sphere and the relationship these fronts have had with the respective parties.

2.4. Aesthetic Criticism in the Left Cultural Fronts: Translating Marxist Philosophy

Till now in this chapter we were mapping the layered historical matrix of the left cultural movements. The process of politicisation of literature during the early decades of the twentieth century took place in the gradually democratising public sphere of Malayalam relatively freeing itself from the rigidly class-caste ridden cliques of the earlier times. The contesting claims of politics, progress and ethics filled this sphere and it was the time when the 'aesthetic' aspect was specifically consolidated as a realm of culture as K. Satchidanandan contends (Satchidanandan 2007). Here in this section of the chapter we will delineate a number of major concerns of this aesthetic register of the communist discourse and evolved with continuities and breaks in its trajectory.

Communist ideologues borrowed concepts from both the western and traditional aesthetics into the emerging debates on arts and literature and translated them to suit the purpose at hand. To understand this translation, one need to search for the idioms and tropes through which the ideology was taking shape, and the actual, material processes and transformations that it was going through while engaging with the specific cultural matrix. In this section, I aim to throw some light to the material and conceptual life of Marxist philosophy in Kerala; in other words, an episode from the life of the vernacular Marxism.

Dilip Menon has argued that the early phase of the communist activism in India was a process of 'transmission' of Marxist ideology from the European context to the local one rather than a 'translation'. For him, the role of the 'transmitter' was closely in resonance with the 'religious' and 'faithful' readings of the 'authentic' original texts and applying the insights onto one's own society (Menon 2006, 34). This in turn is related to what he terms as the 'organisational move' in contrast to the 'ideological move' carried out by the early leaders from one organisation to another, a history he has explored in another work (Menon 1994). The discipline of the communist organisation is held responsible for this successful shift and capturing of organisations by the leaders; it is presented as dissociated from the ideological paradigm of Marxism.

However, the larger argument of Menon with regard to EMS being a 'Brahmin in the Marxist way' is based on the historiographical operations carried out by EMS that brought the Brahmins back to the centre of the historical narrative of Kerala's past

(Menon 2006). Here, EMS is supposed to have skilfully used the idea of historical materialism to achieve this end. This could be considered as a process of translation as opposed to transmission in Menon's own terminology as the hegemony of the movement could not be attributed to a superficial process of transmission alone.

I intend to argue that most of the points of these debates that follow are separate yet connected facets of the larger question of the dialectics underlying the relationship between aesthetics and politics. The argumentation that follows is divided into three sections and their sub-sections. In the first section we will look at the binary of content-form in literature and the technique of aesthetic production. Second section deals with the question of the figure of the individual writer and his/her relationship to society which branches out into the relationship between writer and reader and writer and the party and ideas of democratisation of the process of aesthetic production and autonomy of the artist. In the third section we will draw the relationship between the cultural front and party and in turn between literature, class struggle and social progress. In all three sections the effort will be to delineate the articulation of the idea of dialectics in the aesthetic field by different thinkers in different phases of the movement.

EMS has identified the history of the communist cultural fronts in Kerala as the search for the dialectical relationship between the society and literature that has various aspects to it (Namboodiripad 1974). This enquiry for the 'correct dialectics' applicable to aesthetics and literature is also an attempt at translating it for the local society as this dialectics is the relationship between the specific forms of consciousnesses i.e. literature and politics. Dialectical method of observation and analysis is the answer provided by the communist thinkers against the liberal individualism and revisionism of detaching literature from its social roots and attaching eternal aesthetic principles to it.

Dialectics here encompass the relationship between literature and politics and in Marxism politics is synonymous with class conflict. Then the dialectical question here is regarding the role literature and arts play in the class struggle or *the unravelling of dialectic at an epochal scale*. The Hegelian notion of totality as the sum of complex self-developing dialectical processes is portrayed by EMS in his argument that tries to build an inseparable relation between literature and class struggle. This chapter will argue that this dialectics in the works of the Malayali communist ideologues was translated in

accordance with the local political economic context and the influence of national and international events on it. We will go through the differences and convergences in the positions adopted by the different cultural organisations including the JSS, PSS, Pu Ka Sa and Vedi. The continuities and divergences in these positions and arguments formed an essential aspect of the intellectual history of the left in the state.

2.4.1. Classifying Life and Defining Literature: Form, Content and Technique of Aesthetic Production

The first question that needs to be explored in this journey is the definition of literature as debated upon by the contesting groups in the left spectrum. While defining the idea of literature, they also classify it, demarcate the scope of the activity of producing literature and set 'yardsticks' of appreciation and criticism in order to sort 'good' literature from the 'bad'. For JSS, the immediate task after its formation in 1938 had been the expansion of the purview of literature and inclusion of new genres, themes, techniques and formats into its domain. This is evident in the initial articles written by both Kesari and EMS in the late 1930s. In this section we will look into the debates around the changing definitions and nature and scope of literature in the left cultural fronts in Malayalam starting from the JSS up to the Vedi.

The dominant voices in the initial 'jeeval sahithya' phase of the progressive movement, EMS and Kesari who was one of the first 'modern public intellectuals' of Kerala primarily attempted to define jeeval sahithyam by reviewing the nature and purpose of literature and aesthetics. It drew heavily from the wider 'art for art's sake vs. art for society' debate that was taking place in other national and international contexts in the literary and art movements. Since the progressives were vehemently opposed by the old-school writers Kesari and EMS attempted to respond to the allegation that the works of *jeeval sahithyam* do not comply with existing aesthetic standards. EMS argued that conservative aestheticians and critics stress on certain eternal aesthetic principles as if they have remained unchanged since the Vedic times. In fact, like every other stream of thought aesthetics is also socially produced and hence historically evolving. EMS writes:

> Just because we reject the notion of art for art's sake, [the critics of the *JSS*] cannot say that we do not subscribe to any ideas of beauty in arts. In fact, when you say you do art

> for art's sake, you are in fact reflecting and encouraging the traditional surroundings in a conservative manner, as no one can carry out artistic production if he distances himself from his circumstances. It is inevitable. So you are asked by the *jeeval* writers to make that [context] progressive (Namboodiripad 1974, 20-1).

Hence, conversing directly with the 'art for art's sake' debate, EMS argued that it is not the function of art to emanate out of society or to belong to it, but it is integral to arts as its material nature for it is produced in a social process. Even the most subjective aspects of writing ought to reflect the social conditions from which it emerges. Kesari, in a related manner argued that *jeeval sahithyam* should be 'so linked to life that it should be useful to life like any natural thing to nature' and 'so beautiful that it should be able to generate immense joy' (*aanandam*)[19] (Pillai 1984, 307). This point becomes central to the breakage of the consensus between the communist and non-communist intellectuals after 1947, which we will discuss later.

The term *jeeval sahithyam* raised certain conceptual issues that at a later stage became more pertinent to the survival of the group itself. EMS was quick to clarify that the word 'jeeval' meaning living or lively does not fully encapsulate the meaning of progressive, the term in English or the Hindi counterpart *pragatisheel* (Namboodiripad 1974, 24). Kesari noticed the discrepancy between the meanings of these two words yet reflected on it differently than EMS. He said that the category of jeeval sahithyam is much broader than the ambit of progressive literature. Kesari held that a work of art could be either progressive or reactionary but still be jeeval sahithyam if it deals with the realities of life. All jeeval sahithyam need not be progressive in the present sense of the term but all progressive writing could be incorporated under jeeval sahithyam (Pillai 1984, 307).

As far as Kesari was concerned the notion of 'living literature' had a particular resonance with the newness Malayalam literature had achieved in the contemporary times because until then most of the writers dealt only with 'dead and sterile' themes with mythical orientation. If the historical and mythical questions involved in a particular work was not related to the contemporary crises it cannot be *jeeval sahithyam.* When we take Kesari's extensive engagement with the modern European and American literature,

[19] Here, joy does not mean in the sense as opposed to pain or melancholy. Rather, it is the response to any great work of art or literature that creates deep impression within the receiver as a result of its aesthetic potential. It could be terribly dark and sorrowful as well as colourful and gay.

including those of the modernist variety it is not surprising that he could make a distinction between the progressive features of a work that explicitly narrates the story of progress and goodness, and those narratives of social and moral decay, degeneration and misery.

However, EMS was clear as to the nature of progressive literature that had to spread hope of a better future and spirit of class struggle to the readership. Even though at this stage it did not become a moot point, this fundamental difference in terms of evaluating literature on the basis of its 'message' and explicit moral orientation became a central issue in the later life of the progressive movement and beyond. This defining issue becomes the strongest point of divergence at a later point, where the moral valency of the content of the work of art was brought in as a concomitant phenomenon of the role that work plays in the social progress of the society by straightforwardly equating the moral with the social where the moral was constituted in a narrow monochromatic fashion. It is evident from this discussion about the early phase of consensus between the communist and liberal thinkers that the seeds of the dissolution of this consensus were already present in itself.

This partly shares the spirit with the criticism raised by EMS in 1954 about the most celebrated plays of the early progressive period *Paattabaakki* (The Rent Arrears) and *Ningalenne Communistakki* (You Made Me Communist) where he criticized the playwrights for detaching the characters of the communist leaders from the concreteness of their societies and portraying them as the typical, generic figures that talk in 'boring' standardised Malayalam using universal jargons (Namboodiripad 1974, 161-164). This also implies a different relationship between the form and the content of art and from here we will take the discussion to the question of form and content. Kesari had also urged for the creation of 'unique' individual and collective characters that are situated in the social setting. It is difficult to imagine them without falling into reproducing 'types' that are representational in nature (Pillai 1984).

- **The Purposive Literature and its Popular Forms**

During the JSS movement the notion of covering 'bitter propaganda' with a coat of 'sugary art' figured in the schemas of Kesari and EMS hence the 'sweetest' art was that which could spread the propaganda amongst most number of people (Pillai 1984, 309). If the efficiency of jeeval sahithyam was directly proportional to the level of popularity it gained, then the forms of aesthetic production had to be rethought in relation to the 'new content' waiting to be written or given shape. New society required new content as the characters and questions hitherto considered aesthetically non-existent had begun to mark their presence from early twentieth century onwards and this 'new content needed new forms'.

The significance of theatre was realized by the early social reformers and it was taken up by the progressive artists and they further experimented with it. Both Kesari and EMS believed that prose-theatre (as opposed to musical-theatre or *sangeetha natakam* that was prevalent then) would be the most suitable and effective form of jeeval sahithyam as large number of people could be addressed at a single time and space. The emergence of kathaprasangam as the most popular art form in the 1960s and 70s can be read along with this thrust given to the pedagogic potential of performances. As Kesari stated the scope of the ideological transformation that theatre could bring about is unmatched in the aesthetic register as it affects the largest number of people at the broadest level and at a single time (Pillai 1984, 315). The collective aspect of the reception of cultural works was further pushed to the collectivization at the level of production itself, an argument which will be elaborated later.

Further, prose was preferred over poetry and poetry in the traditional meters and styles were thoroughly discouraged in *jeeval sahithyam* and use of Dravidian meters, folk tunes/indigenous ballad rhymes was to be promoted as it would enable the collective enactment of these songs. This was applicable to the national communist cultural movement represented by the AIPWA and Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). As already discussed, the cultural exchange between the rural folk artists and western educated urban artists was central to the activism of this period led by P. C. Joshi. In Malayalam, there were attempts to identify the peculiarities of *jeeval sahithyam* as different from the traditional literature on the on hand and the modern Romantic literature

on the other. It was considered to be the miniature of a bright future that in the present can only be accessed in the realm of aesthetics.

The debates in the PSS in the post-independence period reflect a changed sensibility regarding the nature of literature. Though the non-party intellectuals, who were intellectually indebted to Kesari, agreed to the anti-traditionalist stance about expanding the horizons for literary writing, they disagreed with the communist party ideologues about the purpose (*uddesham*) of literature. They accused EMS and others for 'overly politicising' literature for the use of direct mass mobilisation and thereby neglecting the formalistic aspects. This position held mainly by Joseph Mundassery was called the *Roopabhadrata Vaadam* (approximately translated as compact formalism) (Prasad 2014). Here the debate was about the conflict between the content and form of literature and compromising one for the other.

The autonomous position attached to the form (*roopam*) of literature in Mundassery's theorisation was attacked by EMS by drawing attention to the indissoluble *dialectical bond* that exists between the content and form of literature. EMS asserted that Roopabhadratha Vadam was only a reformulation of the old slogan 'art for art's sake' whereby these scholars tried to interpret progress in vague and "harmless" terms by dissociating the evolution of the literary form from the progressive expansion of the terrain of the content (Namboodiripad 1984, 47-48). This position was an advanced take on the larger debate in Marxist philosophy that was gained momentum in the post-war period and especially in the period after Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation initiatives. Walter Benjamin had a similar concept with regard to materialising literary production.[20]

As we come to the later phase, in an article titled "Dialectics in Literature" (*Sahithyathile Vairudhyathmakata*) published in *Prerana*, Nanda Kumar argues that the relationship between form and content is dialectical in its essence and aim. Literature

[20] Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Author as Producer", relates the loss of aura that occurs to the works of art that became easily 'literarized' and hence reproducible in the mechanical age of re-production. For Benjamin, a work's literary technique is understood by analyzing its position in 'the literary relations of production of a period'. The political tendency of a work needs to be studied in relation to its literary tendency which in turn needs to be judged according to the 'progress or regression of [the] literary technique'. He brings in the concept of literary technique in order to undo the dilemma presented by the form/content debate in literary criticism since "it [the form-content binary] is an academic method of trying to fit literary relations undialectically into compartments" (Benjamin 1970).

requires an audience, whose needs the writer intends to represent, just like an arrow requires a target. The content and themes are dialectically being transformed by the forces of history and unless the writer finds out these 'laws of dialectics' that determine this transformation, he could not carry out the conscious activity of literary production, Kumar argues. Only when the writer grasps the dialectical relationship between the elements in the chosen theme, he would be able to bring out the concrete contradictions in the literary text (Kumar Feb 15-28 1981, 18-20).

Kumar goes onto add that in literary criticism, the Marxist approach is to go beyond the form vs. content binary and find out the dialectical process embedded in the activity of producing literature. The dialectical categories that are active in this process need to be separately analysed for their independent and collective functions in it (Kumar Feb 15-28 1981). This brings back to us the claim of EMS during the tussle in the PSS in 1947-8, that Roopabhadratha Vadam represents this fake dichotomy between form and content whereas the Marxist approach is able to see the dialectical relationship between the two, changing through the epochs.

EMS has argued later that in the earlier debate of the late 40s the arguments of communist thinkers including himself about the relation between the political-economic history of the working class and the creative activities of writers seemed direct and mechanical whereas the non-communist writers disproportionately emphasised upon aesthetic beauty as something that lies above and independent from the political-economic struggles of the working class. In 1972, he reviews the earlier position and argues for a more nuanced and complex analysis of the class struggle and its actions and counter-actions vis-à-vis literature (Namboodiripad 1974, 299-321).

As far as the field of criticism was concerned, the job of the critic is to unravel the reality of class struggle, as different from the apparent subjective reasons and pleasures of the writer, as the driving force behind every activity of writing. It could happen when the critic would start seeing the writer not as a conscious agent of any class or section, but understood the result of the dialectical activity between the social forces around the writer. The apparent subjective pleasure in writing itself was the product of the ideological world, produced as a result of this dialectic between the writer's subjective position and the objective world he attempts to capture (Ibid).

The later efforts of EMS seemed to suggest that the activity of writing was somehow bound to have an ambiguous position in Marxism as a productive activity. On the one hand, it was done by a small section of people, emerging at a particular juncture in human history, when society was producing surplus to let this section indulge in these activities (Namboodiripad 1974, 310-11). But on the other hand in order to demystify creativity and materialise its true nature, one had to connect other kinds of labour with writing. The problem lay in the particular nature of the activity of writing itself as it involved materiality on the one hand and ideation on the other.

The category of dialectics is of utmost importance in both these conceptualisations whether by EMS or Nanda Kumar. The Malayalam term for dialectics is *vairudhyathmakata* which literally means contradictoriness. This gulf in the meanings of the original word and its translation encompasses a conflict that need to be unravelled and analysed in order to see the conceptual operations at work in the vernacular theorisations. I argue in the final section of this chapter that this peculiar term for dialectics and the conceptual translation of dialectics in relation to literature to Malayalam are reciprocal in effect. The subtle changes that have happened to the meaning assigned to 'dialectics' through the four decades under consideration may reveal the transforming relationship between politics and aesthetics in the regional context.

- **The Scope of Literature: Writing Art and Science Progressively**

Another significant aspect of literary criticism is the approach towards the 'classification' and 'valuation' of literature. Kesari undertook an effort at classification of various styles of writing or 'movements' in Malayalam literature. Literary movements, according to Kesari denote the revolutionary transformations in the field of literature. Moreover, he stresses on the idea that a piece of art or literature could be said to have inaugurated a 'literary movement' only when it has posed a challenge to the aesthetic temperaments that already exist in a society.[21]

[21] The term *prasthanam* is used by Kesari here to denote various combinations of styles, techniques and forms. But it is usually used to denote a movement as in the communist movement of progressive movement. Kesari argued that the changes that are accompanied by the changes in the *bhaavam* (expression) constitute the major movements and the changes in other factors like 'subject and materials', 'medium', 'technique' and 'form' constitute sub-movements. From the 'god-Praising' movement of the

On a different note, EMS argued that notion of literature cannot be confined to that of creative works but it should include every form of writing ranging from scientific to journalistic for a progressive literature movement to be effective and transformatory. EMS reasoned that literature has been defined by various people with different scopes. But when it came to progressive literature, it was not to be understood in the narrow sense of creative literature. If only the artistic creations were to be considered as literature, then many of the literary, grammatical and linguistic studies would not come under the rubric of literature and if these academic writings can be considered to be part of literature then scholarly writings on other issues like politics should also be included in the corpus of literature. According to EMS, 'there is no greater artistic quality to language and literary sciences than natural sciences or other social sciences' (Namboodiripad 1974, 27-9). Any writing that aimed at the progressive mobility of a society which evidently included the sciences should be included within the scope of progressive literature.[22]

In *Prerana* (Inspiration)[23] that was started in 1977 and later became the organ of the Vedi, a number of articles can be found that stress on the 'law-like' working of the

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Bhakti period and 'god-rejecting' movement of the secularising events like that of Kunchan Nambiar to the modern styles and techniques of writing, including the Romantic poetry (*Manam-nokki*/Inward-looking) and historical novel (*Pinnil-nokki*/Backward-looking) were categorized in Malayalam terms (Pillai 1984, 394).

[22] There was indeed a practical reason also behind this effort to converge all sorts of writing into literature. Since the office-bearers of the PSS were elected democratically by all the members of the organisation, the communist party needed more of its members to be considered as 'writers'. This became a serious issue in the PSS Conference that was held in 1949 at Kollam. In the Conference the communists argued against a resolution tabled by Thakazhi and Dev that limited the membership of the PSS to creative writers. The resolution was passed by the majority of a single vote. But beyond this immediate practical requirement, EMS' position reflects the emphasis given by the communist movement in documentation as in journalism and the dialectical conception of knowledge production that cannot be neatly divided into different disciplines.

[23] *Prerana* along with other 'little magazines' like *Samasya*, *Yenan* and *Prasakti* became an active platform for the aesthetic discussions and creative expressions of the sympathisers of the Naxalite movement and it claimed to offer an intellectual alternative to the 'progressive' aesthetics. In its May Day Special Issue of 1979, the editorial harshly criticized the complacency of the so called 'progressive literature' towards the 'vulture skies' that were coming down on the Indian villages. The topics surfaced in Prerana ranged from introducing international and national writers to the Malayalam readership with translations and commentaries to the documentation of everyday struggles of the Dalit, tribal communities in the region. There were articles on 'the women's question', the working of the Dalit panthers in Maharashtra, field reports on the deplorable conditions in the mental asylums, reminiscences about martyrs of different revolutions and fact-finding reports of various state atrocities and human right violations. Here, we shall focus solely on articles with theoretical debates on issues of aesthetics, appreciations of contemporary poems, plays, novels, short stories and films in Malayalam. In 1981 as part of the government crackdown

human-nature relationship based on theories of energy transfer and movement, biological and medical bases of human existence out of which aesthetic sense emerge as a reflection of 'nature' as mediated by human knowledge/brain about the nature. In one of the articles titled "Aesthetic Philosophy: A Foreword" *Science in History* by J.D Bernal was heavily cited along with the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin (Vivekan Jan-Feb 1979, 7-16). The 'scientific' definition of life and aesthetics is not an isolated phenomenon in this phase of the cultural movement.

This view is extended in another article written by Nanda Kumar in *Prerana* by arguing that literature is not the making of a scientific theory but it is the journey towards scientific 'invention' as the former begins from concrete material facts and reach an abstract conceptualisation about the facts whereas the latter starts from certain conceptualisation of the world and its working and reach the concrete aspect of the journey through it. Hence, the process of writing literature/producing art involves certain knowledge of the world, its laws, its objective realities, which are to be used in order to make a final product that are concrete narratives of concrete human beings and their specific lives (Kumar Feb 15-28 1981, 18-20).

One of the new classifications that emerge in this period is that of 'revisionist' literature. The pejorative usage of Revisionism represents a long and difficult strain in the history of Marxist ideas since the days of Marx himself. Revisionism embodies the spirit of betraying the fundamental ideas of Marxism that results in the weakening or corruption of the praxis. It is used against an individual or group of individuals by those who used to belong to the same organisation or party and split ways on the basis of certain ideological differences.[24] As far as writing is concerned, the Vedi activists considered the earlier progressive movement to have taken a turn towards revisionism and institutionalization.

The critiques, Vedi and similar platforms of left activism of the post-Emergency period, raised against the official left groups such as the Deshabhimani Study Circle and

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on the 'extremists' *Prerana* was threatened to be banned and the press to be confiscated (Sreejith 2005, 5335). Most of the issues are not properly archived and available now and the sixteen issues I have accessed here came out during June 1978 to April 1984.

[24] For instance the CPI (M) used to describe the positions of the CPI as revisionist meaning to be less radical or more compromising to the bourgeois parties like Congress and likewise the CPI (ML) used the same term against the CPI (M).

Pu Ka Sa were based on different interpretations of Marxist categories like revisionism and most of these debates emerge from the search for the 'authentic', 'scriptural' meaning of principles in the 'original texts'. Apart from the polemics between individuals from both sides, the larger critique was about a 'better' Marxist alternative. This was the first time the communists were having a debate among themselves as the earlier debates were mostly with either the traditionalist or liberal intellectuals as we already saw.

Moreover, the politics of a work of literature as discussed in the PSS was primarily in terms of the politics embedded in the content of the work such as the class division of society. Literature of 'hunger and exploitation' (*vishappinteyum chooshanathinteyum sahithyam*) as mockingly termed by Kesava Dev in 1948, written by the communist writers needed to go beyond these themes and enter into the process of internal transformation of humanity at the level of the individual. The form on the other hand remained 'non-political' for both these fighting groups whereby they both agreed that progressive literature could be written in both 'strong/secure' (*bhadram*) and 'loose/harsh' (*parusham*) forms. The politics of the work depended directly on the 'intended' politics of the content and the partisanship of the writer.

Even though, from the late 1930s onwards communists tried to bring in the 'dialectical approach' to literature against the binary created by the liberals as discussed above, the notion of this relationship between literature and politics did not change considerably in the theoretical discussions; whereas the field of literary production changed radically from realist and social-realist shades of progressive literature to modernist and political modernist ones in this period. As far as the theoretical debates in the Vedi are concerned, a few individual articles in *Prerana* in the early 1980s attempted to bring out this difficulty of reducing the politics of literature to its content and the politics of the writer. Yet, these efforts did not gain acceptance in the political circles of the CPI (ML).

I want to argue that one of the reasons for this stagnation in the theoretical debates has to do with the narrow definition of dialectics as contradictoriness (*vairudhyathmakatha*) that could not go beyond breaking the abstract binary of liberal categories. As EMS later acknowledged the debate that immediately followed independence was caught up in personal mud-slinging to some extent from both sides and

the much relevant inquiry into the nature of this dialectics in the local literary and social relations could not take place. The question for EMS in 1974, while recollecting the earlier debates was the complex relationship literature has with social progress through its intervention in politics/class conflict beyond the 'intentionality' of the writer or the lack of it. This would be the resumption of that 'search for dialectics' suited for the indigenous context.

Now from this we go to one of the specific methodological issue the left cultural movement encountered throughout these years from the days of the JSS to that of the Vedi. It is clear that in the radical cultural platforms of the 1970s and 80s the definition of literature was not a central question as it was in the earlier phases. Nevertheless, the nature of model literature and literature for progress and liberation was an issue they had to constantly encounter, especially with the rise of modernist literature. In the following section we will trace the continuities and breaks in the left cultural movement regarding the question of social progress and literature's stake in it.

- **Social Progress and Literature: Technique of Socialist Realism**

The question of communist culture as progressive culture and its differentiation from the bourgeois culture has historically been a complex one. This becomes especially true for a society that is so peculiarly configured at that juncture with the traditional systems of marriage and family under attack by the reform movement within various communities. Hence the manner in which the progressive writers approached the questions of family, love, sexuality and marriage became an important point of concern for the communist critics.

M. S. Devadas was the most articulate critic of the individual writers who wrote controversial pieces in this regard. Apart from the existing distinction between the traditional/orthodox literature and the progressive one, Devadas formulated another distinction within the literature that was being published in the progressive movement. He argued that some of the stories and novels, written by the so-called progressives like Thakazhi, Dev, Varkey and Basheer were in fact degraded literature (*adhama sahithyam*).

In an article he wrote in 1949 in the pseudonym M. B. Menon, M. S. Devadas criticized many works by these writers as encouraging the social and cultural decadence

that existed in the society. Devadas contended that realism did not amount to replicating the filthy reality around explicitly. For Devadas, a writer needed to understand the progressive movement of history in all spheres of human existence.

> Engels in his well-known classic *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* had prophesized long ago that the history of human community, the man-woman relationship progresses towards more and more monogamous and better chastity… A progressive story writer/poet who values and develops all the values that are based on the high ideals of human life does not worship sexual anarchy and prostitution (Devadas 1991, 27-8).

The question of civilization and morality came to dominate the cultural sphere of the communist movement. The self-censorship and internal-disciplining that was required of the communist intellectual as well as activist seemed to have attained a certain ascetic plane. On the one hand, they tried to envision the bourgeois romantic love, monogamous conjugality and patrilineal nuclear family as the ideals of progressive culture as opposed to the signs of decadence including adultery, prostitution and 'anti-natural sex' that seemed to be the remnants of the collapsing feudal system. The transition from any stage to the next was painful and involved certain decadence and degradation, they assumed. The communist aestheticians like Devadas had strong belief in the one-dimensional and inevitably progressive trajectory of history that was founded upon their understanding of the modern history as a Great Dialectic. This was presented in the clearest fashion by EMS while explaining his notion about the politics of aesthetics.

However, M. P. Paul came up against this narrow understanding of literature that can only describe the morally sound aspects of social life. Paul was against the instrumental understanding of literature, whereby literature is seen as the means to bring about something beyond it. Furthering Kesari's idea of art being *aanandadayakam*, Paul argued that the fundamental quality of art was its ability to deliver joy beyond which it had no other purpose or function. Paul here tries to bring the Indian Rasa theory and Western aesthetic philosophies together and argue for the non-instrumental connection with art and social progress (Paul 1953).

When the notion of purpose was conceived in a narrow sense, then art, Paul asserted, did not have any purpose at all. But the flourishing of art had been essential for the progress of humanity and human culture. The writer had to process his aesthetics

through his deeper thoughts and values, humanity, experiences from life or books and ideals of life in order to witness emergence of a larger set of philosophies that were embodied in the works of art (Ibid). Hence, it seemed to Paul that artistic life was an integral part of human existence.[25]

The two questions about the morality of the artist and that of the art were to be kept completely apart and could not be collapsed into one, according to Paul. On a lighter note, he added that it might be correct to say that Ravindranath Tagore had beard but one could not have said that this beard was what made him a great poet. Likewise, strong moral principles could not make anyone a great writer or artist. Morality to a writer was as inconsequential as the beard to Tagore's poetry. Paul went on to argue that a writer does not create aesthetic objects to substantiate something external or beyond it which would amount to being a slave to that external factor. Then according to Paul, art had to be free if it had to be art and it seems that there could not be any direct relationship between art and morality and any effort to make anyone the shadow of the other ought to be useless and illogical. Art could express any quality irrespective of it being good or bad in the same way a knife is used for all sorts of purposes not just to cut the strings of evil (Quoted in Natarajan 2004, 35).

An imagination of the future was the responsibility of the progressive writer and a communist society was the space in which socialist realist literature had to be placed. In the 1930s there was an emergence of socialist realist literature. In 1934, the First Congress of the Soviet Writers established Socialist realism as the fundamental literary and artistic principle of Soviet Union. According to Gorky, it was the style directly connected to the proletariat and has the power to portray their central role in the unfolding of history. British Chartist poetry, German Proletarian poetry and French literature of the Paris Commune are the initial instances of the unleashing of this method in literature (Zhdanov 1934).

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai who enjoyed unparalleled popularity among the common readers as a poet and his poems embodied the spirit of the 'melancholic present and dark future' according to EMS and his poems belonged to that short phase of

[25] This synthesis can be attributed to the influence of both Kuttikrishna Marar and Kesari Balakrishna Pilla on Paul's critical thinking.

capitalist decadence before the moment of the upsurge of the working people into the scene. They were fighting against the unjust and exploitative system for which they need sheer hope and optimism. Thus, EMS argued that a poet like Changampuzha would no longer be read the way he had been till then. Then was the age of socialist realism, not of realism of the 'defeatist movement' (Namboodiripad 1974, 89-107). This 'incorrect' assessment of Changampuzha poetry which transcended many of the 'progressive poets' in popularity through time emanated out of a direct mechanical correlation EMS made between political economy and poetry.

Socialist realism is the most favoured technique in the Vedi period as well. It is different from other forms of realism based on individual rebellion, anarchist paths and fatalistic and nihilistic approaches to life. It is intrinsically connected to the socialistic organisation of life. It involves a 'social project' aimed at the thorough transformation of the society. In socialist realism, *model characters in model conditions* had to be recreated and the general and the particular needs to be connected in the right manner and hence the artistic truth discovered. Whereas the other kinds of realisms like critical realism focuses only on the negative aspects of the society and ignore the creative/constructive ones, the socialist realism portrays the historical responsibility of the constructive forces to fight with the reactionary ones and gain strength to build a better society. In both these periods, though the oppositional elements change – from the realist writers of the progressive period to the modernists of the Vedi period – the gist of their critiques of this 'decadent' literature remains the same.

For instance, C. R. Parameswaran criticises the 'borrowed pimp-like' sensibility of the so called humanist, liberal intellectual of Kerala that ignores the reality of the millions of poor in India and indulges in the riches of the feudal past. O. V. Vijayan's celebrated short story *Arimbara* (Wart) written in the context of National Emergency is criticised by Parameswaran for their 'feudal romanticism' that is used only to hide the real problems of class. The trajectory of modern Malayalam poetry is marked by the author as the development of 'writing skills' and its ability to cover up the idealistic propaganda of the ruling classes on the one hand and the superficial, revisionist and mechanical tryst with the working classes that ended up in 'the luring market of film music'. The latter part of the accusation points towards the generation of progressive

poets hailed by the communist party in the 1950s and 60s including Vayalar Rama Varma, P. Bhaskaran and O.N.V. Kurup who later worked for the film industry whereas the former part is aimed at all the classical, romantic and reformist poets who were not part of the progressive movement.

He argues that Malayalam poetry had been more conservative and rooted in feudal sensibilities than prose from the time of the first novel and even in the modernist phase, poets were approaching modernity from an academic curiosity than as lived experience. Their merely discursive sense of modernity and philosophical myopia made their poetry 'lifeless lethargic thoughts' (Parameswaran Jan 1981, 11). A related aspect of this conceptualisation is discussed below whereby Parameswaran depicts the modernist writers as effeminate cowards who exhibit 'madhyavargakkarante napumsakatha' (the middle class third-genderedness) for which the exception were K.G. Sankara Pillai's poems. He identifies a concern similar to the early communist critics that the committed-revolutionary writers are not being able to produce as 'formally strong' poems as the modernists who indulge in existential crises, anachronism and feudal-romanticism (Ibid, 18). Now let us come to a related issue in the left aesthetic critiques in Malayalam in the following section.

2.4.2. The Figure of the Writer vis-à-vis the Reader, the Party and Society

The modern figure of the writer emerged along with the category of literature in the modern sense of the term, which French philosopher Jacques Rancière uses as the writing that is inscribed on to a field that is everyone's. In the 'pre-modern' world most of the Indian texts did not carry the name of the individual author; rather the author had to be identified by analyzing a large number of texts from a period and demarcating the styles and techniques that seemed common and could be traced back to a single writer as in the case of Valmiki or Kalidasa.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, the individuation process had begun that carried the marks of all social stratification and hierarchies like gender, caste and class and writing was one of the most visible fields of this change taking place. In fact, writing was one of the most important mechanisms through which a person could gain the individual status and mark his/her own existence with regard to the social. The early

modern literature and the literature produced out of the social reform movements carried the marks of this transition that produced individuals and re-classified them various social groups. Novels like *Indulekha* or poems like *Nalini* would not have appeared in the absence of an intellectual matrix of modernisation and community reform initiatives and the emergence of the 'engendered individual'.[26]

Nevertheless, the progressive literature movement had to question this individuated figure of the writer from the perspective of the 'social' process of production and reproduction. The 'genius' of the individual author had to be 'demystified' if one had to socialize and politicize literature for the people. About the process of demystification of the author-figure, Kesari and EMS shared a subtly differentiated position. Kesari emphasised on the need to dissociate the figure of the author from the 'aura' of admiration by the reader who stood at a distance in awe. The writer needed to engage with the everyday lives of people both at the level of sharing similar material conditions and at the level of drawing his problems from them.

> Once the writers begin to communicate constantly with the common people and serve the society, the people would be able to see them as ordinary persons having both good and bad qualities. This will transform the awe and admiration into love and camaraderie… For the *jeeval sahithyam*, the author is neither somebody distant from the society, nor deserving admiration, nor half-saint. In the world of living literature, the author will have the same position as any other *skilled labourer* who also works towards social progress (Pillai 1984, 313, 326 emphasis added).

EMS said that the progressive writer is different from the earlier author as the former is to be fully conscious of his 'duty' not just as a writer but as an active participant in the progressive social transformation. The progressive writer/artist cannot pretend to be neutral about the unequal and exploitative social relations unlike the traditional writers/artists who considered them to be isolated individuals creating idealistic and romantic works of art (Ibid).

The point made by Kesari about the writer being a 'skilled' (*vidagdha*) labourer of pen and paper, like every other skilled labourer is of extreme significance here (Pillai

[26] *Indulekha* (1889) written by O. Chanthu Menon is regarded as the first 'proper novel' (*lakshayuktamaya novel*) in Malayalam. It is considered to signal the beginning of Kerala Renaissance in its realistic portrayal of contemporary society with a stress on English education, nationalism, scientific temperament and rational thinking, portrayal of modern women, romantic love as opposed to traditional *sambandham*.
Nalini (1911) is a long poem written by Kumaran Asan depicts the romantic love of a young woman towards her childhood friend. It is considered to have inaugurated the dignified, non-sexual portrayal of a woman in poetry who is capable of thoughtfulness and reflection.

1984, 313). This brutal process of 'flattening-out' or homogenization of all kinds of activities in order to place them all together as wage labour in the market for exchange, is the central theme in Marx beginning from the *Communist Manifesto* and gaining a systematic exploration in *Capital.* On the one hand, it becomes essential in the paradigm of progressive literature movement to think in terms of a writer who can critically engage with the existing set of affairs i.e. the existing relations of production and reproduction; but on the other hand being a skilled labourer of the capital, the writer is no more autonomous than other workers who work in factories and other production processes.

The question of alienation seems to be at the centre of this discussion. For Kesari, the progressives should not be caught up in the dilemmas that the early realists were in. The anxieties about the omnipotent and omnipresent capital and the ethical/moral/social decadence and loss of innocence it was bringing in, plagued the writings of the writers of the 'Defeatist Movement' (*parajaya prasthanam*) as Kesari named it. Thus the progressives should overcome these dilemmas by identifying with the poor and the ordinary people. Writers are given a choice here to overcome their alienation by identifying with the toiling masses by writing about them. These skilled labourers of pen and paper should transcend their positions as mere individuals and merge into the people through their labouring activity. However, the ordinary 'unskilled' labourers have no such option of 'transcendence' in order to overcome alienation and will have to wait until the entire capitalist system is overthrown and a communist society is in place.

But the paradox lies in the fact that ultimately writing/ artistic work remains a task that involves imagination and contemplation, which requires a considerable individual effort. So there is a need to materialise these aspects of artistic production such as imagination, fantasy and contemplation without necessarily erasing the individual out of it completely. This individual could be differentiated from the solipsist individual in the liberal philosophy. The complex diffusion between the particular individual who is writing a poem, for instance and the social milieu need to be traced with utmost sensitivity in different cases, rather than approaching it with some already established principles.

The question of the genius author was resolved by EMS at one level by suggesting creativity to be emerging out of certain social formations quite like other

material aspects of production transforming itself as well as the entire production process in every epoch. There are two figures that the writer gets to be compared and equated with in this discussion. If Kesari compared the figure of the writer with an analogous figure of the skilled labourer, EMS emphasises on the image of the progressive political activist as an equivalent to that of the writer. The only difference between a political activist and politically committed writer (both progressive) according to EMS was that the writer has to be careful about the medium that exists between them and the people and needs to be aesthetically crafted. He stated:

> [T]here is in fact a big similarity between a great artist and a great political activist: both works due to internal inspiration… Both are hastily trying to erect a new ideology and social structure in the place of the existing ideology and social structure. While one (the artist) expresses the beautiful idea that's boiling over in his heart in a beautiful form, the other (the political activist) gives an energetic form namely practice, to the bright idea that fills one's heart. To make art great and political activity effective both (the artist and activist) need utmost individual freedom…The communist party is the party of such political activists who posses full-fledged personalities (Namboodiripad 1974, 31).

It is interesting to see how EMS connects the idea of creative freedom to that of the freedom of the political activist precisely at a point where the communist party was being criticised for 'restricting the freedom of artists' and following a Stalinist path.

B. Rajeevan in his article published in *Prerana* titled radically as 'Anubhootikalile Varga-Samaram' (Class Struggle in Sensibilities) reiterate the nature of poetry as a labour that the poet and the reader carry out together. This article is a study of K G Sankara Pillai's poem 'Bengal' published in a little magazine called *Prasakti* in 1973 that marked a rupture in Malayalam poetry and brought political modernism in poetry to the forefront. Rajeevan argues that every epoch fights against the 'normalized aesthetic sense' through the poets of its times. Every poet faces a certain aesthetic obstacle; at the moment when he feels he could no longer live, without overcoming this obstacle, he tries to face it. Through this activity of overcoming, he transforms himself and the world around him and proclaims freedom from the older order and finds new aesthetic sense. Hence, a poet's journey in the class struggle is invariably related to his fight for transformation of the aesthetic realm against the ugliness that used to tie him down (Rajeevan Jan-Feb1980, 7-12).

Though Rajeevan's nuanced position does not represent the larger position of the Vedi or the CPIML on the same, this idea has its roots in the possibility opened up by the period in which he was writing. The exposure to newer works in Marxist aesthetics from continental Europe, cultural resistances taking place across the globe as well as the emergence of a new kind of writing in Malayalam contributed to the possibility of a kind of literary criticism that approached the aesthetic transformations of the field as an autonomous process yet in conversation with the rest of the changing fields. Nevertheless, this theoretical position represented by Rajeevan (and a few others) did not get reflected in the general resolutions or proclamations of the Vedi. This could be attributed to some extent to the lack of more diverse opinions in the platform that could have in turn led to further open discussions.

Mostly these debates occurred among men from similar social classes and castes; even when they extremely disagreed with each other politically and ideologically it contributed to the *homosocial* character of the intellectual public sphere of Kerala. I intend to argue that the absence of an external critique that comes from a different class-caste-gender location resulted in certain conceptual limitation of the discourse. It is more convenient to attribute maximum responsibility to the availability of (or lack of it) 'authentic western writings' for the complexity and diversity of the vernacular discourse. However, I intend to point out the problem that lies within the spaces that produce these discourses; the homogeneity of participants and audience in terms of their social origins.

In other words, some of the limitations of the vernacular Marxist aesthetic discourse until the 1980s rise not only from their intrinsic issues but more importantly from the nature and composition of their discursive spaces. This becomes clearer when we look into the critical discourses that strengthened from the 1990s onwards whether it is the feminist, Dalit or environmental ones and their engagement with the former. Such homo-social character of the left discourse opens up another facet of the 'figure of the writer' which is solely masculine and the necessary value for politics that is bravery.

The bravery expected of a progressive or radical writer (most of these discussions do not even conceptualise a woman writer and are gender-blind in their vocabulary)[27] in

[27] Hence, throughout this thesis, I have maintained the male pronouns while discussing the original texts not to mask this gender-blindness.

contrast to the cowardice of the revisionist writers is emphasised in each phase of the local left cultural movement. EMS wrote in 1947 that since the life of a communist party activist is full of poverty and torture, only the brave can choose it. He says that bravery is the only foundation for the 'steel discipline' that the liberal critics of party's role in the cultural movement mock at.

In the Vedi discussions of the late 1970s too one finds a similar take on the character of the writer or artist, in their criticism of the modernist writers. C. R. Parameswaran in his article on the evolution of modern poetry in Malayalam titled 'Hruswadrishtiyil Ninnu Mochanam' (Freedom from the Short-sight) portrays the modernist writers as cowardly and evasive in character.[28] The article was published in three parts in three consecutive issues of *Prerana* from Dec 1980 to March 1981.

He connects the 'broker' (*dallal*) character of these writers to the 'feudal baggage' that the Romanticists carried in the beginning of the century and beneath their flair for writing poetry hides their effeminate lament over the lost feudal world of Onam flowers, lazy-entertainments, *bhakthi* for the lords and *kooththichikal* (the old term for performing women or courtesans which is used in the local parlance to denote prostitutes or women of 'loose' character). The masculine ideal of bravery is here contrasted to the effeminate cowardice of the modernist writers who follow the legacies of both the Romantic writers and the revisionist ones (Parameswaran Dec 1980, 7-12).

The figure of the writer is re-envisioned in these debates as we have seen and this puts forth an immediate question in front of us that of the changes in the nature of writing effectuated by this changed figure of the author. In the following section we shall analyze the changes suggested in the sphere of writing and its relation to the readership and critics upon the de-mystification of the individual author and his creativity is theorised.

[28] Some of the modernist writers began their intellectual life at the Vedi and other Naxalite-sympathiser platforms. Poets like K. Satchidanandan, Kadammanitta Ramakrishanan and K. G. Sankara Pillai and prose writers like Pattathuvila Karunakaran, M. Sukumaran and U. P. Jayaraj were fellow-travellers of the Vedi until the early 1980s. Many of them left this association at different points due to various differences. One of the major points of divergence as shown in K. Sreejith's article was 'the annihilation line' adopted by the Party. In this work I address an aesthetic reason behind this dissociation which had to do with questions of morality and sexuality.

- **Democratisation, Collectivisation and Planning in Literature**

According to the communist writers the most important aspect of being a progressive writer was his ability to observe and learn from people's lives by coming closer to the ordinary reality. For the communist ideologues this in turn meant leaving the 'petty-bourgeois comforts' and joining the working class. This process of 'de-classing' will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters for its political, ethical and moralistic connotations. But, in the context of democratising the process of cultural production as imagined by the left cultural fronts, this idea of the proximity of the writer to his the people is of crucial import.

The other end of this process is occupied by the consumer of the products of the cultural production; the reader or the spectator. Even with progressive writers who have transformed the content and form of literature as to bring the people to the centre of the text, the reader (who is imagined as a 'common man') remains out of the process of literary production and can at best be the object and/or subject of this process. They have to wait patiently to 'get encouraged' by these catalytic reflections wrapped in an artistic idiom to bring about real social change. Thus the non-reciprocal relationship between the text and the reader is not questioned where the reader cannot influence or bring forth changes in the text, to which the author has an 'authoritarian' association. He contends that the cultural fronts could be spaces where the writer could directly encounter the readers and gain valuable insights from them.

The question of the 'demystification of the figure of the author' discussed earlier, is closely connected to the issue of democracy in literary production. In this phase, the problem of the 'authority' re-surfaces as a critique of the elitist notions of literature that excludes the common people from the process of literary production. EMS suggested that the writer should be open to debates and discussions not just with one's fellow writers or party ideologues but also with the common readership at large. If the writer was with the communist party, according to EMS, the writer should be ready to open up his views and writings in front of everyone who would like to participate. When one clamours so much about freedom of expression for the artist with regard to the party, it was ironic, according to EMS that the same person will not allow his common readers to express their opinions about the quality of work freely.

> In fact, if you are a real progressive writer then you would not have asked such questions that position the writer in a *higher caste* and a common reader who is not a writer in a *lower caste*… if you are writing for the people, you would minutely and strictly analyze how each of your writings is received by them; you would acknowledge their opinions mostly; and you would respect *their representatives* who criticize your works and demand [a] certain kind of work from you in the same way you respect the eminent scholars of grammar and formal aesthetics (Namboodiripad 1974, 37 emphasis added).

Here, even though in a more direct and physical sense, EMS understood and argued for a *dialogue* in the process of literary production itself whereby the product of literature will no longer be the object of aura, reflective of the individual talent of the 'author', but produced through collective effort and comradeship. The work of literature thus becomes a social product in literal sense. However, he restricts this to a *procedural* plane, where if such and such a discussion takes place and the writer takes down all opinions rigorously then he shall make use of them as other means of production which process is quite similar to those of mechanical/manufacturing production. I argue that the more difficult task lies in the radical restructuring of the relationship between content and form and revisiting the figure of author and its relation to the reader whereby a truly democratic dialogue will be possible both within and without the text.

EMS' approach of collectivization of writing is opposed to the literature of the genius and great men. Individuals can be called 'great men' only when they can understand the flow of history in a scientific manner and seize the moments of crucial import and intervene in them to change the existing conditions. Their greatness must lie in the fact that instead of using their abilities for the status-quo they use it in pushing towards progress. Understood in this way, according to EMS, the greatness is dependent on the correct analysis of concrete material situation and a scientific world view (Namboodiripad 1974, 127). Hence, the naturalised 'genius' should be taken away from the writer and replaced with the responsibility of erudition, analysis and a different imagination of the future. This will make literature accountable to the movement of history towards progress.

As against these collectivist tendencies of EMS, MP Paul argued that the clearest manifesto any writer could produce was his writings and one did not require any external pressure, disciplining or regimenting for that. The activity of writing was free as far as

the progressive writers were concerned and this meant that in all practical questions they did not need to take a position according to the party program. Paul wrote

> All human questions are important to art including state, economy and politics. Yet, the empire of the poet/artist is the inner world of people and processes, as Caudwell had pointed out. As the creator of the aesthetic objects his duty is to throw light on the art by hiding himself beneath it and the critic has to *translate* his aesthetic senses onto another object of art (Quoted in Natarajan 2004, 55 emphasis added).

The issues were raised in a heated polemic that took place in the PSS Conference held at Thrissur in 1947, where the writer-members of the movement got polarized into two antagonistic blocs. We can see here the manner in which the question of democratizing the activity of writing is skilfully connected to the disciplining of the communist party.

This attempt to talk about a new way of writing literature, which is *collective* and *discursively produced*, is to be read along with some other political impulses of the period such as the drastic ideological diversions and shifts in leadership the CPI underwent in the decade of 1940s. As a result of the Calcutta Thesis of the 'Programme of Democratic Revolution' of 1948, the party was banned by the Nehru government. Fighting the ban, it was also trying to discipline and regiment the cadre in an unprecedented fashion. Regimenting the creative writers and intellectuals became all the more important as the earlier phase under the leadership of P.C. Joshi had attempted to forge a strong cultural mass base for the party in various regions and it had become a significant issue within the party.

Thus, there is an imperative for the communist ideologue, in this case EMS, to control more closely and guard the ranks, which might explain the threatening or disciplining undertone that could be read in this essay written in 1947. In other contexts, we are familiar with the manner, in which the invocation of 'the people' legitimizes the state power. In a similar fashion, 'the common readers' could be another entry point through which the party censor can work and legitimize itself.

In a pamphlet published in 1956 titled *Vyaktiprabhaava Siddhantam* (Theory of Personality Cult). EMS relates this question of the individual writer to the issue of personality cult and how history needs to be re-written by displacing these 'supernatural presences' with the daily lives and struggles of the ordinary people. It was also the time of de-Stalinization in Soviet Union and hence the question of personality cult became all the more relevant. EMS argues that the 'denouncement' of Stalin's personality cult and

other authoritarian policies by the new collective leadership is in fact not the degradation of Stalin as such. Rather, it is the act of recognizing the role played by ordinary men and women in social progress the way they deserve and rejecting any view that degrades them (Namboodiripad 1974, 128-9). This effort, to gain out of a complete turnaround of events at the international level is significant here, whereby EMS is accepting de-Stalinization as a step forward without changing his earlier positions.

In this procedure towards democratisation and collectivisation, planning becomes an essential aspect of cultural production. Soviet Union's economic planning and its rapid and systematic growth had instilled hopes in the nascent post-colonial countries and leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru had tried to incorporate elements of planning in different degrees. EMS points out that similar planning would not be amiss in the field of culture as well. A group of writers with a common goal, that of social progress could come together, discuss their ideas and move forward in tandem. They might decide to share their tasks and in turn create a detailed plan for the future writing. EMS further clarifies that unless a writer accepts that he has social goal of progress in mind and be ready to confine his freedom inside that goal the notion of planning is worthless to him (Namboodiripad 1974, 114).

P. Govinda Pillai wrote in an article in 1975, about the establishment of Deshabhimani Study Circle that regular meetings and gatherings of young and upcoming writers is a necessary aspect in the development of progressive literature as it helps them critically approach their own writings with the help of like-minded people in the gathering. They could submit their work for critical scrutiny and later it could be sent to various publications including *Deshabhimani Weekly* accordingly (Pillai 1975). A contemporary intellectual, writer and poet M. Govindan harshly criticized this notion and stressed upon the individual character of fiction and poetry that needs isolation and intense processing that cannot be shared before it's done. If it has to be scrutinized by a group it would amount to policing and surveillance he argued (Govindan 2011, 789).

While discussing the ideas of democratisation, collectivisation and of the processes cultural production, it is pertinent to review the Maoist approach to culture and aesthetics that had gained popularity among the writers, activists and intellectuals of the 1970s and 80s. According to K. Venu, the core of the Cultural Revolution was the

intention to make class struggle as the 'main link' and to bring politics to the leadership of all affairs. This struggle aimed at breaking the bourgeois idea that in all spheres, like science, arts and philosophy the handful of experts to remain dominant. It broke this monopoly and situated the working class people at the centre stage of every activity by proclaiming them to be the creators and heirs to the cultural realm as well as other walks of life (Venu Sept-Oct 1980, 36-41).

He goes on to add in his Message to the Cultural Activists who participated in the State Convention of the Vedi at Anthikkad, Thrissur, in August 1980 that only through the 'popularization' of the activities of the Vedi that the larger goal of building a new democratic society could be achieved. People's art and people's literature are the key words to the popularization of the radical politics and he assures the cultural front activists that the party shall always stand by the process of popularization of the new democratic culture. He marks the bourgeois writer's effort at popularization as an incomplete and contradictory one as on the one hand the writer tries to be among the people without fully leaving his reactionary baggage behind. A two-line struggle of this kind is needed which should be encouraged by Vedi (Ibid).

There was an opinion in the Vedi that the reason behind the restricted popularization of the Vedi activities is the lack of popularization of the party itself. Venu refutes this by saying that such an argument would only help to revert the status of the cultural front to that of an appendage of the political party. It is true that more the political party's engagement with the people the easier it becomes for the cultural front to democratise. But even in the times of fascism, where radical political activity is restricted, the cultural front should be the vehicle to carry the politics to the people. Here, *janakeeyavatkkaranam* is translated as popularisation in want of a better word because the former is subtly different from making something popular. It literally means to make something/someone of people's own. The people should own it with a sense of belonging. From here we reach another theme that is intrinsically connected to the ones already discussed. Freedom and its various connotations in these discussions embody certain significant concepts like the relationship between the party and cultural front, censorship and the idea of the nation and its understanding in the communist discourse.

- **Artistic Freedom and the Communist Party**

In the debates between the communist and non-communist members of the PSS in 1947-8 the political restrictions of the creative freedom of the writer and the artist by the communist ideologues became the central issue. Let's begin by a response by EMS to such a criticism.

> [Thus,] even if one had a difference of opinion with the Party program his immediate impulse would be to sort it out within the Party through open dialogues and democratic decision-making processes. Once all such measures are explored and went in vain, then one decides to leave the party. Hence, if you are with the party you don't have to access an external platform to critique its program and if you cannot come to consensus with the program then you would have no interest in remaining its member (Namboodiripad 1974, 35).

The question was raised whether any writer will have the freedom to write against the party program and activities even if he is a party member. It is interesting to see how EMS managed to put the onus on the other person to justify his question rather than being defensive about his own stand. If one wants to be member of the communist party, EMS reasoned, then it was because of the belief that it is only through the Party that one will be able to bring about long-lasting and just social change. It is the sum total of individual freedoms of all those comrades that forms the 'steel' discipline of the communist party (Ibid, 32-33).

The concept of discipline was problematised by EMS here by considering it more like a *structural compulsion* that is present at all spheres of the activity of writing whether one is a writer belonging to any party, or a non-partisan progressive writer or an ordinary writer. The notion of *roopabhadrata* too amounts to disciplining writing in terms of norms of formalism. 'If one can write according to the rules of ancient Sanskrit aesthetics or Western aesthetic norms, then how could they argue about an abstract notion of the artist' asks EMS (Ibid, 55-56). Even if a writer belongs to the 'art for art's sake' camp he has to obey the 'discipline' of the norms and restrictions of artistic creation.

EMS extensively quoted from Christopher Caudwell's essays to substantiate the above point that freedom is nothing more than a 'bourgeois illusion'. If the liberal critics were genuinely interested in safeguarding creative freedom of the artist, then they should vehemently oppose the way the government is detaining many communist leaders who are also writers without even a trial and thus curtailing their freedoms of expression.

Since in the case of the proponents of 'compact formalism' this illusion had cowardice and regressive mentality as its basis, they never talked against the state power (Namboodiripad 1974, 57-60).

P. Kesava Dev argued in opposition that a writer had to look at all the aspects of life unlike a political activist who had to look at only one aspect of it, say the political. He asserted that there were so many deeper concerns for the writer like the eternal and humane love, love for one's child and siblings etc. to address rather than constantly crying about hunger, unemployment, misery, struggle and revolution. If these intimate questions were not addressed how literature can be real literature, Dev suggested in one of his essays written as part of the debate at this moment (Dev 1974).

In response to Dev's criticism, EMS wrote that the political forces of hunger and poverty can radically transform the intimate sphere of affects and emotions. Love and affection could be present in the stories of struggle and misery also. He mentioned a number of the communist party activists who were killed in various fights with the state, landlords etc. and argued that the families of all these 'martyrs' were also capable of familial love and affection. For EMS, then, the task was not to find out all those corners that did not have politics and write about them. That would only amount to the de-politicisation of literature and writing and jumping into some mysterious and abstract theme called 'life' (Namboodiripad 1974, 73-75).

He further said that at times these two aspects (analytical and affective) could co-exist in any form of writing as it happens in Marx's *Capital* which has many witty statements, statements of literary criticism and extremely poetic statements too alongside the intense scientific analysis. He also applauded Maxim Gorky's works for their political sharpness and audacity and contrasted those with the works of writers including Dev.[29]

EMS denoted that this kind of apathy to politics leads to 'a casual approach' to literature that could not contribute anything to the movement and its larger goal of social progress. 'Unlike the professors, progressive movement is not a leisure-time activity for

[29] He quoted Engels where the latter talks about the nature of a socialist novel in 1885, without mentioning the exact text from which the paragraph is taken. Interestingly, the same paragraph along with a few more paragraphs are quoted by E.M.S. in an article (published much later in 1972) that sought to review the mistakes communist leaders and writers committed in the earlier phase of late 1940s. The translation of that particular paragraph and the sense it conveys is considerably different in both these instances. The second time when he quotes it he also cites the source of the quotation which is Engels' letter to Minna Kautsky written on 1885 and the translation is more verbatim here.

the ordinary people. For them it's a matter of life and death and they will consider these loose and diluted definitions of progress as merely farcical' (Namboodiripad 1974, 65).

However, 'writing politically' did not amount to accepting the party program of CPI as the progressive movement was a common united front formed by progressive sections of people belonging to all parties and non-party persons. He explicated the differences between the agenda of the progressive movement and the agenda of the communist movement. As they share an intense opposition towards the princes, landlords, capitalists and imperialists; genuine love for the masses that fight against the oppressors and for EMS this would summarize the major features of progressive literature (Ibid).

In the early 1970s after the formation of the Deshabhimani Study Circle EMS wrote an article that began by saying that it attempts to correct certain mistakes of the debates in the Progressive era. He further equates the cultural front that includes the non-party intellectuals and writers, to the united front in politics that is formed in different contexts according to different needs of the times. As far as the split of the PSS is concerned, most of the reasons led to that were political, he argues. After independence the purpose of progressive literature became an arena of friction in the platform and that led to the debate of *roopabhadrata*. In fact, when the reader thinks EMS is about to mention the mistakes the communists committed in those debates, he contends that he stands by the theoretical positions of those days till today and only need to condemn and reconsider the methods in which they argued. The communists including him could not lay out their arguments properly and this had led to much confusion. He argued that ultimately the communist position was correct and he will not follow a revisionist 'self-critique'.

To add to this, we could also look at his famous 'Permbavoor Rekha', the resolution of the Pu Ka Sa adopted in the Conference took place at Perumbavoor in 1992. This is considered to be a significant step from the communist party to acknowledge the mistakes it committed and the sectarian role it played in the fissure of the PSS. Nevertheless, the position EMS took in 1974 is as follows. 'If we consider the arguments we [the communist ideologues] made at that point without any exposure to those more sophisticated texts, they could not have been any better and we should in fact feel

satisfied that they were not worse' (Namboodiripad 1974, 9). Even though he points out the mechanical approach to aesthetics and culture the party writers showed in the early debates, he subtly puts the major share of the blame to both the lack of communication abilities and the unavailability of the advanced texts from Europe and the United States.

A significant addition to the Pu Ka Sa's agenda from 1980s onwards is the issue of communalism that became a threat to the class-based mobilisations of the workers and posed threat to the diverse social fabric of the country. In the process of politicisation of literature communalism gained a significant space in the post-1984 years and from the 1990s policies of LPG and neo-liberal agendas were also central to the cultural discourse.

K. Venu, the then General Secretary of the Kerala State Committee of the CPI (ML) and a significant presence in the ideological debates in the Vedi identifies the radical shift in the notion of artistic freedom in the post-Chinese Cultural Revolution period. In the Soviet discourse, culture was seen a mere appendage to the material sphere and the cultural front was an appendage to the political party whereas the Chinese experience allows us to rethink this relation in terms of relative autonomy assigned to culture.

In the Vedi, this point later became instrumental in the dissolution of the group was the relationship between the political vanguard i.e. the communist party, CPI (ML) in this case, and the cultural vanguard of the Vedi. K. Venu mentioned that the idea of the 'leadership of politics' as adopted from the Cultural Revolution does not automatically mean the leadership of a political party. Rather it denotes the centrality given to politics in the choice of content, forms and popularisation. He responds to some of the debates took place in the State Convention of the Vedi in 1980 and contends that there are three kinds of positions regarding this question of politics and culture that emerged through these discussions. The first position equates the leadership of politics as the leadership of party and follows the mistaken position of the Soviet model and sees cultural movement as an appendage of the party. The second position regards cultural activities as free and independent of any politics and hence feels suffocated about the 'excessive' political attitude of the Vedi (Venu Sept-Oct 1980, 36-41).

There is a third position that on the one hand realizes the significance of politics in the development and popularization of the new democratic culture and on the other

acknowledges the dialectical relationship between the Vedi and the party. The first two positions can be clubbed together as the extreme mechanical positions and the Two-Line struggle that's taking place in the Vedi is between the mechanical approach and the correct third approach. Now let us come to the last section of the chapter that tries to bring together the significant ideas discussed above with regard to the 'translation' of dialectics into the historical context of the communist engagement in Kerala (Venu Sept-Oct 1980, 36-41).

2.5. Writing Dialectics in Malayalam and its Aesthetic Limits

As we already saw throughout these debates, dialectics comes as a holistic panacea to the theoretical challenges posed by the fields of literary and cultural production in Malayalam. *Vairudhyathmakatha* (the most used word to denote dialectics in Malayalam) is central to the Marxist attempts at resolving the issues of binaries and dichotomies in the field of socio-cultural analysis of the aesthetic activity. Whether it is the argument against *roopabhadrata* in the late 1940s where EMS argues against the dichotomous approach to form and content and suggests looking at the dialectical relation between them or the position of K. Venu in the early 80s regarding the relationship between the communist party and the cultural front being dialectical not hierarchical, the ultimate unique Marxist analytical category has been that of dialectics.

The purposive nature of literature is a point at which the progressive thinkers and writers agreed upon in the initial years of the progressive movement. Later they disagreed on the exact meaning and nature of this purpose, especially in the post-independence era. It seems to us that the purpose always remained outside of art and literature in the progressive period, as something to be achieved through the *instrument* of literature. Hence, the progressive nature of the purpose was automatically collapsed onto the progressiveness of the work of art or literature.

Theodor Adorno argues that this operation stems from the deploying of the enlightenment variety of reason that refutes the presence of particularities and contingencies that do not fit into its abstract conceptualisations of the world. Art in modernity is precisely that arena for Adorno that enables the refutation of this refutation, through the negative dialectics, and rescues the non-identity from the 'Idealist rage' of

reason by simply being art. In other words, in modernity, art assumes its meaning not by representing an external principle or purpose that is objective and meaning-independent but by being itself (Adorno 2010).

This could be seen as engaging in conversation with the contemporary articulation of Jacques Rancière with regard to the politics of literature which he defines as the 'politics of literature as literature'. It is not the political orientation of the writer or the theme that decides the political valency of the text. Rather it is the positioning of the text vis-à-vis the 'partitioning of the sensible' in the particular society and language that maintains the status quo. If the text (whether image, performative or written) is able to intervene into this partitioning and disrupt it then only it can be called literature, according to the French philosopher (Rancière 2004). This is connected to his idea of dissensus (as opposed to consensus) only which can resist the onslaught of capitalist complacency. The political needs to build this dissensus against 'the police' that will always suppress the radical dissent and it is possible by politicising the process of aesthetic production (Rancière 2001).

In our discussion, there were two major aspects to the communist intervention into the aesthetic; first, contesting the binary of content/form of literature by de-compartmentalising it and outlining the direct relationship between literature and social progress, second, reviewing the relationship between the subjective and objective aspects of cultural production (i.e. the writer and his freedom and the material world through the mediation of the cultural front) by planning, democratising and collectivising it. Certain dialectical operation seemed to be the solution for all these dilemmas though the nature of this operation was difficult to devise. In this section, we will analyse the peculiarities of this 'dialectics in translation' and its transformation through the various phases of the communist cultural activities in the region.

For EMS, in the late colonial Malayalam-speaking region of South India, the translation of the idea of dialectics would lead to the demarcation of the social forces into two distinct camps. He identifies two broad forces in the world, which he is further able to subtly join with specific local issues: fascism, imperialism, capitalism and landlordism vs. liberation, nationalism, democracy and socialism. If a writer is progressive in approach through his activity of writing he will be expected to support and strengthen the

latter set of forces against the former ones. Let us elucidate this picture by laying out the subsets of these blocs. The regressive camp i.e. status-quoist and static is comprised of the exploitative, fascist, imperialist, anti-social, feudal, individualist, conservative, traditionalist, unscientific and irrational tendencies and the dynamic and radical progressive camp had the liberatory, anti-fascist, anti-colonial/nationalist, socialist, anti-individualist, modernist, transformationist, scientific and rational forces (Namboordiripad 1974, 22).

In this process, we should note how the readers of EMS become familiar with an intricate relation between progressive literature and the process of social progress. Writing progressively or producing progressive literature is much more than simple or direct propaganda in terms of taking a political position or enabling a certain political mobilization. It should involve a philosophical engagement with the materialist understanding of history of the world in general and that of aesthetics and the task of critic in particular. Hence it goes far beyond the immediate impact created by the world-wide united front against fascism.

It was crucial EMS suggested all the axes of progress to come together and work in solidarity with the larger political battle against the forces of fascism, imperialism and colonialism. This was to become the basic framework for the 'progressive movement' whose activist writers were expected to write in order to strengthen the forces of progress and emancipation. Within this shared paradigm of cultural resistance, EMS tried to push further towards a deeper philosophical convergence that was desirable, scientific and hence progressive.

There is an explicit call here for a re-thinking about the relationship between knowledge, ideology, progress and history. The historical understanding of the past and present should enable human beings to forge a united struggle for a better future. For that the knowledge systems need to be understood not as repositories of pure and objective knowledge but as 'world-views' having epistemological and ideological implications. The regressive ideology is not merely false-consciousness that can be eliminated through a psychological confrontation. Rather, the operation of this ideology is closely intertwined with those material forces of history that determine its movement. Even scientific knowledge is not, as EMS reminded, devoid of ideological orientations and

hence such implications to be stronger in case of arts and literature. It should be noted that EMS did not provide an easy solution for this dilemma between knowledge and ideology. He only indicated a method to reject the backward looking ideological implications through scientific ways of knowing and that knowledge which strengthen the progressive forces. Ideology appears to be materially founded in EMS' understanding and is sophisticatedly connected to other 'superstructural' realms of society in a fashion less reductionist than the Soviet model.

EMS constructed an entire set of local and national issues related to both feudal and capitalist systems in order to relate it to the international scene. The issues like the putting an end to princes and *divans* and bringing in Responsible Government, abolition of landlordism and utilizing that rent-money for the welfare of peasants and people in general, confiscating all the British properties including plantations, banks etc. and using that money for our own needs, seizing the assets of those native capitalists who exploit their workers and clerks without giving them proper wages and salaries and make profit through black marketing and hoarding, spreading modern scientific knowledge among the masses to eradicate their superstitions and ignorance etc. polarize the society into two large groups; socialists and communists who fight for progress on the one hand and the landlords, imperialists and capitalists who strive to maintain the system as it is on the other. The real question is not just about propagating communist ideology, but about agreeing upon and working towards the resolution of these broader issues.

Through this strategy, in the immediate context, the communist ideologue attempted to convince the larger group of progressively oriented people outside of the communist fold also to share the dream of progress defined in this broad sense. However, most importantly, as we can see the attempt is to provide the movement with a deeper epistemological grounding in the dialectical materialist philosophy. The world, for EMS was divided into two philosophical and political camps. By depicting the modern world as two large camps of mutually hostile forces, EMS was in fact, putting forth a grand canvas of history as a *great dialectic*.

As we can clearly identify, the picture is far from being a 'true' re-presentation of the existing reality. The simple, if not, over-simplified narrative and the binary and summary allocation of the tendencies is of interest. Most of the individual forces in one

camp have complex relations with some forces in the other. For instance the capitalist tendencies in the regressive camp and the scientific ones in the progressive cannot be easily separated as two unrelated or antagonistic tendencies. Likewise, the fascist forces included in the regressive camp have somewhat close and peculiar relationship with the nationalist forces placed on the progressive side.

The most significant Marxist critique of EMS and the progressive literary movement came from the Vedi that was organised by the fellow travellers of the naxalite movement for the purposes of literary-cultural and aesthetic debates. Now let us analyse the particular ways in which dialectics was conceived and translated in the Vedi discourse (mainly drawing from the discussions in *Prerana*). One of the major critiques of the CPI (M) and its cultural fronts raised by the Vedi was the revisionist position of the former. This was discussed in a previous section. The mechanical approach of the revisionist communist parties towards literature is critiqued by Nanda Kumar in an article published in *Prerana* in 1980. He argues that the real question lies with understanding the dialectical categories embedded in literature as such and contextualising it in the larger philosophical matrix of Marxism. These dialectical 'laws' govern form, content and technique of literary production and it is of essential importance to discern them (Kumar Feb 15-28 1981).

B. Rajeevan has argued that the process of aesthetic production is an attempt at 'internalising the hitherto external things' and thereby 'waging the external war at the internal level'. The class struggle when carried out in the mental, intimate and bodily levels it will give rise to art. This struggle forces each human being to take a position; either to stay with the existing life or to risk its radical reconstruction. Hence, the effort at reconstructing the world has a counterpart in the inner world as well. This is an improvement over the position of EMS as discussed above. Rajeevan's ideas extend the world-historical struggle of the two camps into the inner world (of affect and emotions) of the human being (Rajeevan Jan-Feb1980).

He goes on to suggest that the fear of change is stronger in the petty bourgeoisie or the middle classes as they can neither aspire to change everything as they value certain things attached to their lives, nor remain the same as they desire to change certain other things. This makes them prey to the hypocrisy of putting up appearances without

radically undergoing change. The way out of this dual existence is exposing ourselves to the experiences of change in the external world and then condensing those experiences to produce an objective thing i.e. art. This struggle is class struggle itself as the internal dialectical process gives birth to a new aesthetic which is accessible to the external objective reality. Rajeevan acknowledges the contradictoriness involved in the formation of these camps itself when he says 'we fight with our own regressive selves' in this class struggle of sensibilities. The limitations of the middle class life are most evident in our struggle to see things lying beyond it. This dual existence is crucial to the production of art and literature as we need to see ourselves in both the subjective and objective positions of the process (Rajeevan Jan-Feb1980).

The role of literature and arts in this conceptualisation is that of processing the external class conflict at an inner level in order to reveal one's own position vis-à-vis the struggle; the contradiction at the world-historical level is related to the contradiction at the personal/inner levels. The criticism of the revisionist writers is connected to this point as they stopped this 'processing' to confine themselves to the 'false freedom gained at the moment of independence'. This pertains to the communist party's slogan in 1947 regarding the independence as '*yeh azadi jhoota hai*' (this freedom is false) which was abandoned by the CPI and CPI (M) in the later year and was picked up by the Naxalite movement which was later consolidated into the CPI (ML). Rajeevan reiterates that the 'fake intellectuals' and poets of the ruling parties have failed in unravelling the real experiential register of the people with the aesthetic process and hence failed at understanding the dialectical relationship between society and art. Rajeevan further uses the notion of dialectics to connect the spheres of knowledge and affect by pointing out the aesthetic significance of the Naxalite movement that is 'yet to be realised' by the contemporary poets (Ibid).

As we already discussed in an earlier section, Rajeevan's nuanced analysis never became part of the larger working of the Vedi or the intellectual public sphere until more external critiques (of the Marxist paradigm) surfaced in the 1990s. To recall Adorno's discussion of the negative dialectics again, the affirmative or accumulative dialectics of the enlightenment variety becomes an obstacle in the achievement of utopia, in the non-teleological sense meaning 'togetherness of diversity' even when it helps the communist

thinker to imagine a world divided up neatly for politicisation as in the case of EMS. Here I intend to stretch the argument of his attempts of translating dialectics in the manner discussed above to the limits and crises that the movement encountered in the years to come at various levels. Even when EMS chose to employ dialectics as against the simplified binaries of the bourgeois intellectuals, their dialectics gave forth to certain other binaries, owing to the nature of their dialectics borrowed from the enlightenment lineage and further translated and fitted to the modernisation narrative of the post-colony.

Firstly, the sensory, experiential and particular mediations of the subject-object relation in life in general and art in particular were easily hidden beneath the narrative of the 'Great Dialectic' throughout. This immediately brings to us the feminist, dalit-Adivasi and religious-minority critiques of the communist movement at the political as well as aesthetic spheres that surfaced strongly from the 1980s onwards. The apathy and negligence to the particular and the contingent (as evident in their rejection and ostracising of the realist and modernist works) resulted in the homogenization of their discourse at different levels.

It involves another significant dilemma in the Marxist philosophy as experienced in the post Second World War context that threw up a number of new questions about industrialization, technology, development, environment etc. and their complicated inter-relations. The comfortable positioning of industrial and technological development next to social progress and abundance in the grand narrative was no longer possible as the destructive potential of industries and technologies were already round the corner in the form of severe pollution or atomic explosions. The way in which the socialist development model of the Soviet Union was competing with the capitalist model of US alerted many a people to the need to review the question of communist ideals as different from the capitalist ones. Marxism was encountering with new dilemmas, being a philosophical system rooted in modernist paradigm and the need to revise some of the older understandings about the more or less one-dimensional trajectory of history towards more and more progress. The dogmatic and overarching modernist conception of the capital as being the motor of progress had to be carefully dealt with if one wanted to use Marxism in order to critique the capitalist system without falling into the unending catch of the rationality behind the model of capitalist development.

Conclusion

This chapter attempts to summarise the 'translation' of dialectics that occurred in the theoretical debates of the communist cultural fronts in the post-independence period in Kerala. I intend to argue that this internally complex translation responded to the local context and its political and social singularities that in turn became available to the communist mobilisation and building of the hegemony in the region.

In the following chapters we take up each of these issues with the help of a set of chosen texts from different periods of communist cultural movement and criticism and analyse them in the light of these lines of critique, the feminist, dalit and environmental in order to see the nuanced translation of politics and the potentiality and limits of the communist aesthetics taking place in these works. In the next chapter, we will closely analyse this argument that tries to contextualise the moral aspect of the 'dialectical aesthetic criticism' of the communist movement in its continuities and breaks by reading some of the significant literary texts that came out in response to the affective registers of the movement.

Chapter 3

WRITING THE MODERN SOCIAL IN MALAYALAM: THE COMMUNIST NARRATIVE OF FAMILY, MORALITY AND SEXUALITY

> Power is not evil. Power is games of strategy. [. . .] For example, let us take sexual or amorous relationships: to wield power over the other in a sort of open-ended strategic game where the situation may be reversed is not evil; it's a part of love, of passion, of sexual pleasure (Foucault 2000, 298–9).

By assigning a rather direct or immediate relationship between the literary-aesthetic registers to that of social progress, the left cultural activists placed significant emphasis upon the alteration of the traditional idioms and aesthetic conventions in Malayalam. The major themes of existing aesthetic canons were to be revisited in the light of the newly acquired Marxist philosophical vocabulary; the repertoire of feudal-colonial sensibilities had to be challenged and newer ones to be introduced and propagated. These exercises of identification and confrontation of the conventional aesthetic norms and introduction of new idioms, themes and approaches gave rise to complicated challenges at the level of intellectual as well as creative practices. In the previous chapter we looked at a set of intellectual challenges and their attempted dialectical solutions presented by the communist cultural intervention in the post-independence period in Malayalam.

In this chapter I intend to argue that the centrality of a certain notion of morality and associated normative approaches to the intimate/private sphere of social relations dominated every phase of communist writing. Though the concrete operations of this moral discourse changed in each of these phases in accordance with the political and ideological differences in these communist cultural imaginations, the tendency to *evaluate* the social in general and the intimate in particular through *the moral* continued. The spheres of morality and sexuality were treated as synonymous, stressing on the need to organise the familial, private and intimate spheres along the axes of the 'new morality' that came to be part of the communist notions of progress and revolution.

The left discourses on literature and aesthetics in the post independence period up to the 1980s presented a set of challenges in front of us in the previous chapter in terms of conceiving and contextualising literary productions and aesthetic concepts. The changes in the discourse during these five decades of the post-colonial Malayali life can only be

understood further by looking at some of the literary productions and their engagement with the communist movement at different levels.

By the time of independence, the notion of literature as 'works of human imagination' was more or less fixed and the discourses around it more or less had a peculiar shape and format. The relationships between the literary and the non-literary had to be understood anew in the emerging public sphere in different socio-linguistic contexts and in turn the relationship between the literary and the aesthetic needed to be revisited. In a context like the Malayalam one, the Sanskrit literary, grammatical and aesthetic theories and practices dominated the scene for a long time and the arrival of missionaries and print technology effectuated the first significant break in the trajectory.

As Kesari (1984) pointed out, medieval poets like Thunjath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan and Cherusseri Namboodiri not only contributed to the *bhakti* poetic tradition of the South Indian region, but also transformed the language for writing literature from the Sanskrit to the more vernacular and accessible Malayalam. The *thevar-vaazhthi* (god-praising) poems of these above-mentioned poets were followed by the *thevar-veezhthi* (god-rejecting) performative verses of Kunchan Nambiar (Pilla 1984, 394). The Venmani Poets inaugurated the *pachamalayala prasthanam* (Pure-Malayalam Movement) in the nineteenth century that challenged the Sanskrit-dominance in versification without necessarily changing the overall thematic. By the end of the nineteenth century, print technology and printed journals, magazines and news papers along with the historical and social novels transformed the literary-aesthetic debates in the intellectual public sphere in an irreversible manner.[30] The poetry of the community reform movements further intensified the complexities regarding these debates as we can see in the works of Kumaran Asan.

As already discussed in the earlier chapter, the progressive movement stepped into this matrix of intellectual discourse as well as literary productions in the late 1930s and immediately tried to consolidate a counter-narrative of the transition that ushered

[30] For detailed discussions on the period see Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia, ed. *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004, G. Arunima (1997) 'Writing Culture: Of Modernity and the Malayalam Novel'. *Studies in History* 13 (2) "Imagining Communities-Differently: Print, Language and the 'Public Sphere' in Colonial Kerala" in *The Economic and Social History Review* 43, no. 1 (2006): 63-76, Udaya Kumar, *Malayala Novel Pathonpatham Nootandil*. Thiruvananthapram: Department of Cultural Publications, Govt. of Kerala, 1997.

these various phases in. Hence, the central task was to critique and reframe these debates on the one hand, and produce new works of literature and arts in the light of this critique as part of a larger process of social progress.

One of the major questions faced by the progressive movement in the initial phase and curiously continued to stay with the left cultural engagement throughout was about the mechanisms to be deployed in connecting the social upheavals and literature. The societal transition in the years of colonial modernity and later in the years of the postcolonial nation making provided the basis for the changes in family arrangements, political-economic relations, land-revenue structure, caste and religious orderings and ideological formations in the region in peculiar ways. The 'specific modernity' that characterised the transition of the region that came to be organised as Kerala in 1956 embodied the contradictions that were taken up in the most effective manner in literature and arts.

Studies that critically analyse the Kerala Renaissance from the perspective of a critique of enlightenment and modernity contextualise these occurrences in what they term as Kerala modernity.[31] The marginalised narrative of caste and gender discrimination is brought back to historical studies. While there have been various facets in literature's thematic engagement with the transition, the influence of the communist movement in the process form the larger backdrop here and the specific theme that is dealt with in this chapter is the moral-familial-sexual conundrum that the colonial, post-colonial governments and other authoritarian apparatuses produced and the ideological mechanisms through which the left writers and intellectuals reconfigured it.

3.1. Relationship between the Intimate and the Political in Marxism

Cornel West (1991) has put forth an interesting way of reading Marx's moral ideas by emphasising on the anti -foundationalist thrust of Marx's social analysis. This enables him to be a radical historicist, without being a reductionist like many Marxist

[31] See the recent Works like P. Sanal Mohan. 2015. *Modernity of Slavery Struggles against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press. P. Chandramohan. 2016. *Developmental Modernity in Kerala – Narayana Guru, S.N.D.P Yogam and Social Reform***.** New Delhi: Tulika Books. Satheese Chandra Bose, and Shiju Sam Varughese, eds. 2015. *Kerala Modernity: Ideas, Spaces and Practices in Transition*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

philosophers, according to West. The meta-philosophical move Marx makes by rejecting the philosophic necessity for certainty and foundation allows him to 'dispel' the charges of moral relativism. This is important to keep in mind while addressing questions of morality and ethics regarding communist politics.

Raymond Williams (1977) argues that even when we have an epochal analytical framework in which we identify a dominant cultural system, it is important to recognize the interrelations and complex currents of transition that the system undergoes constantly. In a bourgeois cultural system we can identify the residual features of the feudal culture as well as the emergent strands of new cultures for instance that of the socialist culture (Ibid, 106). Such an approach is particularly useful here in the analysis of post-colonial societies where culture has been another word for 'transitions'.

In his introduction to the section titled "Zhdanovism" in the *Anthology of Marxist Aesthetic Criticism,* Mayanard Solomon (1979) tries to connect the roots of Zhdanovist tendencies to the general approach to art in post-revolutionary time and space. He briefly analyses the Greek-Roman periods, the medieval times and the periods of French Revolution up to the Cultural Revolution of China in order to show the regimentation and censorship that art and creative expressions had to undergo in periods of insecurity and crises (). Solomon identifies certain tendencies within the Soviet public discourse during the Zhdanovist period some of which it shares with other post-revolutionary moments. Firstly the central effort is at the creation and propagation of 'a body of exemplary myths in art' that could be a model that inspires. The 'heroic self-portraiture' of the leader and the readiness expected out of the masses to follow him are part of the values that had to be inculcated by art (Ibid, 235-241).

Consequently anything that goes against this strain had to be differentiated, evaluated and shunned in order to keep the purity of the social and decadence was the central theme to fight against any tendencies of decay and disintegration 'in society as much as in literature' (Ibid, 255). The second aspect of Zhdanovism surfaces at this juncture; the de-sexualisation of art and the pitting of productivity against sexual excesses and moral decay. Many scholars have argued that the works of art and literature banned and artists witch-hunted for having counter-revolutionary political and ideological content were less compared to those punished and purged for writing sexually explicit

content. In a notorious article on the opera *Lady Macbeth of the District of the Mzensk* in *Pravda* in 1936, Zhdanov violently critiques it for being 'coarse, primitive and vulgar'. Ascetic models paraded the works of art and literature and writers were cherished as 'engineers of human soul' (Solomon 1979, 253).

Themes of love, intimacy, conjugality, family, sexuality and morality are constantly 'rescued' by the left writers from the traditional, bourgeois or other regressive canons throughout the life of the left cultural initiatives. In this chapter I intend to point towards some such attempts, whereby the tool of Marxist aesthetics is used explicitly or implicitly to politicise these themes on the one hand as against their 'eternal status' in the traditional mode and on the other to curtail any possibility of them falling into the trap of decadence and anarchy that characterise the bourgeois life in general.

The texts are chosen on the basis of their status as works in correspondence with the communist engagement as discussed in the previous chapter. It looks at the works of literature produced as part of these movements, directly or indirectly influenced by the movement, works that illustrate some of the aesthetic concerns discussed among these left critics and the way in which these texts were received by these movements. The processes of definition and acceptance or rejection on the basis of those aesthetic yardsticks are to be studied in detail. Some of the texts are representational, as in, they can be approached as representing some of the left ideological positions on literature and aesthetics. Some others are outstanding, in the literal sense, not much understood or appreciated by the movement, more often much critiqued as degraded or reactionary or revisionist. Before we take up the particular texts under consideration a condensed discussion on the history and nature of this social transition is necessary in order to contextualise our debates.

Alexandra Kollontai was one of the first female Marxist thinkers to have confronted the question of communist morality and the relationship between the sexes as early as in the initial decades of the twentieth century. She argued that the success of the dictatorship of the proletariat would be predicated on the consequent withering away of the family as a functional unit and the establishment of social collectives carrying out the functions of cooking, cleaning and caring (Kollontai 1929). Engels' classic work had decisive influence on her own theorisations of the family and intimate relationships and

she tried to separate sex from romanticised love by arguing that monogamy or polygamy (among couples) was not a communist concern, the only real concerns being those of health and hygiene. She went on to argue that neither love nor sex should be determined by economic or financial considerations as they are now in the institution of family. Similarly, moral censure or sexual restraint can also hamper the solidarity in the collective, Kollontai argues (Ibid). As against the ethics of competition, greed and private property communist morality should put forth the ethics of collectivism, love and solidarity. Kollontai's position stands out in the intellectual and political history of Soviet communism as we saw earlier with regard to the Zhdanovist conception of morality.

Now let us briefly go through the layered processes of societal transition that occurred in Kerala from the early modern period up to the moment of independence in the middle of the twentieth century. The focus of this reading would be the changes that took place in the private or intimate sphere of social relations including family, sexuality and morality.

3.2. The History of the Societal Transition of Kerala in a Glimpse: The Private Narrative

Since the numerous approaches to modernity are in themselves mutually contradictory and even exclusive at times, it is significant to find a common minimum conceptual entry point to the discourse before one could go forward and talk about the 'specific modernities' that was experienced by (not passively) the different regions in the post-colonial societies. The only such possible common denominator could be the ability to produce changes with a more or less drastic rupture effectuated to the earlier epochs. the For the the historian of the communist aesthetic, recognising the contradictions of the present, the specificities of Kerala as a region, its peculiar historical trajectories and hence the different contemporaneities cannot be taken as a given in this work.

History of modern Kerala is also a history of transitions, rapid and consistent, multi layered and mutually reinforcing at times, radical and contradictory at other times. All spheres of the social organism have undergone crucial transformations. The social divisions along the lines of caste and gender were redrawn at various moments, forming and reforming the hierarchies and constituting and reconfiguring the structure. The

organisational principles of the society changed so drastically that every decade introduced its own newer mores of identification and interaction among various caste and community groups. From the Breast-Cloth Struggle in the middle of the nineteenth century to the Temple Entry Movement of 1930s, this region witnessed a transition of irreversible currents.

The closely knit and rigid economic and familial structures in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods among various caste groups were legally and normatively intervened by the missionary and governmental presence of Victorian morality. The matrilineal setup as existed among different communities underwent numerous changes in different parts of Malabar, a direct part of the British Empire (Kodoth 2001). In the princely states of Travancore and Kochi also, thorough societal reconfigurations took place under the aegis of 'progressive' royal patrons. The beginning of print technology was characterised by the didactic method adopted by the missionaries and the spread of moral values, specifically of European Christianity. As a recent volume on the various aspects of the modernity of the region has pointed out in its Introduction, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century the 'dialogic mode' becomes a significant or at least partially the dominant mode of communication through the print media (Bose and Varughese, 2015).

J. Devika mentions in her work on the history of the engendered individuating processes in the region that the missionaries tended out strong 'critical appraisals' of the local social organisation and customs, sexual mores, caste hierarchies, family structures and most importantly the larger moral organisation of the society itself (Devika 2007). Along with the rapid spread of modern education, emergence of novels as a space for polyphonic, dialogic narratives and community organising and reforming efforts, the landscape of social, sexual and familial moralities were changing from the last years of the nineteenth century through the early decades of the twentieth. Partha Chatterjee's conceptualisation of the division of the interior and exterior with regard to colonial intervention into the local customary practices and life in general can be seen at play though with its own contradictions here (Chatterjee 1993). The caste identities being the fundamental marker of the societal organism, irrespective of the private or public nature of issues, the community reform movements had to work with great care in order to

develop a vocabulary that can address the complexities of the existing stratification and the emergent modernity.

The history of the early modernity in Kerala underlies a history of constantly transforming notions of the moral. Throughout the twentieth century, the missionaries, the politico-spiritual leaders of the social reform initiatives, ideologues of the national movement and the activists of the communist movement, engaged with these notions. In this chapter I intend to trace the multifarious engagements the communist movement has had with the moralistic registers in relation to family, sexuality and gender primarily in the sphere of writing. The communist writings on the experience of this complex transformation both in fiction and in autobiographies provide the primary materials for the chapter.

The central argument that runs through the whole chapter is to do with *the axial presence of morality*, an overbearing sense of moral righteousness and its relationship both to politics and aesthetics in the vernacular communist discourse. For instance, even after the heydays of the progressive movement in the 1940s and early 50s, the communist intervention into literature and criticism continued to focus on the notion of progress along with adjectives like 'radical', 'revolutionary' and 'counter-revisionist' in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. The valency of these terms needs to be analysed in relation to that of 'progressive'. In evaluating literature and any writing for that matter the yardsticks of 'good' and 'bad' are employed with certain peculiar meanings attached to it that need to be unpacked and studied. The intellectual discussions in the previous chapter would work as a backdrop for the rest of the chapters in the thesis. The changing nature of these yardsticks for 'judging' writing has been traced in Chapter One and that would enable us to contextualise the chosen texts in this chapter to understand their reception and appreciation in the period of their initial publication.

In the Introduction and in the previous chapter we discussed various strains of the discourses in the public sphere with regard to the communist cultural intervention into it. The aesthetic and cultural debates surrounding the desirable and promotable notions of literature and other artistic expressions in the left intellectual public sphere in the post independence decades up to the 80s were discussed in detail in the previous chapter. As we already saw, the rupture-ridden yet mutually conversing history of the aesthetic

theories and approaches of the communist parties open up an interesting point of departure for the study of the political history of modern Kerala.

The cultural interventions of these platforms produced not only theoretical debates around literature and arts but also grounded literary productions like short story, novel, poetry and plays. At times, these platforms served as immediate context for the writers and artists and at other times, the cultural climate created by these interventions played a seminal role in the writing and reading of some texts. In this chapter we plan to engage with certain chosen literary texts produced during the period from the late 1940s to the 1980s in order to analyse the changing contours of this modern social as understood by writers engaged in communist thought and practice.

The interior, private, familial and sexual invariably and overwhelmingly pertain to the gendered divisions of the society and hence to women and other sexual minorities. As far as women are concerned, the emergence of the modern Malayali individual was already invested with the strain of engendering as Devika has analysed in detail in her work. Patriarchy has been creative and successful in modernising itself in the post-colonial societies as many scholars have pointed out. The religious and caste-based patriarchies were adept in reforming themselves in tandem with the ushering in of modern education, modernising political-economy and cultural changes. In this analysis of communist writing of various periods in post-colonial Kerala society to understand the specific relationships they tried to establish between notions of family, sexuality and morality, the history of engendering and women's presence in the communist discourse both as activists and writers and as 'characters' in the narratives constitute an essential aspect.

Women's access to 'politics as an equalitarian activity' to borrow the phrase from Jacques Rancière (2001) was always mediated through their presence in the domestic, their ability to manoeuvre the 'sexual potential' of their bodies or through a certain claim to the specific masculinities that the society acknowledges. B Rajeevan (2010) argues for a reconsideration of Asan's *Duravastha* from the perspective of a world literature that transcends temporal and contextual constraints. He does this by giving certain agency to the 'inert' appearance of Chathan, whose existence is extended to the uprising of an entire community that was hitherto oppressed and exploited. His transformation from

being a passive man, a victim of caste oppression, who feels perplexed at the misfortune of Savitri, to an active rescuer and Savitri's transformation from being the novice victim of patriarchal as well as communal oppression to a woman capable of agential love happen because of their interaction. Such an interaction was unconceivable in the existing scheme of affairs. As Rancière (2004a) says it is precisely this rupture of propriety, in the hearing of voices, hitherto inaudible because of the partitioning of our sensible world and meeting of bodies, untouchable and sights unseeable that makes it literature par excellence. Here, the word is written onto the flesh of not just the one writing but to the flesh of the immediate social and the imagined universal both as available through the changing world.

Writing as a process of selection from the social and arrangement of what seems literary entails a layered activity ridden with questions of representation and authenticity. The literatures of various periods of social upheaval in Kerala points to the diversity of the experience of this 'selection' of experiences and stories deemed writable and worthy of representation. The communist movement, complex and varied from within, influenced not only the processes of selection but also the entire trajectory of an author as a writer, as an activist at times, as a critic, or as an opponent to others.

Apart from the fictional narratives written by the communist writers in dialogue with the movement itself or the tropes introduced by the communist movement, used by non-communist writers or fellow travellers, the biographies and autobiographies that were produced out of/in connection with the communist movement also are an equally interesting source for our theme. The first section deals with a novel titled *Devalokam* (The Heavenly World) published in 1965 by Cherukad, a well-known communist writer. In the second section a short story named *Bourgeois Snehithan* (The Bourgeois Friend) written by an important writer of the modernist period, Pattathuvila Karunakaran is discussed. The third section contains an analysis of a poem titled *Sankramanam* (Transformation) written by Attoor Ravi Varma one of the most serious voices in the modernist period, who is not considered to be a companion of the communist movement. In the fourth and last section we will read through some of the well-known autobiographies written by communist activists/writers from different periods and

analyse the way in which the relationship between self and morality is constructed in the communist discourse.

3.3. Paradise Questioned: Model Conjugality, Moral Decay and Political Decadence

We have already discussed in the previous section about the deep rooted transformation the society had undergone since the last decades of the nineteenth century, especially in the personal and familial spheres in Kerala. The growth of the communist movement during the 1950s culminated in the electoral victory of the CPI in 1957. This marks the end of an era that can retrospectively be called as the era of movements and the beginning of the administrative and policy making periods. Since then the CPI and/or the CPI (M) have come to power almost in every alternate election in the past sixty years. Such an ideological and electoral presence ought to have influenced the deeper layers of societal life and I build the larger thesis on this premise that the penetration of the communist movement into the grassroots of a society while negotiating with other forces like religious and community groups is to be held accountable for the ways in which the contemporary is formed in terms of its collective ethical, moral and political orientation.

Even after coming to power in 1957, there were numerous challenges faced by the communist party from the economically powerful, upper caste, community groups whereby the latter protested massively against the communist government. The land reforms and educational bills that the government proposed to bring in created strong resistance from powerful lobbies including some of the affluent Catholic Church managements, the Nair Service Society and the Indian Union Muslim League and they were organised politically along the platform of the Indian National Congress who were the electoral rivals of the communist coalition. At the local levels of this anti-communist mobilization they took recourse to the criticism that communist ideology was atheistic and anti-family and would lead the society to godlessness and chaos.

In this section we shall closely read *Devalokam*, a novel written by Cherukad (the popular name for Cherukad Govinda Pisharody)[32] during the years immediately after the

[32] Cherukad Govinda Pisharody (1914 – 1976) was born in an upper caste household in Malabar and was educated in Sanskrit and Ayurveda. He began his career as a primary school teacher but was terminated from the service later, due to his communist activism. Then he became a Malayalam lecturer in a college and continued to write and remain politically active. Later he resigned from his job and became a full-time

independence. Cherukad was a communist party member and activist throughout his lifetime and was a teacher, active in the teachers' trade union activities for a many decades. *Devalokam* was one of his later novels and about the period of publishing *Devalokam* he says, 'I was upset as someone closely witnessing during the twelve years from 1952 to 1964, the strides and workings of the communist party, which I had taken to be more precious than my own life' (Pisharody 2013, 12). According to him, this was an age of disillusionment and disenchantment for many comrades, as the party after forming the government followed a path of institutionalisation and bureaucratisation. The 'materialistic' gains which some of the leaders pursued inaugurated a 'winter' that froze the cadres' enthusiasm and commitment. The novel was first serialised in the *Deshabhimani Weekly* and was later published in the book form.

In the foreword written to the novel, Cherukad undertakes a candid analysis of the working of the party in its post-government phase. It would be interesting to consider the Foreword briefly before going into the text of the novel. The note of dedication at the beginning of the book itself is interesting. "In reality glued to the mud and earth, they imagine themselves to be flickering on the sky. To those intellectuals I dedicate this book" (Pisharody 2013, 9). The rest of the Foreword becomes a justification for this curious note of dedication and what he thinks has gone wrong with the communist party in the years post-independence.

We find a scathing criticism of the parliamentary path that the party followed and the resultant breaking down of the militant trade union and mass movements at the grassroots. On the one hand the division between the leader and the cadre widened and the meanings of various terms like discipline, democracy and mobilization changed. One could read this critique alongside the momentous split that the undivided CPI underwent

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activist and writer. He was an active presence in the *Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana* and unlike many other writers remained affiliated to the communist party throughout his life. He has written many novels, short story collections, dramas and some poems. His autobiography *Jeevithappatha* (The Path of Life) is hailed as an outstanding piece in the entire genre in Malayalam literature. K. N. Panikkar (1997) has argued that the 'intellectual break' created by the progressive literature in the trajectory of Malayalam literature and its intellectual domain produced many writers and thinkers among whom Cherukad occupies a dominant position.

in 1964 whereby a dissident faction came out of it and formed the 'more-left' CPI (M).[33] Fissures continued to occur and the Naxalbari movement in the later 1960s and the concomitant militant underground activities of various CPI (ML) fractions in the following decades tell a compelling story of internal criticism and efforts at radicalizing the movement.

Our interest in the novel titled *Devalokam* lies in a parallel register that runs throughout this work alongside the criticism Cherukad explicitly spells out in the foreword. The novel I would suggest lays out a narrative of the decadence that occurred in the communist party in Kerala after its ascent to governmental and administrative power in 1957, largely from the perspective of a moral anxiety. The tropes and characters are laden with their predilection towards or disapproval of the 'pleasures' that the newly gained powers could offer. The intellectuals associated with the party, hailing from the petty-bourgeois or landed aristocratic backgrounds stood to benefit the most from the institutionalisation that the party went through and for the author they betrayed the trust and commitment of the ordinary cadres who had given their lives to the party in the earlier years. Beyond the regular critique about the corrupting potential of power the novel goes onto tie the manoeuvres of the powerful with the greed for untameable pleasure and anarchy.

Coming to the main text, it epitomises the moral decadence of the communist ideals, some of its former leaders-turned bureaucrats, upwardly mobile petty bourgeois individuals, rising from the already degenerated feudal landlordism. The communist movement/party at the grassroots here, works, antithetical to the state bureaucracy, as the other possibility, a holistic way of life that enables a simple, morally fulfilling life and work. The private and public spheres of the life of an activist are redrawn and several examples of conjugal relationships are provided either as exemplars to be followed or as epitomes of degeneration.

Since this is a fairly large novel with 320 pages, a summary will not be amiss here. The novel begins by introducing Ramachandran, a young promising Communist

[33] The parliamentary faction of the CPI was called 'Gandhian comrades' and they were associated with the right-wing, opportunistic deviation of the undivided CPI, against which the left-wing rebelled and eventually left the party. At the same time the self fashioning of the communist activist involved a certain Gandhian mode of self-censoring and self-disciplining, a point we will take up later in the thesis in detail.

Party leader, the member of the State Committee and a rank holder in the Bachelor of Laws (BL) examination. He is well versed in Marxist philosophy and is a brilliant orator. He is in love with Rajamma, an equally brilliant law student and an active member of the student wing of the Party. They are shown to have engaged in pre-marital sex, twice, secretly during various party programs. The other party comrades are Aravindan, Pappachan and Kurien hailing from lower middle class households and committed to the party activities. Rajamma is a brave, intelligent woman who realises the immoral nature of her love for Ramachandran as she feels they should have kept the interests of the party before their interests and not have done such 'sexual exploits'.

In the meanwhile, Ramachandran gets qualified in the judicial exam and is worried about the police clearance for it owing to his communist activities. He receives a matrimonial proposal from a well-settled bureaucrat in the Central government for his daughter Lalita and he goes through a roller-coaster of feelings, about the party, Rajamma and his career ahead. Finally, he decides to leave his past behind and embrace the future as a magistrate and marry Lalita. Ramachandran's parents wanted him to marry his cousin, who is his bride-to-be by custom and thereby to get their daughter married to her cousin brother in return. But, they succumb to Ramachandran's decision to marry Lalita. He gets married to Lalita, his influential father-in-law clears his police verification and joins as a magistrate in a local court. Later he also clears his administrative service exam and gets posted as sub-collector in a district in south Malabar.

A two-layered narrative follows this point in which Rajamma's and Ramachandran's lives get unfolded in separate directions away from each other. Ramachandran finds it difficult to love his wife Lalita and when she is away he ends up having extra-marital affairs. The character of a corrupt police officer who encourages Ramachandran in his pursuit of boundless pleasure embodies the corrupt and alluring system itself. Rajamma is shocked to know the news of Ramachandran's marriage but recovers soon. When Rajamma finally decides to move on she says that 'the ashes of love would be manure to the society's growth' (Pisharody 2013, 113). She is an advocate now who actively partakes in party activities, especially those of the women's front. She gets married to Raveendran. Ramachandran ends up being a drunkard, womaniser and a corrupt bureaucrat who cheats on his wife who finally leaves him. Ramachandran

succumbs to the pressures from the corrupt police and in the last scene decides to pursue the 'pleasures of heaven or *devalokam*.

Apart from this central thread there are a number of narratives taking place in and around these protagonists. Let us briefly discuss some of these 'minor' storylines in the novel before coming to the larger argument of the chapter. The Dalit labouring family with whom Ramachandran was made to stay while in hiding after a police warrant against him for a speech he made at the party platform gives an alternative family model that Cherukad considers to be backbone of the communist party. Chanthukkutty, the young son of Shanku and Kunjamma comes across as a more mature character than Ramachandran who expresses blatant discomfort and disgust at the poor conditions in which the family lives. Another significant character is that of Thandamma, a strong willed labourer woman who works with Rajamma in the Women's wing of the party. The parents of Ramachandran, Rajamma and Lalita also occupy important spaces in the narrative. Now we shall take up a few related yet separate themes from the novel for discussion.

3.3.1. Declassing the Body: Experience of Caste in the 'Shelters'

As mentioned above, Ramachandran is accused of sedition after a speech he delivered at one of the political meeting organised by the communist party and the police are on the lookout for him. Kurien arranges an underground shelter for him to hide from the police in the shack of the working class family. This episode in his life is instrumental in solving his confusion regarding the future course of action. He has by then qualified his professional exam and he has to choose between joining the bureaucracy and continuing in the party. He contemplates on his future as a party activist and realises that it is not going to fetch him any comforts except starvation and misery.

Anyone familiar with the history of communist movements from this part of the world would know the significance attached to the 'underground days' in every communist leader's life as the 'real life' experiences of hunger, fear and discomfort, but more importantly as the moment of realisation about the sacrifices the cadres undergo in order to safeguard their leaders. The leaders, hailing mostly from the upper caste families would take shelter in the huts of lower caste labourers and share food and space with

them. As many leaders have recollected in their later autobiographies or interviews, the caste-barriers were 'broken' and 'declassing' took place for them during their stay in these huts and in brief they underwent a transformation that almost seems like 'a spiritual' and 'moral' journey. Transcendence in this context involves primarily a victory of the self over the caste hierarchies and bodily restrictions it provides along with an exposure into the gender question. There is a bodily journey that one has to undertake in order to transcend the bodily markers of caste and class.[34]

Here I intend to spell out the complex relationship between the corporeal and the spiritual and the mediating factor of the social. Cherukad depicts a complete reversal of this in *Devalokam* by moving away from the conventional description of the 'shelter' life and the spiritual transcendence the comrade could achieve while living it through the bodily nearness to the material conditions of the class with which one is trying to empathise and fight for.

Ramachandran finds it impossible to spend even a single night at the hut of Shanku, Kunjamma and Chanthukkutty and sneaks out of the place in the middle of the night after they have slept. He also steals a small torch that the family possessed. This incident is shown as a pointer towards the path of degradation Ramachandran is to follow later throughout the novel and also shows the inability of the petty bourgeois intellectual to undergo the process of declassing. The moral dilemma that constantly torments Ramachandran up to a point in the story passes a milestone at this point, and he takes a decision 'not to waste his life' in service of the party and these poor masses and to opt for the comfortable life of the bureaucrat. So, when he comes to know about the marriage proposal from an influential and wealthy family he decides to accept it after some

[34] The idea of spiritual transcendence has a very long and peculiar tradition in the region not just in terms of the ancient Vedic or later Advaitic thoughts, but more significantly in the re-working of various ancient and medieval traditions during the community reform movements in the early twentieth century. Udaya Kumar (2014) in his article on the idioms of Sree Narayana Guru, points towards an interesting move in Guru's arguments about the relation between the spiritual (*adhyathmikam*) and the worldly (*laukikam*) in the struggle for liberation. For an individual and more importantly for a community to achieve transcendence or spiritual liberation, Guru incorporates a social dimension into the spiritual one that enables him to talk about the economic prosperity of the members of a community and ways towards achieving it (Ibid). This presents a skilful method of materialising the caste/community question using a language of spirituality and merging the two distinct goals of spiritual and material liberation into a single one through a social path.

rumination about Rajamma. Here the moral decay in the life of a communist activist is imagined to be closely connected to his (the question of the woman activist is further complicated) inability to sacrifice worldly comforts and adopt the material conditions of the working class with humility and get declassed. This correlation the writer makes, and that too in a convincing manner, between the quest for bodily comforts and the incapability to choose the path of commitment over 'possible future comforts' makes it a moral choice in nature.

This absence of the transcendental journey in Ramachandran's life that as a comrade he could have experienced stays with him throughout and gets surfaced in moments when he has to make choices between right and wrong. The fleeting moments of guilt and shame that he feels cannot progress to reflection or change because of the flawed nature of his choices that prioritize pleasure over commitment. This idea of choice that an individual has vis-à-vis a revolutionary organisation takes us to the figure of the communist intellectual which is discussed in the next sub-section.

3.3.2. Intellectual in the Communist Party: A Liberal with a Choice

The figure of the intellectual has been central to the question of the relationship between philosophy and practice in Marxism. Since the legendary Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach[35] bridging the gulf between interpretation and transformation of the world has been the most tiresome task of every communist thinker and activist across contexts. The task of translating complex philosophical issues into common parlance so that it can be made use for the political processes of transformation rests on the intellectuals associated with the particular communist movements. Hence someone, whose 'skills' cannot be confined to the realm of organisational activity, but are intricately related to the ideological as well as strategic posturing of the organisation is considered to be an intellectual. For the present purpose we use the term intellectual in this broad sense whereby we put artists, writers and thinkers into the fold. Their activity deals with the realm of ideas and involves

[35] 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it' (Marx 1845)

ideation and artistic creation which needs to be used to forge the links between the vanguard party and the masses.

One of the most significant contributions to this question regarding the figure of the intellectual is from the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci and according to him the fundamental function of the intellectuals belonging to every class or social group is giving it homogeneity and a sense of its social, political and economic function. At the same time, he reiterates the Marxist idea that every practical action, however mechanical embodies certain 'creative intellectual activity' and hence "[A]ll men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (Gramsci 1985, 34). More often than not, those who occupy the social function of intellectuals hails from the middle classes and castes in any given society, owing to the intermediary position these groups enjoy in a society between capital and labour and the social mobility they have achieved with the ideological state apparatus.

Whether in Bengal or in Kerala – or in several others parts of the country and the world for that matter – where the communist party could grow its roots, the presence of this English educated middle class at the helms of the affairs of the party is unmistakably prominent. Their class position (caste too, though given less importance in the early decades) needed to be changed and they had to 'be adopted' into the working class party. Yet, they would occupy the position of highest importance as 'vanguard' within the 'vanguard party' and shape the patterns of mobilisation, ideological positioning and strategic decision-making, ethical and aesthetic orientation and above all dissemination of the scientific knowledge of Marxism, among the masses by 'translating' and 'simplifying' it.

Here let's take a brief detour from our discussion of the novel to an example from the early history of the communist cultural front to further substantiate the point. EMS had an interesting formulation about the nature of the intellectual who is committed to the communist party. The task of the intellectual (rather, writer in this context) was not different from that of the political activist according to EMS (Namboodiripad 1974, 342). His exploration into this idea is never more concrete than in his article about K. P. G. Namboodiri (henceforth KPG), a poet of the progressive generation who is almost erased

out of the contemporary poetic memory of Malayalam.[36] In the debates within the Progressive Literature Association in the mid twentieth century he was considered by the communist critics including EMS to be the model progressive poet who could make poetry out of his clear understanding of the working class movement. Here it will not be amiss to include a brief discussion on the figure of the poet and the conceptualisation of the figure of the intellectual-writer by the communist party.

According to EMS, KPG was the epitome of a writer whose contributions to the domain of literature was as much a contribution to the political activities of the communist party. He had no doubt about his role as the poet of the people; the poet of the communist ideology. His words were supposed to become the 'bricks' that build the communist party. Most of the leaders of the communist party had undergone a similar kind of transformatory process at various levels while building the workers movement all over the world, EMS argued. As he has communicated very clearly through his poems, KPG was nothing more than an activist of pen whose task was to raise people's awareness about the current political reality and to inspire them to join the struggle towards changing it. Through this act, 'KPG participated in the making of human beings out of workers' (Namboodiripad 1974, 345). Hence, by becoming a communist, a worker was in fact becoming a human being.[37]

Here, the poet is considering writing as a conscious activity that has to resist a number of reactionary pressures from various sides. Hence, keeping in line with the communist imagination of producing literature against the dominant cultural stream and contributing to the emergent mode of culture, KPG perceived himself as the vanguard of the new aesthetics that was is to become the basis for the modern Kerala society. Yet, he was 'adopted by' the proletarian class as he originally belonged to the dominant class (caste also). He underwent the process of de-classing in order to become the soldier of pen, the vanguard in the struggle of the working masses. The poet accepted and in fact cherished this transformation that he had undergone. As EMS aptly points out, the poet in

[36] Cherukad was also considered to be an exemplary communist writer by EMS, but EMS did not have to defend him or his works much as they were rather popular already unlike KPG's works.

[37] This idea has a strong resonance with the idea of 'making a human being out of a Namboodiri' *("Namboodiriye manushyanakkuka")* the key slogan in the Namboodiri reforms movement under the *Yogakshema Sabha* of which EMS was an activist before joining the Congress-Socialist Party and later the CPI.

KPG had blended his personality with the life-struggles of the ordinary people. Thus, this transformed personality became the weapon against the enemies of the working class in this struggle.

As EMS mentioned in the foreword written to KPG's poetry collection published posthumously, KPG was adopted by the working class as *their* poet. In the poem, *Sankethathil* (At the Rendezvous) KPG recollects the moment of this adoption when he received an anonymous letter in the trade union office in Alappuzha to reach a secret place. There the poet met a great leader whose sincere hospitality and warm embrace brought the poet into the fold of the party.

> I still remember my meeting with him.
> Though it was in a hut
> How royal was the welcome
> I received from him!
> Not with great many dishes, nor with the pompous style
> But, with a heart full of pure love.
> His words still echo in my ears:
> 'Come my poet, the worker will see you'[38]

For KPG, the communist poet is the mediator between Poetry and Labour as he vividly depicts in a poem titled *Velayum Kavithayum* (Labour and Poetry) (Namboodiri 1974, 169-170). Poetry anticipates the relations of the future and the poet becomes the prophet. Prophecy has a two-fold importance in the communist scheme; firstly, it translates the scientific understanding in the logic and inevitable collapse of capitalism and establishment of a new world order based on communist aesthetics and politics, into popular imagination and secondly, this instils confidence and optimism in the masses about this scientific knowledge that would in turn emerge as their revolutionary consciousness.

In these situations the intellectual-writer is set at a distance from the labouring class and their reality that is being represented and is, hence, able to evoke empathy and solidarity towards them. This distance is to be bridged with the help of strong ideological convictions and commitments as seen in KPG. This is a coming to terms with a *more real* reality of the working class as against the reality of the poet who belongs to the exploitative section. The poet is aware of this distance in terms of class and caste but

[38] Original Malayalam in Namboodiri 1974, 124.

believes it to be perfectly possible to bridge it and join the working class in their struggle. The effort is to destroy one's privileged positions in terms of class, caste and cultural locations and to merge into the new stream of proletarian culture. The writer has to forego his privileged class/caste positions and come down to the earth as if in a fall.

It is also a task of building up a parallel culture as a mechanism of creating an alternative hegemony. This is an attempt by the poet to overcome the gulf between the labourer and the intellectual as part of a deeper effort to overcome one's alienation intensified by the exploitative system. The task is huge when juxtaposed to the already existing canons of dominant art and culture. Every meaning has to be changed; every word has to be recovered and given a new dimension. The paradox underlying this effort is the division of labour that is maintained in this revolutionary activity as well. The intellectual can understand this large narrative and feel the impetus for social change. He will simplify the grand theory for the labourer; enable the labourer to raise his consciousness to new levels of knowledge. He has a pedagogic relation with the worker who will be taught to bring about the revolution as he is the universal revolutionary subject.

Cherukad in his novel has emphasised upon the role of such a budding intellectual, (*budhijeevi*) who could have been as asset to the party if not for his ethical and moral decadence as a result of his desire for comforts and power. According to Cherukad, 'an intellectual [of the communist party] is like a grain on the brim of a plate. It could fall either way' (Pisharody 2013 16). Intellectuals have options other than being the vanguard of the working class revolution, as they have gained the currency to a bourgeois life through their modern education. If one is a traitor (to the working class) he betrays everyone around him. He cannot be a good husband, son, brother, comrade and officer. He is a failure at all levels. It's a fall, definable only in terms of one's inherent and moral failure. One wants to lead an adulterous life and the habit continues. The intellectuals who belong to the non-working classes have options to fiddle with and 'choose' to be a traitor of one class or the other. Once again the question is whether or not one can make a morally sound choice irrespective of the material pleasures and gains that can be achieved from the wrong choice.

3.3.3. Bureaucracy as Dual Obstacle to Revolution

On a related note, the relationship between the class position of the intellectual, his access to education and habitual ease with a life of comfort attract him to the 'other options' open to him as ways of life, apart from the 'party life'. The most lucrative of those options is to join high bureaucratic offices. On the other hand, the party itself becomes a bureaucratic structure that makes it possible for the leaders to remain within the organisation and still not be organic in practice.

While Cherukad explicitly criticises the legislative and bureaucratic approach the party adopted that resulted in the lack of vigour in its activities in the Foreword, in the text of the novel the criticism is restricted to the real state bureaucracy that lures Ramachandran and makes him unfaithful and corrupt at all levels of his life. Cherukad does not deal extensively with the transformation the party system has underwent in the novel except for the influence certain figures like Nanukkuttan seem to have in the higher party echelons. Nanukkuttan who apparently had 'some connections' with the party before it came to power now enjoys the 'fruits of power' and the real comrades who worked towards the strengthening of the party remains far away from the leadership.

This disaffection between the leadership and the cadres happened owing to the institutionalised mechanism that the party adopted in the post-1957 phase. The novel has to be read along with the note of explanation author added at the time of its publication in book form, after hearing the criticisms and comments from the readership to its serialised form. Hence, on the one hand the novel criticises the actual bureaucracy that works as a den of corrupt individuals and on the other the change in the party structure leads to the de-radicalisation of its activities.

Bureaucracy is a term with complex etymological and historical meanings. From the neutral, impartial and hence just system of administration to the Kafkaesque critique of its convoluted and inhuman nature and its complicated location in the Marxist class analysis in relation to state and the conceptualisation of the party organisation as a hierarchical and top to bottom structure, the term posits analytical as well as theoretical challenges.

The Politburo (short for political bureau) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), for a long time, resembled the upper most bureaucratic institution in the

state and took decisions at the behest of the soviets and at the command of the General Secretary. It was one of the most anti-democratic and oppressive decision making body and its reflections occurred in many countries where communist parties held power and ventured into totally authoritarian and tyrannical trajectories. In the critique raised by Cherukad about the bureaucratization of the party structure, he points to the core of this problem of whether a party (especially the cadre-centric communist party) could remain connected to the masses and remain disciplined and efficient at the same time.

This further pertains to the question of the communist party that on the one hand enables the working classes to collectively struggle for social transformation and on the other hierarchically disciplines and separates the cadres from the leadership. Lenin's notion of democratic centralism could not sufficiently address the issue is clear. Here in this novel the writer addresses the question at two levels. The educated middle class upper caste intellectual opts out of the party life to get the life of a bureaucrat. The moral anxiety regarding this gets intensified when the party organisation itself turns bureaucratic and nurtures the intellectual leaders who are not in touch with the masses.

Moreover, the nature of the critique in the second case is more political than moral because it pertains to the de-radicalisation of the movement that mobilised the masses to fight for a just social transformation. But as I mentioned, this latter aspect is only present in the afterthought which became the Foreword in the later published book version and not tangibly present in the text of the novel. Cherukad visibly did not want to blame the party when he wrote the novel and later only when he was criticised for 'not projecting the committed comrades enough' did he responded to it with the scathing criticism (Pisharody 2013, 13). Now let us go on to discuss the central theme of our analysis in the next sub-section.

3.3.4. Model Conjugality and Communist Morality

Different imageries of conjugality (*daampathyam*) and other family relationships are portrayed with varying degrees of approval and disapproval in the novel. Unlike many of his previous works, *Devalokam* deploys the sexual lives of the protagonists as a central trope in the narrative. The novel has plenty of suggestive descriptions of sexual encounters mostly of corrupt nature like pre-marital or extra-marital sex. Romantic love

is given a dubious status in the novel as is evident from the monologue of Rajamma which we will discuss below. The 'inappropriate', lustful encounters between Ramachandran and Rajamma, donning the garb of romantic love is destined to fail as it does not have its roots in the soil of reality and commitment. J. Devika notes a similar point with regard to *Devalokam* that 'romantic love is rejected as a refinement of lust, which secretly sneaks back the body into the 'union of minds' (Devika 2005a, 480).

In Ramachandran's life, this lack of commitment and drive for pleasure later degenerates into his relationship with Mala Marar who stereotypically represents the emerging urban, English educated, morally loose and above all glamorous 'society ladies'[39]. His fall is ultimately depicted in the way he sexually exploits the young servant woman and disposes her off once she is pregnant. His marital life is broken as a result of his inability to control his lust, not just for women but also for money and comforts way beyond his professional capacity. The corrupt police officer whom he befriends epitomises the lack of commitment towards anything except *sukham* (pleasure).

As for the dubious status of love is concerned lets closely analyse the long reflection of Rajamma right after the night she spends in a hotel with Ramachandran, while going back to her house. She had just been admonished by Pappachan about the 'indecent' act she and Ramachandran committed. This thought process involves a number of interesting ideas regarding the feeling of love, its relation to the struggle of the working class and the communist party, the place for the feeling in a capitalist society and most importantly the connection between love and lust (*premam* and *kaamam*). Let's take each one and closely listen to their unravelling in Rajamma's mind. She thinks:

> As Pappachan said, love is the hobby of the bourgeoisie and they decorate their lives with it like an ornament, as they do not have any other aims in their lives. Love is the hobby of those lazy people who have no goal and the passion to work towards it. Do we see similar *kaamachaapalyam* (lustful indulgence) amongst the workers and peasants? No. They don't have the leisure to entertain such stuff. The bourgeoisie had made love into religion-like opium. I should not don my sexual appetite with the garb of pure love (Pisharody 2013, 70).

[39] The figure of the modern 'society lady' is very central to the novelistic and cinematic imaginations around the presence of English educated, fashionable and rich women who are out there in the public sphere with men. These caricatures of 'modern, educated and individuated woman' as J. Devika (2005a)calls them, carried the unmistakably misogynist connection between fashion, freedom and loose sexual morality. Both comic and overtly sexualized at the same time, the figures of these society ladies represented the male bashing feminist position also.

The bourgeois entertains such filth because of their leisure time and here she equates 'sexual lust' with religion. In fact, the more apt example would have been that of art which requires leisure and time and energy to contemplate upon things that go beyond the immediate existence. The working class is thus saved from the immoral temptations of life as a result of their inability to think beyond the means of subsistence. The theological connotations of these ideas are hardly in need of further clarification.

In the second part of the monologue Rajamma makes a very interesting move regarding the 'immoral' activities that she and her lover indulged in the previous night. She connects it with the larger oppressive and exploitative capitalist system in which the poor and jobless have no rights including that of coitus. Ramachandran claims he is in love with her but cannot marry her because of his lack of financial stability. But the natural desires of the body do not allow them to keep away from each other.

> Those uncontrollable sexual feelings had maligned last night. It feels bitter and sour at the same time. If we love each other genuinely why cannot we get married? His justification is that of not having a steady income and financial security. Then why haste to taste the fruits of conjugality? Sheer greed! We do feel strong desire; the object of desire is right in front of us. But we cannot taste it just because we don't have money. This is part of the economic philosophy of our society. It's just like staying hungry because of lack of money. Thus, people engage is thievery and adultery, disrupting all the social propriety and decency (Pisharody 2013, 71).

The political economic explanation of pre-marital sexual relation is given succinctly here and it is equated to of thievery and other crimes. The 'greed' does not allow a couple to maintain propriety during their courtship and forces them to follow the path of carnal knowledge.

> Here in this world capitalism does not even let you love. If you don't have money, you cannot get married. The wealth is controlled by a few. Until this wealth becomes people's we can satisfy neither the hunger for food nor for love. When people cannot control and discipline themselves, such crimes, deviations and prostitution happen. To freely experience sexual desire (*kaamam*) like wealth, a revolution is inevitable...Nevertheless, could we stop the flow of life, till the moment of revolution. Hence all these vulgar tendencies in the society. The thief steals out of hunger and we prostitute out of sheer desire (Ibid).

Like the wealth that needs liberation from its status as private property of a few, sexual desire needs to be freed from the hands of the few who are able to experience it freely. This freedom nevertheless does not indicate a freedom to choose whom to love or to love without getting admonished or stigmatised. Rather, it is a freedom to get married and

legitimately engage in sexual relation. This argument is curious when it collapses the distance between marriage, which is a social construct to maintain the order of the society and love that has a radical potential to challenge this order. To marry and to run a family without economic constraints, we need a change in the capitalist system that presently restricts it.

Apart from the pre-marital relation discussed above, the conjugal relationships we come across in the text mostly fall into four categories of which the first three are model husband-wife relationships in different ways. First kind of such relationships are rooted in the existing feudal patriarchal system and experience love and execute duty within it without questioning its logic, like Ramachandran's, Rajamma's or Lalita's parents. They are bound to each other by the unquestionable ordinariness of the union given to them by external forces like family, caste and community. Their disputes have a well-placed mechanism to sort them out. In the case of Lalita's parents, the aspect of duty is more significant as her father decided to marry her mother because of his financial condition that needed support from the bride's family. He took it as his duty to look after his disabled wife who gave him all the fortune.

The second set of marital bonds is mediated by a similar yet different system that is able to provide meaning, morality and unity to their relations. In the case of Rajamma and Raveendran both the partners have undergone the necessary transformation under the intellectual guidance of the class ideology. One of the most significant set of dialogues in this novel takes place between Rajamma and Raveendran when he comes to meet her for the first time. He says, 'according to me, marriage is a business contract. And, I don't have any love. Not to Rajamma also. If Rajamma is ready to accept this decent contract I am ready too. That's all'. Rajamma responds by saying '[I] need clarification about some clauses in the contract'. She asks him, 'after the marriage, will you encroach upon my freedom? My interest, my job, my political activism, my individuality...? In brief, will I cease to exist after our marriage?' Raveendran responds quickly with a no and says 'Rajamma should not engulf me too' (Pisharody 2013, 215). Here, the marriage is transformed from a sacrament as seen in the first example to a contract and the

significance of such a move is theorised by many feminist theorists from various religious and cultural contexts.[40]

Then there is a third model of marital relation that is connected to the second one. The relationship between Shanku and Kunjamma is portrayed as the epitomized working class bond; the one Rajamma reflects in her thoughts mentioned above. In their deplorable living conditions and utter misery, this couple lives in harmony with their son. If the marital contract that Rajamma and Raveendran signs reflects the ideological and intellectual engagement with the communist party and its philosophy, the companionship between Shanku and Kunjamma draws upon an experiential register of their commitment to the class ideology of the communist party. The working class lives are transformed through the channelizing of their energy to the cause of building of the party organisation and class struggle. The fourth instance of the conjugal relationship is shown as being corrupted by Ramachandran due to his greed and lust. This does not need more explanation here as this is already discussed in different sections above.

The discussion opens up some new ways of looking at the communist literary engagement with the intimate spheres of human existence. As we know *devalokam* is a space where all the *sukham* (pleasure) is available in abundance. Here *sukham* comes not as an antithesis to *dukham* (which is sadness in the literal sense) but to *samtripti* (fulfilment) that could only come with commitment and responsibility. *Sukham* need not be peaceful and calm if one's pursuit for it is devoid of commitment towards that which seems right to him/her.

The moral foundations of the communist imagination is clearly visible in the text, not just in terms of its take on conjugal relationships but also on the idea of bodily declassing and individual transformation, in the question of the intellectual with a choice to be or not to be and the issue of bureaucracy within and without of the party structure. The novel is the story of a man's moral degradation that is fundamental in nature. But it is also a crisis for the party itself as it is unable to transform comrades like Ramachandran because it has fallen into the path of institutionalisation and bureaucratization. The following section looks more closely at the links between body, the feeling of love and

[40] See a detailed ethnographic and theoretical discussion on the changing nature and meaning of marriage in India in Patricia Uberoi, 1994. *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India* (ed),UK: Oxford University Press.

the legitimate avenues of attaining *sukham* in the communist imagination of the modernist period.

3.4. Queering Camaraderie: Bourgeois Friend and the Impossible Romance

One of the central questions that occupied the leftist literary and aesthetic circles across the globe was the possibility of 'balancing' between the objective aspects of writing/artistic production including the location of the writer in the socio-economic relations of production with the subjective aspects including imagination and ideation. We have examined the theoretical discussion in the cultural fronts of various communist parties on the same in the previous chapter.

This dilemma spills over to the larger theme of our dissertation that is the relationship between politics and aesthetics in the Marxist theoretical and creative discourses. One's approach to the latter question has to be framed in accordance with one's definition of the nature of the activity of aesthetic production and the role the material relations of production play in it. It is unproductive to look for the ratio in which this relationship is struck in the case of each writer and each work. Yet, the politics of a work is an integral part of the material embeddedness of the same as it forms the map of the 'sensible' as Rancière (2004a) denotes, which the work has to engage with and alter.

In the Foreword to the short story collection of Pattathuvila Karunakaran[41] (henceforth Pattathuvila) written by Kiran Prabhakaran we come across a similar point regarding the politics of those short stories. He writes,

> [S]ome writers do not bring in politics from outside in order to politicise the text rather the subjective peculiarities themselves politicise it from within. Hence, the fictional world, apart from denoting the subjective creation of an individual writer, owing to its contemporary relation to history becomes a particular reality defined along a particular relation of power. The fantastic, unreal, personal and the perspectival elements in the fiction would surface as the speciated indicators of socio-political reality (Prabhakaran1999, 7-8).

[41] Pattathuvila Karunakaran (c.1925-1985) was a management professional in a multinational company for the larger part of his life. At the same time ideologically he was a fellow-traveller of the radical left movement and most of his works reflect and respond to the changing socio-political trajectories of Kerala. He contributed to the modernist Malayalam literature from the late 1940s to the 1980s mostly in the form of short stories.

Pattathuvila is commonly referred in the literary history of Malayalam as the writer par excellence of political modernism in the vernacular. According to some scholars the term modernism evades a coherent definition in the aesthetic discourse in Malayalam (Raveendran 1999, 178). The era of modernist literature presents many difficulties in front of the students of literature owing both to the vast scope and wide variety of the works and genres produced during the period. O. V. Vijayan's novel *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* achieved a cult status as inaugurating this phase of modernism in Malayalam literary scene.In an essay on *Khasakkinte Ithihasam*, Raveendran wrote,

> Modernism perhaps is too general a term to describe the shift in fictional grammar that this novel accelerated. But it is valuable as a term that designates the new sensibility which flourished in all Indian languages almost simultaneously after the mid fifties. This sensibility has now, by a consensus of opinion, been superseded in these languages by other sensibilities variously described as nativist, eco-feminist, communitarianist and post-modernist. Indian modernism is now seen largely as a historical relic, a poor cousin of the once-powerful first world modernism which itself had become irrelevant in the West by the forties or thereabout (Ibid Raveendran 1999, 178).

We could provide an extensive list of novelists, short story writers, poets and playwrights whose works are considered to be modernist by various scholars and critics. S. Krishna Kumar contends that there were resonances between the presence of 'existential fear, neurosis, nostalgia, death-wish, metaphysical despair and spiritual emptiness' in modernism in Malayalam and western literature (2000, 157). These general 'defeatist' positions disappear from the political modernist works.

This 'post–progressive moment' needs to be associated with the absence of any overarching communist cultural front in the public sphere and the fading of the aesthetic formidability of the progressive canon. A comprehensive evaluation of the period of the array of writings is not within the scope of the thesis. Nevertheless, it is important to mark the complex relation the communist critics had with the modernist writers and in order to do so we need to remind ourselves about an earlier moment from the progressive literary movement.

In the heated debate within the progressive movement of the 1940s, the definition of realism as a method of writing and its nuanced interpretations effectuated the eventual split in the movement. The communist ideologues emphasised upon the need to adopt a socialist realist technique which not only 'describes' the world as it is but also gestures

towards a progressive future. To cut the story short, they argued that representing the decadence of the bourgeois society in literature amounted to decadence in literature itself and termed many of the significant writings of the period as *adhama sahityam* or decadent literature (Devadas 1991).

In a related way, many of the 'modernist' works were criticised and rejected by the communist party and its critics as falling into the same old decadent corpus. In an interesting manner, the modernist works in Malayalam included the existentialist strain also. Here we take up a short story written during the 1960s by Pattathuvila titled *Bourgeois Snehithan* (The Bourgeois Friend). *Bourgeois Snehithan* offers a unique moment in the trajectory of left literature (not because the writer claims to be a leftist writer, but the thematic and problematic are inseparably invested in the imagination of the working class movement in the region) as it opened up a new world of homo-social, if not homo-erotic, possibilities of masculinity and friendship, away from the familiar and cherished notions of camaraderie and/or romantic hetero-love.

The relationship between the local communist trade union leader Chandran and his 'bourgeois friend' (*snehithan* is commonly used to denote friend, but the word *sneham* goes way beyond friendship to mean love, even conjugal love) who himself is the narrator of the story is characterised with contradictions. The bourgeois friend is torn between the two words that make him up; between his petty bourgeois sensibilities and his indefinable feelings for the communist leader.

The story is plagued with subtle and not-so-subtle references to the nature of intimacy shared by the trade unionist and his bourgeois friend. The bourgeois friend's name is not revealed throughout the narration. The short story is shaped around the monologues and unruly pieces of memory of the friend who hails from an upper class probably upper caste household that maintains scorn and disdain for communist politics, especially trade union movements in the region. The story is situated in an unnamed small town in Kerala and all the usual visual and affective paraphernalia needed to establish a romantic relationship is used skilfully, to show the nature of the relationship between Chandran and his *snehithan*. The elements of the relation recollected in retrospect takes us into the crooked boulevards of male homo-social companionship.

Henrike Donner, a scholar who studied the question of masculinities in the Naxalite movement in West Bengal, through in-depth interviews with the participants and their family members, write that '[N]o doubt there also existed intimate relationships between some of the comrades, though unlike the sexual freedom enjoyed by heterosexual couples, these were never discussed in the course of the life histories I collected' (Donner 2009, 339). This story stands apart in the history of Malayalam fiction as it deals with the homosexual or homoerotic dimension of love and places it in the most uncommon of turfs, that of the communist imagination of camaraderie. It cannot be contained in the masculine notions of camaraderie that is expected to be forged through the process of politicisation the activists undergo as part of the movement.

We will divide the section into three sub-sections that deal with three aspects of the central question of the relationship between politics and sexual morality in the leftist imagination in the local milieu. Before we do that and closely approach the text let us contextualise it in the discourse of romantic love and its trajectory of politicisation in Malayalam in the twentieth century and the era of communist literature around the same.

3.4.1. Writing Love in Malayalam: A Peculiar Strain in Literary History

It is interesting to look at the history of the concept of modern love (*aadhunika sneham*) in Malayalam as a meaningful detour. The early social novels and poetry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century started to address the question of love between a man and a woman in a manner that was radically different from the dominant traditional literary approach to the same that can be termed under the category of *bhramam* (lust or attraction) as against *sneham* or *premam* (love). The union of souls as a pre-condition to the union of bodies in marriage and confronting the obstacles that the traditional society posed in the path of this union became the central themes of writing.

Changampuzha Krishnapilla (henceforth Changampuzha)[42] in his celebrated poem *Ramanan* established the inevitability of the romantic love falling prey to the socio-

[42] Changampuzha KrishnaPillai (c. 1911-1948) could be fittingly described as the most popular poet that modern Malayalam has ever produced. He published his first poem in 1927 when he was hardly 17 years old and the first poetry collection *Bashpanjali* was published in 1935. Changampuzha wrote poetry in a simple and passionate style uprooting it from the older traditions of writing. As M. N. Vijayan (2008) said, Changampuzha poetry's tremendous popularity was the result of both the musicality and 'rootlessness' of

economic structures of the feudal society. A brief discussion on this poem will not be amiss here as it defined the later contours of the literary representation of love in the language. Changampuzha wrote *Ramanan* (1938) when his close companion, neighbour and fellow poet, Edappally Raghavanpilla committed suicide after a failed love affair. *Ramanan* became the love story par excellence between two unequal persons, in this case a poor shepherd boy and a rich, sophisticated urban-bred girl. The poem ends with the suicide of Ramanan after being betrayed by his beloved Chandrika who married a rich suitor. Changampuzha's love was always taunted by betrayal, compassion was cruelty in disguise and smile was the epitome of artifice. The friend of the protagonist Ramanan is another shepherd boy Madanan (the poet himself) who warns him of the unequal status of the two lovers and the impossibility of their desire play an important role in the narrative.

It was published in 1938 and became the most popular work of literature that modern Malayalam, comparable only to *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippaatt* written by Ezhuthachan. *Ramanan* was read by the large literate Malayalee population, product of the first set of schools that imparted 'secular' education. It was accessed by pupils across genders, castes and classes. By the late 1930s, for the first time in the history of the region a vast number of people began to read news papers, magazines and literary texts regularly. Changes in the socio-economic realm also aided the ordinary masses to spend more money on things that went beyond the level of subsistence. The authoritative joint family structure used to appropriate the entire income of the members under the hold of the head of the family and he could devise the expenditure pattern for the whole household. Such an allocation of money would have never allowed the young generation to utilize money for the new world of books, magazines and other printed materials. The relative independence and responsibility enjoyed by small families to earn and spend money through newer avenues enabled the growth of print capitalism in Kerala. The *Granthashala Prasthanam* initiated the widespread establishment of reading rooms across the state and that became another important marker of the changing times.

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his poems. He became part of the editorial board of the *Mangalodayam* magazine. His alcoholism and disordered life made him severely ill by 1947 and Changampuzha died in 1948.

Ramanan became one of the first literary texts in Malayalam that tapped the maximum potential of all these changes in the cultural sphere of Kerala society. The second, third and fourth editions of the long poem were brought out respectively in 1939, 1941 and 1942. In 1943, the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth editions were out. Next year again six more editions were published where each edition printed one thousand to five thousand copies of the book. Well-known critic Joseph Mundassery remarked in the Foreword written for the fifteenth edition of *Ramanan*,

> *Ramanan* has become the first textbook [of Malayalam] in the beach, balcony, boat jetty, vehicle stand, hotel, palace, hut, field, factory, and war front. If a new literary inclination is present in all these walks of life, Changampuzha could be proud that it is his early work that created this spirit (Mundassery 1990, 268).

It was an unprecedented event, not only for the Malayalam context but for most Indian languages as far as a literary works were concerned. Mundassery (1990) observed that *Ramanan* exhibited the direct influence of European pastoral poems in its simplicity, lyrical flow, melancholy and drama. However, this was considered by Mundassery as an achievement rather than lack of originality as this innovative effort reduced the distance between ordinary people and good literature. Changampuzha wrote most of the poem in Dravidian metres with utmost musicality.

For Kesari, *Ramanan* epitomizes the characteristics of the 'Defeatist Movement' writing in Malayalam that resonates with the realist style in European literature as seen in the works of writers like Émile Zola, Honore dé Balzac, Gustav Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, Oscar Wilde and Fyodor Dostoevsky. The dominant spirit of this approach is the utter disillusionment with the bourgeois society and its ideas of civilization and morality. A deep sense of betrayal by the hierarchical social structure, decadence prevalent in the society, strong distrust and suspicion about the civilized world as a whole, inward-looking and narcissistic tendencies and dreadful loneliness and helplessness define the dominant contours of Changampuzha's poetry (Pillai 1984, 432).

The *natural* need of a man to love and be loved is curtailed and suffocated by the traditional society ridden with social barriers and the capitalist utilitarian rationality came with the colonial invasion. The hierarchies based on class and societal status trample upon the sincere efforts of a man to be free. Unfreedom, as it is forced upon the creative individuals becomes the moot point around which Changampuzha configures his

imagination. Kesari wrote extensively about Changampuzha and his 'Defeatist Movement' in his articles on literature. Kesari was strongly influenced by both Marx and Freud in his reading of Malayalam literature and he argued that the writers of the 'failure movement' showed exhibitionist and sadist tendencies. Kesari wrote in the Foreword to another poet's work that 'in Freud's language, their [the advocates of the failure movement's] ego surrenders more to reality (i.e. nature or circumstances) than to their super ego or id [whereas] in the romanticists (*manam-nokki* that literally means mind-looking) their ego surrenders more to their super ego and id more than the reality around' (Pilla 1984, 431).

The ushering in of modernism in Malayalam poetry does not really correspond to the period of Kerala's historical modernity that spans from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the early ones of the twentieth century. It is only by the 1960s and the 1970s that Malayalam witnessed the emergence of modernist idioms and tropes commonly in poetry. But as K. Satchidanandan (2007) argues the works of many poets in the era of modernity and later showed many aspects of this modernist turn. When we extend this beyond the realm of poetry, it correlates with the observation we made above, regarding the discomfort and 'disgust' expressed by many communist critics of modernist writings resembling therejection of the works of the earlier generation (1940s and 50s) of realist writers like Thakazhi Sivasankara Pilla, Kesava Dev, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, S. K. Pottekkad and Ponkunnam Varkey by the communist critics of that generation.

Changampuzha occupies a unique position in this history as he produced 'poetry of utter emptiness (*shoonyata*), hallucinations and sheer artifice of this changing society' (Vijayan 2008, 95) for the first time. Let us read the most celebrated couplet by Changampuzha that embodies the spirit of the 'Defeatist Movement'; I owe my failure in this sham world/ To my sincere heart (Pilla 1990, 123).[43] These lines sum up his attitude towards the society in which he lived, loved and hated simultaneously. The society is blindly cruel in his poetry where it makes the free development of the individual impossible.

[43]*Kapata lokathil aatmarthamayoru/ Hrudayamundaayataanen parajayam.* These lines are taken from Changampuzha's poem called 'Irulil' [In the Darkness] and published in *Bashpanjali* in 1934.

The intimate sphere of human interaction and the associated moral and ethical dilemmas are the least addressed issues in Marxist aesthetics. How do you politicise love? The renaissance way was to break the artificial social barriers, like in *Duravastha* or to succumb to these barriers as in *Ramanan*. Later on numerous narratives were written that belonged to either one of these categories and these works criticized the barriers whether love 'triumphs' or 'fails' ultimately. Let us get back to *Bourgeois Snehitan* after the long detour in the next section to looks at the 'impossible' relationship that is narrated in it.

3.4.2. The Impossible Meeting Point of Queer Love

Let us begin our analysis from the final instance in the narrative which is plotted in the form of a question. The question 'will we ever meet again?' raised by the bourgeois friend at Chandran ends the narrative. I intend to argue here that the real question that gets hidden in the narrative is in fact 'Have we ever met, at all?' The question is whether it was possible for us – who are individuated through the process of coming closer, yet bound to the respective structures of authority that makes this individuation impossible – to meet, the way we would have wanted to meet each other. We will discuss the nature of these structures of authority in the next section.

As mentioned earlier the romantic and erotic pointers of their relationship are dispersed all through the narrative in the narrator's description of not only his feelings for Chandran but also of the sharing that takes place between the two men. A few sentences are quoted here that could reveal the economy of desire that is at work in the story.

> For how many hours did Chandran use to wait for me on this bridge! How anxious are the moments before our meeting! The moment we are together, we start floating aimlessly. We are so content with each other's presence. The background doesn't matter. We don't realise the passing of time. How childish was my behaviour? I get angry if he is late even by a few minutes. I start counting the seconds impatiently...I am ashamed of it now.' 'Then when he arrives finally, I would turn away as if I wasn't waiting for anybody, as a punishment for getting late...Chandran would steal a look at me with love and interest...This would go on for some time...Later when we part I would ask, 'when will meet tomorrow? (Karunakaran 1999, 38-39).

This long quote is just a glimpse of similar moments that reveal the strained economy of desire that attempts to burst out of the control, exercised from both ends. The bourgeois

friend has a sense throughout the story about the 'immaterial', floating nature of their meetings that lack any concrete meeting points in the social they live in.

The bourgeois friend has no clear political knowledge or convictions beyond the sympathy and respect he feels for Chandran and his comrades. He is visibly uncomfortable in the way his family mocks a communist rally, but he is not able to confront them and defend the ideology or politics associated with the rally. At the same time, he is also uncomfortable at the trade union office, where he goes to meet Chandran (after waiting for him at the railway over bridge) and is called Chandran's 'bourgeois snehithan'. He only has a superficial knowledge of the activities in which Chandran is involved and their relationship is not based on political communication. He wants to be part of Chandran's politics, but all he could do is to crease the sleeves of his shirt with his own hands to look 'declassed'.

At the same time, their relation cannot be built on an imagination of a future family as in the case of hetero-romance.[44] In that case, a hazy feeling of sympathy and personal commitment and readiness to sacrifice one's class privileges were enough for it to be materialised. But, in the case of a homo-erotic relation it is a failed relationship even before it 'blooms'. This is clear from narrator's monologues about their togetherness.

> [W]hen I look back, at the complete nature of this relation, I could feel the unnaturalness of it. I am only amazed that it lasted this long. It should have been severed long ago. Even when we were content by the mere presence of each other, an inexplicable sorrow used to fill the air. A strong belief that it will not last long. Just did not have the courage to utter it out. A life that constantly questioned [my] beliefs (Karunakaran 1999, 42).

The pain and helplessness that characterises this monologue point towards the failure of the individuals to overcome the social pressures and norms. Once again, it cannot be the usual story of upholding individual love against all odds created by the caste/class hierarchies. What we have here in Pattathuvila's story is not the noble and lamentable failure of Ramanan. It is *unutterable*, *unacknowledgable* and impossible even before the meeting. Though the story sets in motion an entire structure of romantic engagement, a

[44] Instances where women from upper class families fall in love with communist leaders and leave their comfort zones to establish a model nuclear family have been rampant in Malayalam literature, theatre and cinema. These women abandon their class/caste backgrounds and enter into an equally patriarchal family system with the communist man who more often than not plays no role in the running of it. A critique of this imagination of the family is discussed later in the chapter.

potentially radical possibility of an inter-class relation, the sheer fact of it being homo-erotic, makes it unacceptable for the communist imagination. The long wait to meet each other, the desire to be together, the desire to see the person, hold hands and walk in silence, the complaints, the tears and the restlessness that comes from the sense of responsibility and ownership are all familiar to us. But we know only too well that it will 'wilt before it blossoms'.

The impossibility of love between a bourgeoisie and a proletariat at a deeper level corresponds to the impossibility of a revolution and the utopian brave new world from which the bourgeois friend shies away. The presence of the 'other' makes him shiver with fear and repulsion. His self-doubt and diffidence is premised upon his misplacedness in both worlds. But he chooses to be in the bourgeois world and feels relieved when the flimsy link between him and the other world that promises a 'third' new world is severed. Hence, the impossibility is structurally chosen from both sides. As for Chandran, the 'weaker' element of his personality is only expressed in his relation to his friend and it is essential for him to re-masculinise himself in order to build the new world (through the party).

Hence the *unnarrativizable* pops up in the impossibility of its existence and the status quo is restored at the end with the severing of the tie that had subversive and disruptive potential. The aesthetic regime of art, as Rancière (2004b) calls it, destabilizes the writer-narrator-reader complex by resurfacing the unspeakable layer of camaraderie. The homo-erotica was the most subterranean presence in literature and art until the very recent theoretical, political and cultural mobilizations by the LGBT, queer groups. From this question that links the individual to the collective and the impossibility of a romantic engagement to the impossibility of a new imaginary collective we go into the question of sexuality in the making of communist masculinity. There is a possibility of queering camaraderie here that gets purged by the inevitable hetero-marriage.

3.4.3. Sexuality in Camaraderie and its Moral Valency

The Foreword to the Anthology of Pattathuvila's short stories is already mentioned above and it discusses the story under consideration in some detail. The Foreword written by Kiran Prabhakaran (1999) talks about the socio-political and even some of the aesthetic

aspects related to the stories in general and this one in particular. Explicit presence of sexuality is identified as a peculiar feature of Pattathuvila stories in this Foreword and many particular stories are mentioned in this regard. He undertakes a detailed analysis of this peculiarity in relation to morality always already being class-morality. Obscenity is read as moral code itself written in the reverse order and hence the bourgeois morality has the discourse of obscenity within its folds. This is then connected to the question of one's belonging to the family and then the state and the impetus to leave the familial as the first step towards leaving one's class belonging behind.

However, the reading of *Bourgeios Snehithan* is conspicuously separate from the analysis of sexuality in the author's oeuvre. When we read the story today the sensuous presence of sexualit*ies* not only as an auxiliary component but as the central track itself is unmistakably forceful. But he does not extend his argument about the discourse of sexuality in the hetero-sexual vocabulary to the problematization of the intimate world and politicisation of it vis-à-vis the two male 'friends'.

How was it possible for the writer to ignore this presence in an essay written as late as in 1999? The only possible explanation could be that the queer movement was not a strong contender in the intellectual and political public sphere of Kerala until the turn of the millennium. It was not possible to read the text in a particular manner without the context provided by the aesthetic shifts in the larger social, caused by what Rancière (2004a) calls the disruption of the distribution of the sensible.

Now let us come to question of sexuality (of the characters and as an analytical category) in the story. The narrator is the weaker partner, the seemingly vulnerable 'feminine' partner who finds solace in 'the arms of his man'. Prabhakaran talks about the abject position of the self/narrator vis-à-vis the other who is full of clarity and resoluteness and is respected by the narrator and others. He waits for Chandran on a railway over bridge and waits rather impatiently. He throws tantrums when Chandran finally comes late and gives the excuse of some party meeting or committee. He refuses to listen to reason. A while later, he feels sorry and smiles for his man. The sight of Chandran in the costume of a prisoner tortures him and he feels his body is the one that undergoes the experience.

In another instance, the narrator explains his feelings when Chandran is about to give a public speech. His body shivers, and it palpitates. His heart beat increases and he feels severe pressure. And when Chandran finishes his speech to loud applause he feels relieved and proud. Pattathuvila is putting in all possible bodily registers to denote their relationship, to show the connection they have, the comfort level they enjoy and the desire they have for each other's bodies.

The climax of the story carries mixed feelings for the narrator as well as for the reader. Chandran in their last meeting discloses his decision to get married to a woman and the narrator hears it with disbelief at first. Chandran goes on to say that the party has clear-cut plans for him and this is a party decision. The bourgeois friend is puzzled as to what his feeling should be. But from a few reflections he has had before while waiting for Chandran once, makes it clear for us that he is relieved at one level.

> This is a signal. There is no point in me waiting for Chandran, ever. An intimate bond is softly dissolving and now vanishing totally. It felt coarse and painful. This hadn't happened all of a sudden. This couldn't have happened in any other way. The most natural ending. Even in the unbearable pain, I felt relieved. Felt, this is good, after all. It wasn't possible [to carry this forward] in the older way (Karunakaran 1999, 36).

Though this sense of attachment and bodily connect can be commonplace in all romantic relations, the pain, deeply ingrained with helplessness is the typical characteristic of any homoerotic relation, especially before the mainstreaming of the queer problematic. A man with fluid sexual tendencies is considered to be effeminate, weak and above all repulsive.

It is interesting to see the ambiguous sexual identity of the friend getting unravelled in the absence of Chandran, who otherwise provides emotional anchoring for him. In another instance in the narrative, an explicit sexual encounter of the bourgeois friend is described. A teenage girl who delivers milk at his house comes to the house when he is alone there. He tries to grope her and she stands close to him,

> '[W]hat is your name?' I asked. 'Bhargavi!' 'May I call you Sridevi? Sridevi is my favourite name'. Um.' She smiled. She took my hand and kept it on her breasts. Firm, growing breasts. I said, 'once you grow up you will raise your skirt for anyone with a shirt on!' (Karunakaran 1999, 41).

His mother comes at the moment and he feels nauseous. He never sees the girl again. Later he reflects on this incident and says that Chandran was in jail during that time and

if he were not, such a thing would not have happened because it was unbearable solitude is what made him do so.

The narrator has a clear crisis in his sexual identity, as his relationships with real women are often of hatred or violation (barring the imaginary character, which is actually a mere name, 'Sridevi'). This crisis is paralleled by a crisis in his class identity, which distances him from his love. However, despite all his affection and desire, the narrator's class identity is something that he does not want to forfeit (he is, for instance, proud of his ability to recognize posh cars), as it enables him to overpower Chandran, by showing off something that the latter lacks.

Perhaps the real provocation of the story lies in addressing the question of bourgeois morality. In communist history more often than not sexual deviation is understood to be a feature of 'bourgeois decadence', as we already mentioned in the communist critic's classification of *adhama sahityam* as opposed to *purogamana sahityam*. Even though it is unclear if Chandran has the same sexually charged feelings for the narrator, the feeling of sensuous affection laden with a sense of melancholy that stems from the realisation of the impracticality of their bond is visibly present in him. The effeminate bourgeois character as the narrator and his feelings of love, desire and disappointment in relation to the masculine comrade would only reveal an aspect of this complicated narrative. Let me conclude this section with a question; is it possible then to replace the gender of one of the lovers and make the narrative heterosexual without causing distortion to its affective registers?

3.4.4. Old Bridges and Beneath: The Class Question of Intimacy

The bridge on which the lovers waited for each other, for a meeting that was impossible is a central motif in the story that attempts to bridge class divisions. The narration happens from the top of the bridge where the narrator waits for Chandran one last time. As we already discussed, the meeting was impossible at a deeper level primarily because of the problematic terrain of sexuality they were on. The other major factor contributing to this impossibility is the class difference that separates the bourgeois friend from the proletariat leader.

Chandran responds to the narrator's demand to be admitted to the revolutionary party by saying that only a person who has experienced economic crisis can be a party activist and *he was no 'recruiting agent'. The idea of recruiting through pedagogic and intellectual engagement is central to the mobilization of communist parties. So this response comes out of his conviction that the bourgeois friend is not serious about it or is incapable of such politicisation. From the other side, the narrator is mocked by his sisters for showing sympathy to the working class march. He is called 'comrade little brother' by them and he feel irritated about it. He feels that both his family and Chandran takes him to be a dumb or silly person. In an earlier section we discussed the notion of declassing which enables the upper class/caste person to join the party and be adopted by the masses. A person undergoes a transformatory experience that cannot be taught but only be learned.*

Chandran never urges his friend to take politics more seriously or to engage more with his comrades in the party. In a romantic relationship, many a times this happens because of the gulf between the public and private lives of the political leader. In most cases of revolutionary romances (unless the woman too belongs to the party from the beginning) the woman is not characterized by her political knowledge or even interest. But the strength of her love, manifested in the understanding she shows towards the sacrifices her partner has to make as a political figure and the skillful management of the household and children without complaining and with the limited resources such a life could offer. Since this relationship was romantic in nature, Chandran might not have pursued pedagogic politicisation with regard to his friend. The relationship between the narrator and Chandran is also one between two classes that have an irreconcilable and antagonistic relationship in Marxist theory. Hence the gulf cannot be bridged merely by standing on it waiting for the love.

Coming back to the motif of the bridge of building class solidarities, an interesting observation can be made about the space beneath it. Beneath the bridge, or beneath the effort at affectionate bridging of class differences, there is a dark work of desire, jealousy, resentment and disappointment, all under the surveillance of the social law. In an incident the narrator witnesses two persons being arrested from there by the police for pederasty. This is a precursor to the end of the homo-social affection between

the narrator and Chandran that is not allowed to be blossomed; as there are norms and customs set by the society, as well as, the party. From here we can take up the issue of authority as playing the most important role in the narrative both from within and without the protagonists.

3.4.5. The Party and/as the Family: The Question of Authority and Freedom

After discussing the differences that keep the two persons apart from each other let us come to a point of similarity that is instrumental in this separation. It is their subordination to a structure of authority, though to different ones at that. The personal life of Chandran, except for the intimacy shared with the narrator, is never once mentioned in the story. Like many communist activists, Chandran seems to have broken away from the family in order to be a political activist. Yet, for Chandran, the structure of the party fills this vacuum created by his dissociation from or lack of a family. The decision to get Chandran married comes from the party and one cannot but be struck by the resemblance it bears with many other love stories that came to an end as a result of family intervention in the form of an arranged marriage with a suitable bride or groom for one of the couple. Substituting one kind of system of belonging with another equally or more hierarchical structure is what we witness here. Utterances like, the party is my family or we are like a family in the party are quite commonly read in the self-narratives or even light talks of the communist party activists and in a later section in the chapter we take up the issue in more detail. For now we focus on the nature of authority that the party exercises on the personal lives of its members, especially leaders who are to be models for the rest of the cadres.

On the contrary his friend's bourgeois family is constantly shown in the backdrop of the narrative, full of contempt and scorn for the poor, the labourers and the lower classes. Here his mother/family becomes the point of reference and he succumbs to the authority rather nonchalantly, like Chandran does to the authority of the party. The bourgeois-ness of the friend is typically characterised in his Hamletian confusion 'to do or not to do' with regard to his aspiration and desire vis-à-vis Chandran and he is relieved at the end when suddenly the confusion ends with interference from outside.

Henrike Donner (2009), in his study about the radical masculinities in the Naxalite movement of West Bengal, argues that central to formation of masculine identities is the challenging of authority. From a psychoanalytical perspective, most Naxalites questioned the paternal authority in their respective families and joined the party. In the party, many of them recollect to have had equal and radically engaging relationships with the elder comrades. At times they ended up supplementing the authority of the family with that of the party. Donner gives an example from one of his in-depth interviews with a former Naxalite who joined the movement as a teenager. The party itself advised the comrade to go against its own decision to boycott examinations at the face of a threat of suicide from his mother and this demoralized him, he recollects. Moreover, the pedagogic, yet intimate, relationship with one's teacher was central to the recruitment of these youths into the Naxalite movement and it in turn played an important part in the consolidation of radical masculinities (Donner 2009).

Family becomes the double ideological nodal point for the middle class self as the material basis of existence and the unconscious, interiorized mental map. In both ways it works as the strongest ideological state apparatus. Class morality as perpetuated through the family and its male-centric nature is clearly shown in the story. The girl, Bhargavi, with whom he involved physically in the above discussed example was never seen again after the mother's intervention. The narrator accepts this in a pliant manner without questioning.

We discussed the idea of declassing before in the chapter in the context of the middle class intellectual's path to radical politics. It is a self-reflective activity that needs to be facilitated by certain material conditions. First of all, one needs to get out of one's family to embark on the process of declassing. Leaving one's family is co-terminus with *sanyasa* in the Indian context, which again leads one to the ascetic moral thrust in communist practice. Dispassion and absence of home is the path to knowledge in *sanyasa*. Can it be considered as an attempt at localising the radical practice of critique? There could be a materialistic approach to the idea of *mukti*, as liberation, that raises the ethical aspects of revolution in the context of de-Stalinisation and oppressive communist regimes in many parts of the world. Liberation theology presents a variety of this approach of ethicalising the communist discourse (West 1991). .

A parallel project can be traced in the long poem published by Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon in 1952 called *Kudiyozhikkal*. There the bourgeois, upper caste poet undertakes a passage to an imaginary revolutionary setting after destabilizing his political positioning vis-à-vis the lower caste labourers and women. If the woman, the narrator has an encounter with, was called a 'potential' whore in the story above, the poet in *Kudiyozhikkal* relieves himself of the moral burden of his betrayal of the lower caste woman he once loved by saying 'for girls love is nothing, but a set of beautiful, glass bangles'/if one breaks, they just wear another' (Original in Menon 1984, 696). P. N. Gopikrishnan argues that the love of the hero is cowardly, inelegant and 'ticklish'. The bourgeois heroes here are incapable of 'the heroic love' that marked the progressiveness of their predecessors. They are incapable of making the necessary sacrifices including declassing (Gopikrishnan 2011, 40-1). The poem is discussed in the following chapter in detail.

3.5. Women's History: A 'Mechanical' Reading of *Sankramanam*

After reading a short story from the political modernist corpus that marked a peculiar moment in the literary history of the language and region we come to the most populous terrain in Malayalam literature of this period that was politicized and transformed most radically, that of poetry. K. Ayyappa Panikker, in an essay written in 1979 taking stock of Malayalam poetry as it stood then argued that in the modernist poetry there was a move against *monumentalisation* of the past that forgoes the privilege of imagining a trans-historical trajectory of values and morals. As the most organic radical poet of the modernist period Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan proclaimed, '[T]o die was to become a scarecrow' (Quoted from Panicker 1979, 135).[45]

The poem that we read in this section stands at the crossroads of Malayalam poetry in quite a literal sense. In an era of loud political poems, read aloud and performed on the streets, Attoor Ravi Varma's poems trod the silent path. They were indeed political and some were overtly so like the one under consideration here. Yet, they remained inaccessible to the dominant literary criticism that had the 'unfortunate hangover' of

[45] From Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan's poem *Kannur Kotta* as used in Panikker's article (1979) is translated by N. S. Madhavan.

progressive literature and socialist realism of the earlier decades (Ibid). Along with K. G. Sankara Pilla's *Bengal* and *Kashandi* (Baldness), Satchidanandan's *Pani* (Fever) and Kadmmanitta's *Kurathi* (The Tribal Woman-Performer) and *Shantha*, Attoor's poems like *Sankramanam* (Transformation) and *Cancer* represented the poetry of the 1970s that critiqued what came to be later termed as the foundational violence of the modern nation state.[46] They all responded to the emergent Naxalite movement, as evidently shown by the title *Bengal* given to the 'first significant poem' of this sensibility and tried to consolidate the poetic and cultural spirits of resistance embodied in the movement and disillusionment with the mainstream left parties.

The 1970s also witnessed the emergence of the militant dalit movement in Maharashtra, radical literary movements in other Indian languages, the tribal movement in Jharkhand and the radical voices from all over the world raising questions of race, class and gender, influencing the directions that modernist poetry took. We discussed in the previous chapter about the Vedi that became a broad cultural platform where these poets met each other and the political activists of the time at various levels. As K. Sreejith (2005) points out the Vedi had a peculiar relationship with the CPI (ML) which initially worked well and later became difficult and finally led to the deactivation of the movement itself.

The poem we take up in this section is *Sankramanam*[47] (named differently by different translators as Transformation, Transmutation, Metamorphosis etc.) written by Attoor Ravi Varma.[48] As we saw above, Attoor was not part of the loud political/performance poetry that was popularised by Kadammanitta. He was not primarily a 'metrical innovator, but his few poems achieve a crystal-like quality because of concentration on images and avoidance of the irrelevant. He does not strain after

[46] The precarious and fragile position these young poets occupied vis-à-vis the state, especially during the Emergency, makes it a 'truth to power' situation.

[47] The translation of the entire poem is mine. The original poem in Malayalam is accessed from (Varma 1995, 70-72).

[48] Attoor Ravi Varma (1930) is one of the major poets of the modernist period who has received important awards from state and national platforms. His name Attoor comes from the little village in the Thrissur district in Kerala from where he hails. Apart from the poetry collections he has published several translations from Tamil of both ancient and contemporary poetry and prose. A documentary titled *Maruvili* (2015) was made on the life and works of Attoor a few years ago by the contemporary poet Anvar Ali.

musical effects and this gives his poems like *Pithrugamanam* and *Cancer* a mature vigour and forthrightness' (Panicker 1978, 87).

Sankramanam follows a condensed, metaphor-rich narrative style that assumes a loosely rhyming form that is closer to the free verse format. It brings together all the sensory experiences to talk about a woman's death, decay and life in retrospect. The poet is a narrator in first person who begins by a note of self-reproach that identifies him as the source of an agonizing stench of a decaying female corpse.

> For many days,
> A woman's corpse
> Decays and stinks within.
>
> Though I walk
> With my fingers plugged
> Into my nostrils
> People, near and afar,
> Evade me.

The metaphor of the decaying body establishes the sense of degeneration the narrator experiences from within as a result of his privileged position vis-à-vis the woman whose body decays. He carries the corpse within and he recognises it as the body of a familiar woman, a woman he used to encounter everyday but did not notice until she died and decayed. It is her death and the eventual stench of rot that forced him to notice her. Then in retrospect he tries to ascertain her past existence as a person of labour.

> Since when I first sensed myself
> She has been there in my eyes
> As a leech[49]
> As mother to the one who died
> Of gorging
> Though she got a woman's head by birth
> No sea roared at its ears
> No waves brimmed in it.
> Eyes, on the face
> Were only to be shut at mid-night,
> Lips, Just the edges of a silent wound
> No star would sleep past her
> No sun rose up before her.
>
> Even after trotting a thousand miles
> She stands at the start.
> Even after standing a thousand times

[49] Original footnote; there is a treatment of placing a particular leech in the eye for better vision.

She falls wilting;
Even a thousand kicks on the bosom
Couldn't wake her up
A worn-out broom,
A stinking wipe
A battered-rimmed broth bowl,
A pile of earth
She!

At this point, the first part of the poem that is descriptive in style ends by clearly outlining the life of the dead woman, ridden with menial labour, weakness, humiliation and exploitation. Her body was already so close to the earth by the exploitation she suffered and death could not have done much to her existence. Most of the reviews of the poem suggest the woman to be a maid-servant, someone destined to carry out the most menial jobs in a society, including sanitation. But when we take into account the invisible unpaid labour of cooking, cleaning and childcare in the domestic spaces and family-centred economic activities including farming and animal husbandry that women undertake the majority of the women from the underprivileged communities and classes could as well be the woman in the poem.

The second part of the poem carries an interesting turn to the finitude death has brought her. In a review of the poem that was published in *Prerana*, K. C. Narayanan (1980) writes that the poet accomplishes a 'white magic' (in contrast to black magic) in order to restore just balance to the world that has become less so with the dead woman. According to Narayanan, justice needs to be served and the weak, helpless poet cannot think of any other means towards this. Hence he decides to let the dead woman haunt the living world as a ghost.

Her doomed soul shall be taken out
Deftly, like a machine
And fixed onto another body!

Not onto the worm-like crawling woman body
But to the cannibal tiger
That roams the realm when hungry.

(Again, the sleeping children
Would hear her growl
Below the hills, afar the fields
Beyond the doors)
Her tongue shall be stitched onto
Another body too;

Never onto the frail bitch
Feeding on the courtyard trash
But the ravenous wolf
That fiercely feeds on its prey.

This process of exorcism happens inside the poet himself as the corpse lies within him. He feels responsible for not only the death of the woman, but also for her life devoid of any creative or pleasurable aspects, marked by menial labour and exploitation and impossible to be distinguished from the dirty tools of her labour. The exorcism is as much directed to the self as to the society as when the soul of the rotten body is transplanted to bodies that can bring dignity and strength to the dead woman who was denied it when alive, the body decomposes fully and the narrator is cleansed of the stench. Narayanan (1980) argues that the fundamental purpose behind this poem is such a self-cleansing.

This moral angst of the middle class writer is the most recurrent theme we came across in this chapter with regard to his revolutionary aspirations. When the petty bourgeois intellectual-poet decides to exorcise the soul of the dead woman into a deadly creature that is capable of destroying the mankind, his immediate intention is to get rid of his guilt and shame that stems from his class location. This 'displacement' of the sense of crime and culpability onto an animate yet non-human actor enables the poet to de-class himself through purging the remorse in to revenge and destruction. Narayanan's observations regarding the function of the poem as displacing the middle-class culpability and alienation onto the sphere of revenge by (meta) physically removing the soul from the corpse and placing it onto the powerful, wild bodies of animals are very significant to our discussion.

The poet/narrator, as a middle class man, feels responsible for the dead body of the woman, whom he carried since his first sensible moments in life. It is an acknowledgement of the labour of women that has sustained every human being from their birth. She had been the mother, not his mother, but the mother of a complex figure of a child. The death of her child was not just a starvation death; this death posits the ambiguity of hunger turning into greed and the hungry boy indulging in eating beyond his ability and capacity. The mother had to helplessly witness her child's death. Her activities are described by exposing the violence in the mundane, the injustice in the everyday and

the deprivation in the ordinary. There is nothing unusual in her life; yet, this itself is the startling narrative of exploitation.

She is forced to alienate herself simultaneously both from the nature, to which she organically belongs and from the social where she should claim her participation as a political being. On the one hand, the nature is taken away from her like days and nights that she cannot experience. She has to work like a machine to fulfil her endless duties. On the other, she is denied space in the scheme of the region's modernization, the development model where every child has the right to education and every mother, the right to food via the public distribution system. She has tried walking with the wave of development and has tragically failed. Her bosom is used to getting kicked and her head is stooping low. The sex-class portrayal of the woman unmistakably punctures the feudal order and alludes to the caste-based relationship to labour. M. Gangadharan (2012) argues that this woman is the poet's 'bharatmata' because she is the one who gives birth to the decaying, gorging feudal structure and dies.

There is de-humanization in the all the activities she does, by which her body almost becomes a machine in its mechanical repetition of labour. The head that is attached to the corpse is of a woman. The head is the distinguishing factor that can be called feminine. Her ears could not hear the wonders of the nature that were meant to be heard. The eyes had a function to see, yet she could only open and shut them mechanically. They were mere mechanized extensions that could not perceive or enjoy the vision. Her mouth could not utter or function the way it was intended to do but only remain silent. Hence she is wounded and dysfunctional as a woman.

She is just a means to things, not the meaning itself. None of her organs can work as meaningful entities that complete a human body. They are dissected for their functions and limited to mechanical repetitions that would enable her to do her tasks. She is nothing but the tools that do the menial tasks of sweeping, wiping and cleaning the world inhabited by the powerful. Above all, she is just a layer of soil that will cover her eventually. She is a corpse that works, cleans and reproduces a hungry generation that gorges itself to death. Her incessant walks are confined in her workspace; the kicks that could have woken a human being from natural sleep cannot wake her from her

mechanical slumber-state of existence. She cannot stand upright as her labour does not require it. She is nothing beyond the functions her body is bound to perform for others.

After this close grim description of her existence the poet wants to tear her soul from that body, the soul wanders aimlessly as she had never lived as a human being. The poet wants to exorcise the soul out of this worn-out, torn, violated body and fix it onto another body, like a part of a machine to another machine. The new body would be that of a ferocious attacker, like a tiger that would let the realm be hunted by her. Moreover her tongue would be transplanted onto another voice, not of the scavenging dog but of predatory wolf. They will do only the most organic deeds whereby the soul and the body unites into one.

Modernist poetry swam closer to the existentialist terrain in Malayalam in identifying the loss of the rural order, harmony and tranquillity to the 'urban inferno' that on the one hand 'disrupted the rhythm of life and poetry' but on the other freed the individual from the feudal hierarchy and occupational fixedness. One had to sacrifice the rooted meaning-making experience for anonymity and freedom. Along with it came another rupture between the nature and the human where the urban life is characterised by mechanisation and associated alienation. Her hunger will engulf the cities and civilizations as wild fire. She would satiate her age-old hunger and destroy anything that comes between her and her inherent hunger. When we read eco-feminist works we find a similar thrust in the connection drawn between nature and women. It is precisely the civilization that distanced her from her innate qualities and put her to work like a machine.

On the one hand, the poem incorporates the question of sexual division of labour and exploitation onto the map of class question and on the other, renews the idea of emancipation in an organic, anti-civilizational and anti-modernisation paradigm that is non-masculine and even non-human. The spirit of the woman who dies from heavy, monotonous, menial labour could be reborn in the wild animal that hunts only to eat its fill as opposed to the man who hunts to compete, to exercise power and to oppress and to maintain private property.

The event of revolution is also an event of exorcism that the progressive ideas of the modern liberal era, which freed the individual from the feudal bondage would be

freed in turn from the competitive, exploitative and oppressive capitalist world by its destruction and breathed to life in a brave new world of communist utopia.

> Her intense hunger shall mix with
> The wildfire engulfing cities and civilizations
>
> Her pain
> To the purulent, bloody sundown
> Her curse
> To the sun that scorch the fields
>
> In the skies sprouted by *vasoorimala*[50]
> As a sacrificial beast,
> I shall lay her death.

The wild fire that engulfs the cities and civilizations reminds us of the mytho-historical story of Kannaki a woman who burned the mighty kingdom of Mathura down with her anger in revenge.[51] *Vasoorimala* is another trope that symbolises the destructive power of the wrath of the feminine as against the injustice perpetuated by male power.

The exorcism does not work here simply as a primitive ritual capable of purging the body of 'dark elements' but as a constructive, technologically mediated ritual that takes the soul out of a dead body and fixes it onto a living body. Its giving an extra-element to the animal body, a will, an element of the human that is capable of having pleasure, feeling anger and accomplishing revenge against an oppressor.

Major questions raised by the poem still permeate the intellectual and aesthetic public sphere of Kerala. The experience of de-humanisation under capitalism is multiplied for a woman because of the compliance of political-economic forces to the cultural economy of patriarchy. The contradiction between the mechanised conception of a body that can be assembled and re-assembled and the organic and wild stature, capable of assuming trans-historical coherence, ascribed to feminine identity is only one of the many. The continuing theme of the moral responsibility of the middle class left

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[50] *Vasoorimala* is the goddess that is believed to be the repository of contagious diseases, especially small pox. People carry out rituals in her worship and offer various things to her when there is an outbreak of such epidemics. She is considered to be one of the infinite forms of *sakti* the eternal female-power that can create and extinguish the mankind at will.

[51] The tale of Kannaki is found in the Tamil Classic *Silappathikaram* (The Tale of the Anklet) written by Ilanko Adigal who probably lived in the end of the Sangam era (c. 1st century BCE to 5th century CE). The poem revolves around the plot where Kannaki loses her husband Kovalan as a result an unjust judgement of the Pandya royal court and she wreaks her revenge on the kingdom by fully destroying it. This story is mythified in many local traditions and rituals. One among these relates the goddess of the famous Kodunagallur Temple of Kerala to the protagonist Kannaki.

intellectuals/writers gains an additional aspect of genderedness that further complicates their imagination and practice of self-fashioning. Moreover, the invocation of the mythical and the ritualistic rudiments of history in an imagination of the transformation and creation of a utopia enable the poem to break free from the rigid, collectivistic and 'scientific' moulds and entertain a revisit to the dichotomies of nature/culture, organic/technological, and body/machine.

The meaning of the word *sankramanam* as the planetary movements that create different seasons on earth can be read here as the changing relationship that human beings have with nature. Thus, the circularcharacter of this phenomenon implies a similar trajectory of the human history that had primitive communism as its emerging point and will have a communist utopia as its end. The imagination of the communist utopia as a pastoral, organic and co-operative world of abundance is a familiar image in communist literature. The return of the natural, devoid of mechanised and technological intervention in the post-state society, however does not sit at ease in this poem. Even while imaging the revival of the spirit of the dead body (oppressed classes/sexes/castes) in the body of a wild animal, the animal is a man-eater that roams the human-inhabited parts, not the wilderness. The wild fire burns down the cities and civilizations populated by human beings and her death is the sacrificial beast at the altar of the goddess of poxes. Utopia here is vexed with turbulence, passion, chaos and technologically transmuted bodies of various human, animal and machine combinations.

3.6. Communist Movement in the Autobiographies

In this section we attempt to take a deviation around the question of the personal in the communist discourse in Malayalam to confront the most intimate mode of writing, that of self-narration. In recent years, study of autobiographies has become a prominent aspect of various disciplines including literary history, sociology as well as discourse analysis[52]. Both the textual as well as historical readings of the autobiography, especially of individuals belonging to the subaltern or marginalized sections have gained much

[52] David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (eds), *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography and Life History*, Delhi, permanent black, 2004 Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself: A Critique of Ethical Violence*, Amsterdam, Koninklijke van Gorcum, 2003, Adrianna Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, tr. Paul A. Kottman (London and NewYork, Routledge 2000)

attention from scholars across the globe. Similar works have enriched the studies of the literature, politics and culture in the context of Kerala.[53] As far as the communist histories of different vernacular contexts are concerned this opens up an interesting opportunity and responsibility to the scholars to map the subterranean life of the movement in the homes and other private spaces of the individual participants. We attempt to read a few autobiographies of communist activists and writers focusing primarily on the different relationships these texts produce between the intimate and the political.

The self-narratives of the individual 'comrades' open up the deeper crises that the translation of an ideology faced and the triumph or disillusionment or both in various degrees as experienced by them in negotiating the public and private aspects of their communist politics. Observably, the class/caste/gender loci of the writer determines the nature, content and form of the narrative in such varied ways that the same historical juncture or event gets described in different autobiographies differently. Colonial modernity and its paraphernalia of urban life, university education and modern employment endowed individuals with choices in all spheres. The story of every first generation communist activist in the region is also a story of the process of individuation and at the same time incorporation into another collective, a political collective on the one hand and into another family i.e. the party on the other. It is as much a story of dilemmas and confusions as it is about confidence and clarity.

Udaya Kumar (2016) in his recent work observes that autobiographies began to appear in Malayalam in the nineteenth century like in most other Indian languages and by the twentieth century it attained stability as a 'literary genre'. He goes onto examine the nuanced ways in which self-narrative became a 'means of documenting a world rapidly receding into the past, and for recording personal testimonies of social change' (Kumar 2016,). It is also a marker of modernity and connected with a range of other genres. From this moment of its inception, when we reach the latter half of the twentieth century where our study is chronologically located, we can see a well-developed genre of autobiographical writing by individuals engaged in all spheres of social activity. A large number of communist leaders have written and published their autobiographies in the

[53] See Udaya Kumar. (2016) and J. Devika. ed. (2005).

post-independence decades as a result of the relatively tranquil political life they could enjoy by then.

Let us begin by looking at a few self-narratives by individuals associated with the communist movement at different periods and in different ways. The selection of these works depends on the significance of the writers and the texts in the history of the communist movement as well as that of Malayalam literature. In a peripheral reading of these works, what we intend to do is to delineate the general manner in which the authors tried to relate the intimate and the political in their autobiographies. In other words, the intricate connection between the self narrative and the historical narrative taking place in the autobiographical text is what we shall focus upon.

There are many interesting autobiographies in Malayalam by communist activists, intellectuals/writers and, more interestingly, the female spouses of activists. It is observed by many scholars that the male leaders' autobiographical works tend to erase the personal spheres of their existence as much as they try to portray their lives as completely committed to political activities. Curiously, some of these leaders' personal lives came to the public sphere when their wives wrote autobiographies, mostly as their life-experiences with the acclaimed leader.[54] On the contrary the female leaders of various political hues end up writing their autobiographies as intimate accounts of struggle or negotiation between the personal and the political and the private and the public spheres.[55] After outlining the questions regarding the relationship between the communist politics and autobiographies we will come to a particular text that is the central to our discussion.

3.5.1. The Home and the World

An interesting instance can be spotted in this regard in the autobiography written by EMS titled *Aatmakatha*, published in 1969. *Aatmakatha* is the term for autobiography in Malayalam and the choice of the title itself points to the effort at flattening the particularities associated with it. What is autobiography if not its particularities?– one

[54] See the autobiography written by the wife of a veteran communist leader T.S. Thirumunp, P. C. Karthyayinikkutti Amma (2006) *Thirumunpinoppam*, Chintha Publishers Thiruvananthapuram.

[55] The following autobiographies of eminent communist women can be referred for further exploration in this regard. K. Devayani (2013), *Chorayum Kanneerum Nananja Vazhikal*, Samatha, Thrissur, K. R Gauriamma (2010), *Atmakatha* , Mathrubhumi Books, Kozhikode, K. Ajitha (2011).

may ask here. But the author makes it clear in the beginning of the narrative itself that he does not intend to elaborate upon his 'mundane' personal life. Rather his autobiography was to be written and read as a mere medium to read about the history of the communist movement in Kerala and to some extent of India and the world (Namboodiripad 1969).

He explains how his personal life is inseparable from his political life and the churning of the society. In order to underscore this inseparability however, he adopts a mechanism that does not register any significant incident from his personal life including intimate memories from childhood or married life. This is an extreme case of de-personalising the self-narrative and establishing oneself only through the conscious political life one leads. Even without going into the content of the text one could mark the de-personalising mechanism that is at work here.

I have already mentioned the manner in which EMS (1974a) talked about the progressive communist poet KPG Namboodiri in the preface written to his posthumously published poetry collection. KPG was described as the 'adopted son' of the working class, quite like many other communist intellectuals and leaders who hailed from petty bourgeois backgrounds yet committed themselves to the workers and the peasantry. In a similar vein, in this autobiography too, he makes it clear that he is about to talk about the class to which he was adopted not the one he was accidently born into. He came from an affluent Brahmin household that owned huge tracts of agricultural land. One of the oft-repeated comments about EMS in the hagiographic accounts is the contribution of all his hereditary assets to the party, especially to the party news paper *Deshabhimani*. This status of being an adopted son of the classes to which you are committed to is gained after undergoing the process of declassing as we have discussed in detail elsewhere in the chapter.

There are others like A. K. Gopalan[56] (popularly known as AKG) who managed to quite meticulously write down his life experiences from early childhood through his

[56] A. K. Gopalan (1904-1977) was one of the most popular leaders of the communist party in Kerala and the first opposition leader at the first parliament in 1952. Like most of the early communists, he too started his political life in the Congress and then joined the CPI at the time of its establishment in Kerala in the late 1930s. He is known for his seminal role in the formation of the workers' co-operative Indian Coffee House in the late 1950s. In 1964, when the CPI split and the CPI (M) was formed, he joined the latter. A docu-fiction was made based on AKG's life titled *Athijeevanathinte Kanalvazhikal* in 2008 by famous cine director Shaji N. Karun.

active political years up to the later mature period. From his autobiography titled *Ente Jeevithakatha* (My Life-Story) which he finished writing in 1975, we will restrict ourselves to his discussion of the two women in his life, his mother and his wife. He remembers his mother as a pious, loving woman, who prayed her son's life and his safe return every time he went underground or to prison. He left his permanent job in order to become a 'whole-timer' in the party against his father's wishes and his father stopped talking to him altogether for over five years. He contrasts his mother's deep and unconditional love to his father's stubbornness. She did not like him becoming a political activist in the beginning but 'she changed with the flow of time' and got accustomed to his political life (Gopalan 2013, 23). During his imprisonment, she used to save his favourite seasonal savouries and fruits for him. He confesses that he was terrified of the tall walls of the prison and could not sleep during the first month thinking about his family and friends.

Coming to the figure of his wife, one needs to keep in mind the significant fact that his wife Susheela Gopalan (1929-2001) was a communist activist herself who has held responsible positions within the party and various communist ministries. He met Susheela in his underground days at her house which was a safe haven for many a communist revolutionaries then. Her maternal uncle was an ardent supporter of the party. She is described as a 'cheerful, naughty little girl' who was a solace in his clandestine life. He used to help her with her school lessons and inform her about the political situation. They grew closer; yet AKG was reluctant about proceeding any further in the relationship as he did not want to drag her into his 'uncertain and miserable life'. Nevertheless he could not forget her and she met him once when he was imprisoned in Coimbatore jail. He felt 'affectionate towards her as she was growing with the [communist] movement in the region'(Ibid, 246) .

Throughout the rest of his autobiography he expresses his gratitude towards his wife, for a variety of reasons. The multi-layered responsibilities Susheela Gopalan had to endure in this marital life are acknowledged by her husband AKG in his autobiography. She enabled him to be a more efficient and effective political presence by keeping him healthy and sparing him from familial duties. Even though she was an activist herself, later when AKG fell seriously ill, she had to restrict herself to the role of a house wife

and help her husband with his party activism. This effort at recognising the double labour that Susheela invested in their life is a genuine and useful way of addressing the relationship between the personal and the political. Both in the case of his mother and Susheela he readily and thankfully acknowledges the labours of love and care that went into the making of his political self that depended heavily upon the sacrifices these women made. This makes AKG's self-narrative stand out in contrast to EMS's and of many others who claimed that the personal is indeed political. In EMS's writing, the personal gets overwritten by the political and is rendered invisible and inaudible, whereas AKG tried to see where these two registers met and moulded each other.

This evasion, if not repression, of the personal might help to understand how the questions of caste and gender gets swept under the carpet of class and to comprehend the resort to the mechanism of declassing for middle class individuals to become true communists. This question is central to any study of the history of the communist movement in South Asia. Many of the meaningful critiques of the movement come precisely from these quarters, exposing the economic and socio-cultural costs that the marginalised groups paid owing to this systematic suppression of the language of the sexual, caste and community based identities in communist politics wherever it held power. Let me clarify one point here that I am not trying to draw linear connections between the personal identity of the communist activist and the tactics or strategies that inform his politics. Rather the attempt is to expose the hitherto unaccounted for exchanges between negligencethe messy intimate and the clear-cut political and the insufficient attention paid to questions of gender and sexuality in communist theory and praxis. Now we shall look into another aspect of communist self-fashioning as seen in the memoirs written by a communist writer.

3.5.2. The Imagination of the Masculine Ascetic Communist Self

Thoppil Bhasi[57] is the most celebrated playwright the communist movement in Kerala has produced and his plays, including the groundbreaking *Ningalenne Communistakki,*

[57] Thoppil Bhasi (1924–1992) (henceforth Bhasi) was born in Vallikkunnam in Alappuzha district and studied Sanskrit and Ayurveda in Thiruvananthapuram. He was active in the Congress Party for a while and then joined the communist party as a fulltime activist. He had been absconding and living underground for the large part of time from 1943 to 1953 and continued to carry out his political activities. Later he became

are considered to have played a significant role in the popularisation of Marxist ideology and mobilisation of the ordinary people into the party. His life was eventful as a communist activist who dynamically participated in the militant struggles the led by the CPI in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. In the aftermath of one such incident in 1948, in which he was a prime accused, he went underground till 1952.[58] The reminiscences he wrote about his clandestine days and titled aptly as *Olivile Ormakal* (Memories of the Underground) became a controversial narrative in the history of the communist movement in the region.

> It's true that the party did not give much importance to the humane thoughts and feelings during those days. Everything was for a solitary aim…Let me tell you an interesting story. We were having our party committee meeting one day. Puthuppalli[59] [Raghavan] and I entered into an argument. In order to prove his point, Puthuppalli asked me: '[Suppose] a very beautiful woman comes to you when you are totally alone. All circumstances are in favour. What would you feel?' I candidly told what I would feel! Puthuppalli got very angry. He said I am a lewd person. He said I am not a communist at all. We debated for an hour on that. He argued that I should think in terms of using her for socialist transformation. I don't understand why [do we need to imagine] 'loneliness and beautiful woman' for that! …To put it briefly, party was like an ascetic order (*sanyasi prasthanam*) those days. Ultimate goal was everything. This had its own pros and cons (Bhasi 2010, 77, 83).

The harsh criticism Bhasi faced from the committed communist leader Puthuppalli Raghavan is an ideal example of the larger articulation about the communist selfhood that comes closest to a Gandhian ascetic selfhood. Rajarshi Dasgupta (2014) discusses what he calls the techniques of communist self-fashioning, whereby he identifies a certain ascetic mode that determined the economy of the action and lifestyle associated with the communist movement in late-colonial Bengal. He points out a certain modality of framing the communist activist that is the 'weakest point' of the local

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part of the Kerala People's Arts Club and wrote a large number of plays for the troupe. In the later years he started to write screen plays for the emerging Malayalam cinema industry and wrote many successful films.

[58] Sooranad is a village in central Travancore, now part of the Kollam District where the communist party had gained strength among the poor peasants and agricultural labourers in the 1940s. In 1950, some of the land lord families blocked the villagers' access to a public water source and that created turmoil in the village. When they forcefully entered the pond and caught fish, the landlords complained to the police and the police brutally crushed the villagers and burned their houses. In the conflict five policemen, including a police inspector, were killed and a large number of communist activists were savagely thrashed and killed. Thoppil Bhasi was one of the accused in the murders of the policemen and he absconded after the incident. He was later arrested and imprisoned. The case came to be known as the Sooranad case.

[59] Puthuppalli Ragahvan (1910-2000) was among the first generation communists in Kerala and founders of the communist movement in Travancore.

movement and to some extent the national scenario itself. This configuration and consolidation of a communist self is of 'largely a masculine ascetic self caught up for the most part in petty bourgeois morality' (Dasgupta 2014, 67-87).

We have already discussed in detail about the idea of becoming declassed and the processes of declassing that a communist had to undergo before he could become a 'true' one at that. The sacrifice of the material privileges and outlook associated with their petty bourgeois backgrounds constitute the central mechanism of this process. Most of the communist autobiographies centre on this process of transformation from one subjectivity to another that enabled their 'adoption' into the working class and the peasantry.

In AKG's narrative, the underground days presented the comrades with as having time at their leisure and secret spaces to engage with the women of the families that provided them shelter. The honesty and truthfulness of a man's communist credentials were tested in these occasions by their ability to abstain from the 'temptations' such opportunities posed. A number of plays and movies directly deal with this dilemma and end up drawing the moral connections between being a communist and a natural 'man'.[60] Cherukad's autobiography that we will read in the last section also has a similar account of his underground experience where he felt tempted by a woman at the shelter and left the shelter at the night itself for fear of 'loosing himself'.

In the same manner, the temptation that women posed to the communist activist and his commitment is considered to be one of the many threats that a petty bourgeois man has to overcome in this journey of declassing; the other temptations being that of money, material comforts and intoxicating substances like alcohol. One could cite several examples from poetry, fiction and essays that address this 'problem' and help the young comrades follow the right path of politicisation.

3.5.3. Memories of Being a Communist Woman

[60] *Anubhavangal Palichakal* is a 1971 film Scripted by Thoppil Bhasi and Directed by K. S. Sethumadhavan, based on a novel by Thakazhi Sivassankara Pillai of the same name. *Mooladhanam (*1969) is a film scripted by Bhasi and directed by P. Bhaskaran based on a play of the same name written by Bhasi himself. The plots of both these films are set on the contemporary communist movement and the difficult lives of the leaders and their families tortured by the police. Both have strong moral dilemmas being dealt in them vis-à-vis the chastity of the wife of the communist leader and the dalliance of the communist activist in the underground life.

Now we take up another radically different memoir written in Malayalam by a communist activist. K. Ajitha (1950-) is a former Naxalite who was active in the brief yet eventful trajectory of the Naxalite movement in Kerala. We discussed about the movement in general and its role in the aesthetic discourse in particular in Chapter One. Here we shall focus on the way in which the sole female member in the Thalassery–Pulppally 'actions' (police station attacks) recollected her life before, during and after the movement. She was arrested in 1968 and spent the following nine years in prison. She wrote the autobiography titled *Ormakkurippukal* (Notes of Reminiscence) after being released from prison in 1977. Later on she went on to become one of the pioneers of the women's movement in Kerala.

Ajitha was the daughter of communist party activists Kunnakkal Narayanan and Mandakini. Narayanan was a member of the CPI (M) until his disillusionment and consequent dissociation from the party in the late 1960s. The outburst of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal and the affirmation it gained from Maoist China drew several communists from Kerala and other parts of India to follow their path of armed rebellion to free the peasantry from the feudal shackles.[61] Ajitha vividly describes her life as a young girl growing up amidst these ideological churnings and their influence on her entry into the struggle.

The English translation of the work titled *Kerala's Naxalbari: Memoirs of a Young Revolutionary* is described in one of the reviews as 'a delightful mix: autobiography, the biography of a collective, and the history of an ideology' (Nayar 2017). The personal merges with the political here, when Ajitha describes the tensions within the Naxalite-Marxist groups in Kerala (Ibid). Since a detailed reading of the work is beyond the scope our present concern, let us focus upon her discussions of her personal relations with the male members of the small group and how this moulded her post-Naxalite days out of prison. She marks this relation as being ridden with difficulties as many of 'radical' comrades were very 'old-fashioned' when it came to the issue of gender. Initially she was discouraged by some of them from joining the clandestine

[61] The Editorial of *People's Daily*, July 5, 1967 described the movement thus: "A peal of spring thunder has crashed over the land of India.

armed activities and she fiercely argued against it. Finally, her father convinced the group that if she wanted to join she should be taken in.

Ajitha recollects that at many instances of debate and decision making she was made to 'feel like a woman' and hence not capable of contributing to collective decision making. She remembers the way they postponed her attempts of discussing the question of gender equality by drawing attention to the 'immediateness' of the class question and the need to prioritize rightly. In a recent interview, she recollects the 'weakness' of some of the comrades with whom she lived and travelled in the forest. At times, some of the comrades 'misbehaved' and even tried to exploit her sexually, though most of them showed care and were protective towards her (Ratnakaran 2014)., In another interview (Payyannur 2016) she says that her love for a fellow-comrade A. Varghese (who was later killed by the Kerala Police in a fake encounter and became an icon of Kerala's tryst with the Naxalite movement) could not be expressed openly because her father would not have liked it. It is important to note here that some of these disclosures are not from the autobiography but they were made much later after an engagement with the feminist movement in the region.

Compared to the brief span of the underground movement, her time in the jail was very long and educative, she says. Though she spent a sizable part of the sentence in solitary confinement, her encounter with convicted sex workers is mentioned as the moment that changed her life forever. She became close to the inmates of the female prison who were mostly sex workers and petty criminals. The world of a prison full of women who were different from Ajitha in all possible ways pushed her towards the need for more politicisation in the society and this she believes enabled her to become a women's rights activist and run an organisation called Anweshi that works with victims of violence against women and edit a magazine called *Sanghatitha* (The Organized Woman) solely for publishing women's writings on various issues. This path that she undertook after the prison life was founded upon her experiences as a woman in the Naxalite movement and in prison where she engaged with women belonging to different classes and social backgrounds. It is interesting how she underwent a process of declassing vexed with 'gender trouble' in the prison and came out a feminist activist.

3.5.4. Desire as the Revolutionary Motor of Life

The last self-narrative we will read here is *Jeevithappaatha* (The Path of Life,) written by Cherukad and first published in 1974 who is already introduced earlier in the chapter as one of the most significant communist writers in Malayalam. What sets this autobiography apart from the autobiographies of most other communist leaders is his courage to probe into the intimate realms of his life and of the times in which he was living. It is a candid account of the life of a communist activist, particularly pertaining to his caste, gender and class backgrounds. Here, for us the most important aspect of this work is the openness with which he has discussed his relationship with his wife.

Cherukad hailed from a Pisharody family, which is part of the Ambalavasi community, situated in the caste hierarchy between the Brahmin Namboodiris and the Nairs who are Sudras according to the Varna system.[62] These caste groups of Kerala mostly followed the matrilineal family structure and Cherukad's Govinda family lived in the southern Malabar region. Following the family custom, he married his cousin from his paternal side of the family. Though it was customary in his case, there were some obstacles to their union. Due to some familial quarrels, which were a common feature in large joint households especially after the gradual collapse of the matrilineal *tharavadu* in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century- Cherukad's cousin Lakshmikkutty was married off to someone else at an early age. She ended the marriage after three months and resumed her education and passed the teachers' training exam.

Cherukad had intense affection, respect and love for her. Once he expressed his desire to marry her, she stood by him and fought off the family obstacles and they got married. His political inclinations were dangerous during the pre-independence era where communists were witch hunted in Malabar by the notorious Malabar Special Police force. He was a teacher at an elementary school and was actively organising teachers against the corrupt and exploitative school managements.

In an introductory note to *Jeevithappatha*, EMS writes that an autobiography has two layers. On the one hand it reflects the ways in which the rapid social transformations

[62] The word *ambalam* means temple and *vasi* means dweller. The Ambalavasi communities' hereditary occupations include cleaning the temple premises, logistics related to the activities of the temple like fetching flowers for *puja*, making garlands, washing the utensils used there and playing percussion instruments like *idakka, timila, maddalam* and *chenda* during temple ceremonies and other festivities. There are many sub-castes in the community like Marar, Varyar, Sharody and Pisharody.

influences the individual who is a small part of it and on the other how the individual contributes to the social change that is taking place around him. Interestingly, EMS does not spend any time on the content and richness of the text itself. Rather, he goes on to situate the writer in the progressive, communist pantheon of writers by discussing his range of fictional works from the propagandistic songs to the intense novels. He also says that the autobiography reads almost like a novel except for the tiresome narrations in the initial chapters about the old tales of his *tharavadu*.

Cherukad in the Foreword to his autobiography confesses the lack of any social messages or lessons to learn from his life.

> I haven't done anything that could guide other people's lives. I am no saint, no king, no minister, no knight, nor a scientist, poet, political leader. I am just an ordinary man...Some friends want me to tell my story. It's fun to tell one's story if there are listeners. If the fun is unilateral, then you should say; I will stop...Is there a story that's just about me? I think there is no such story that's just about any one person. Each one's story is linked to the place where one was born and brought up and the people there. Every life is a story. I too have a life and my life is a story too...With some humour sense, story can also be titled as 'nerampokku' (Pastime) rather than The Path of Life and the reader should not expect anything more from this (Cherukad 2013, 11).

He calls his journey from birth to death a 'parade, not a pilgrimage'. 'Once I am born I have the birth right to live in this world. It's my duty to fight against everything whether it's the background, class, culture, faith, tradition norms, laws that stands between me and my right to live in happiness and abundance', he adds (Pisharody 2013, 12). He mocks at those who claim to be doing sacrifices or service or *dharma* when actually all they are doing is co-operating and negotiating with the world around them as no one could sustain alone.

It is the desire to live even in the worst circumstances that lead people to fight and survive. The love for life is the most genuine and honest drive behind everything including revolution according to him. We dwelled in detail on this part because this sets the narrative apart from the ascetic and self-effacing narratives of most other male comrades. This is also about taking oneself lightly and with a sense of humour; a quality that is rarely seen in communist self-fashioning and self-narratives. Like Cherukad's, Thoppil Bhasi's writings also, especially his autobiography, show this quality even though they were not particularly admired for this in the party circles.

In the twenty fifth chapter of his autobiography titled, *Kaamavum Premavum* (Lust and Love) Cherukad openly discusses what he calls the sexual perversions he had committed or experienced in his youth. They include masturbation, homosexual relations and pre-marital sex. He points towards the necessity to inculcate right and healthy knowledge about sex in young boys and girls so that they could distinguish between the different kinds of experiences and choose wisely. He says that many comrades (of the party) might think that he should not have written about these. But he believes that if one cannot write the complete truth one should not even attempt writing an autobiography. He also listens deeply to his own complex feelings vis-à-vis his wife and their conjugal relationship in particular even when it places him in a bad light for being misogynist and selfish. He confesses his frequent inability in understanding the burden his attitudes placed on his wife.

Cherukad, despite the 'institutionalization' and 'bureaucratization' the communist party underwent and the disillusionment it caused him, remained an activist and writer for the party until his last days. Udaya Kumar (2016) points out that 'autobiography's vital link with history is not just its documentation of life and society in a lived past; even more importantly, it is revealed in the lack of fit between narrative and subjectivity' (Kumar 2016, 17). Then, the erasure of the intimate and making one's life-story the political history of a party, movement or a region open up more questions that they intend to address. Writing the political has to supplant the intimate in the dominant narratives like that of EMS's. But the 'lack of fit' as Kumar calls it reveals the way in which the autobiography carries in itself another parallel narrative that is not written out but hidden in its own absence.

Conclusion

Let us summarise the major arguments raised in this chapter before going to the next chapter. The different mechanisms adopted by the communist writers and those who brought in themes of Marxist ideology and social context in order to write about the intimate spheres of life, including sexuality, morality and family were discussed in the chapter.

The degeneration of the party after its coming to power is attributed on the one hand to the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of the organisation. On the other, the indulgent, pleasure-seeking leaders (in contrast to the committed and sacrificing early leaders) epitomise this decadence. The middleclass intellectual who is endowed with a choice to be or not to be a communist does not grow beyond this liberal-individualist paradigm due to the lack of politicisation the party is supposed to offer. The lack of political culture is directly connected here to the immoral pursuit of pleasure and power. Only strict disciplining and austerity at the individual/personal/sexual levels can rebuild the radical and revolutionary character of the communist party.

The queer moment of camaraderie is erased even before it could be narrated and the party and the family work as co-terminus forces in the policing and normativisation of desire here. The effeminate portrayal of queer sexuality produces the masculine other that is readily understandable to the communist imagination of the hetero-normative, and in turn, respectable love. This leads to the question of envisaging a conjugality that is de-romanticised, de-sacralised and contractual.

In the modernist moment, the middleclass intellectual/poet is also reflexive about the relationship between the gendered everyday and the trans-historical patriarchy. This reflection is guilt ridden owing to the privileged position of the male writer. The transformation of the dead labouring woman into multiple ferocious, predatory and vengeful animated bodies require the 'magical' that goes beyond the rational and the civilizational.

When we come to the self-narratives of communist activists, they gesture towards the combined operations of self-regimentation and external moralising with regard to 'libido' in the organisation of the communist party. This is related to the Gandhian ascetic modality of doing politics in the sub-continent. However, the writer renders his autobiography with the potential of narrating the 'power of desire' that works as the locomotive of life. On a related note, the woman comrade has a gendered experience in the underground communist party. Finally, the binaries that operate in the communist autobiographies in terms of erasure and acknowledgement of the personal and its politics were discussed in the chapter. The limitations of these self-narratives will prove decisive

in the following chapter that looks at the nature of the presence of caste as both an analytical and aesthetic category in the left literature of the post-independence period.

Chapter 4

CASTE AND COMMUNIST LITERATURE IN MALAYALAM: NARRATIVE OF HEGEMONY AND RESISTANCE

> One of the main problems of historical sociology is the relation between caste and class. How is the logic of one system different from another? And are they so different that there could not be any mixtures or graftings of one onto the other? Secondly, is this transition linear? Would caste system eventually disappear? (Kaviraj 2006, 72).

The approach of the communist movements in India both at the national and regional levels to the 'caste question' has been criticised from diverse academic and political positions in the recent past. If we largely divide these critiques into two positions[63]; the first one would deal with the theoretical limitations of Marxism at grasping the centrality of caste (in Indian socio-economic and political life and hence in making the transformatory processes more cosmetic in regions where the left had intellectual as well as electoral presence. The reason behind this failure is attributed primarily to the 'orthodox language' that Marxism had become by the middle of the twentieth century as a result of the refusal of the Marxists to take the new subaltern movements across the world into consideration (Kapicadu 2015). This criticism aims at the 'theoretical inadequacy' of Marxism that inevitably made all streams of the communist movements including the mainstream, Naxalite and the present Maoist ones, closed and undemocratic when it came to questions of identity.

The second set of criticisms that emerged in the more recent times focus on the subtler and deeper casteist nature of the political as well as organisational life of the communist movements in various regions owing primarily to the leadership of the communist parties that predominantly hail from the brahmin or other upper caste groups. This in turn paves way for a nuanced reinforcement of the structure of caste in societies like Kerala, where the party had been powerful.

[63] The variety of criticisms of the Indian left around the category of caste is diverse and complex. Since the limited scope of the present work does not allow us to elaborate them all here, I intend to focus on two major sets of critique that strongly emerged in the later periods (after the 1980s) as a point of departure from the contemporary to the period under consideration). These are neither mutually exclusive nor ideologically polarised. More often than not, they overlap and are present in the works of the same critic. This larger separation is primarily for analytical clarity.

Both these sets of critiques are not mutually exclusive, yet it is important to see them as coming from distinct rationales; the first one points at the theoretical limitation of Marxism whereas the second sees communist organisations as mere extensions of a caste-based society and as reflecting of its hierarchy. In this chapter, we intend to draw the genealogy of the 'caste question' in the communist literature in Malayalam since independence and the literary and aesthetic interventions by Dalit writers into the arena dominated by Marxist and left-liberal intellectuals up to the 1980s.

Apart from the reason that the overall theme of the thesis justifies this time frame with regard to the trajectory of the communist movements in Kerala, it is to be kept in mind that the beginning of the 1990s marks a renewal in Dalit intellectual and aesthetic discourse that cannot be sufficiently addressed in this work. This later Dalit discourse is to be approached in this project through its disruptive and subversive relationship to the aesthetic and political narrative structures of the previous decades. This Dalit discourse criticised not only the exclusive and anti-Dalit basis of the celebrated Kerala Development model and land reforms in particular, but also the aesthetic limits of communist literature that failed at addressing the issue of caste in more radical ways.

Despite the considerable diversity within the mainstream Malayalam literary sphere during the four decades under consideration (1950s-1980s) that included the progressive realist and social realist works and the existentialist, modernist and political modernist ones, the overarching sensibility aligned with the communist politics which had organisationally split into numerous streams. Most of the aesthetic as well as political criticisms of the left literature up to the 1980s came from either of the opposing strands of communist literature or from the individual narratives with the anti-disciplinarian and anti-Stalinist thrusts which were shunned by the party and the cultural fronts as 'reactionary', 'decadent' or 'anarchist'. Hence, the 1990s witnessed the powerful emergence of not only Dalit critique but also of feminist and ecological movements and their powerful critique of the communist politics.

On the one hand this chapter tries to delineate the dominant mechanisms used in left literature to mark caste, as a problem to be dealt with as part of the transformatory politics it tried to aesthetically strengthen, and as part of the realist portrayal of the society. There were diverse means by which issues of untouchability, caste-based and

hereditary labour, humiliation and exploitation were addressed by left writers of various groups. Some of the early progressive writers focussed more on the agricultural labouring force that consisted of various Dalit untouchable castes, the feudal relations of production and exploitation and the communist mobilisation of these slave-labourers in the late colonial period. We shall attempt to map the distinct approaches that left literature of the post independence decades up to the 1980s developed in this regard. For this, we shall take up a few works of fiction from the communist literary corpus in Malayalam belonging to different periods and genres that engage with the category of caste in varied ways.

On the other hand, we shall closely read some of the Dalit writings from the same time period that depict the communist politics in the region and its engagement with caste. The electoral and mass base of the communist movement in Kerala is not simply a lower/working class one but is essentially a lower caste one, including Dalit and Ezhava communities. The opponents of the communist front were always backed by the affluent land owning caste groups including Nairs, upper caste Christians and affluent Muslims in various parts of the state though actual ground level support can vary from one electoral constituency to another.

Apart from land reform and welfare policies in education and health, the relative success of the communist government in Kerala is also acknowledged at the international and national level for the cultural advancement of the society achieved through widespread literacy and a thriving public sphere. Even though the foundations for these achievements were paved as early as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the caste-community social reform movements, missionary activities in the field of education and princely initiatives in Travancore and Kochi, the grass-root mobilisation of the communist movement was instrumental in politicising questions of ownership of land, workers rights and trade unionisation and spread of public education.

Most of these claims of the Kerala Renaissance and communist mobilisation have been questioned and challenged by later Dalit, feminist and ecological critics. The casteist and sexist nature of the contemporary public sphere in Kerala only makes these critiques increasingly relevant. A significant aspect of this criticism is aimed at the progressive nature of the re-fashioning of the language and literature and other cultural

and aesthetic spheres of the society in which the communist movement played an instrumental role. Before we venture into the aesthetic (re)production of caste and associated categories in communist literature and the Dalit writing that challenges communist politics and aesthetics, in the following section we will summarily discuss the major mechanisms adopted by the various Marxist parties in India, to conceptualise and understand caste. As we discussed in the previous chapters, these decades unfolded the division within the communist movement and vehement theoretical and political fights between these groups. Here, we need to map the convergence and divergence between these groups/parties around the issue of caste.

In the second section we will briefly describe the presence of caste as a category of representation in the modern Malayalam literature from the late nineteenth century. The third section will dwell upon the writings of T. K. C Vaduthala (henceforth TKC) the pioneering figure of Dalit writing in Malayalam in juxtaposition with the representational strategies of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai who has written extensively around untouchable life worlds. TKC's works not only responded to the progressive left narratives of caste with the might of lived experiences, but also reflected on the political space the communist movement created for Dalits in the 1950s and 60s. Instead of undertaking a comprehensive analysis of his corpus of work we will highlight some of the narrative mechanisms he adopted in order to bring the experiential and political-ideological registers of a nascent Dalit consciousness to Malayalam literature.[64]

In the third section we will take up a novel written by M. Sukumaran titled *Seshakriya* published in 1979 that can be considered as the most powerful work to have situated a Dalit protagonist at the centre of the political history of the communist party. This would form the central part of the chapter as it delves deeply into the relation between the Dalit subjectivity, the political participation of the same in the communist party and institutionalisation and disciplining in the party structure.

In the 1960s there was no category of Dalit literature in Kerala and writers including T.K.C. Vaduthala and Paul Chirakkarode were not read as Dalit writers but as

[64] Though the political use of the term Dalit to denote the scheduled castes began at a later stage than the period discussed, we shall use the term for discussion here (except while discussing some of the primary materials where other older terms have been used) as only that would enable us to sufficiently contextualize our analysis in the contemporary discourse.

writers who focussed on the experiences of certain disadvantaged sections (*adhasthitar*) in society. The recent shifts in the political vocabulary of the region has enabled intellectuals from the marginalised sections to oppose the mainstream aesthetic and cultural discourses incorporating a deeper critique of the narrative of the Kerala renaissance and modernity. In the final section the critical positions vis-à-vis communist literature, criticism towards these and the Dalit discourse will be delineated in order to see the continuities and divergences in them in general and in the Malayalam literary sphere in particular.

4.1. Caste in the Communist Party Programme

> *In fact, one of the distinguishing features of India's social organisation based on the caste system was that it could easily fit itself into the three particular patterns of social organisation known in Marxist terminology as primitive communism, slavery and feudalism. Element of tribal organisation and tribal consciousness can be seen in the organisation of caste and the caste consciousness arising therefrom. Caste is, in other words, a social organisation in which society has not completely outlived the tribal form of organisation (Namboodiripad 1977, 7).*

The Marxist scholarship in India is being thoroughly criticized in the recent times for its approach to the category of caste in theoretical analysis of Indian society. In history and economics, politics and culture, left scholarship faces criticism with regard to its understanding and solution to the caste problemaitque. This is alongside the political critique of its exclusionary practice and embedded casteism at the organisational structure of the communist parties in places where it has enjoyed significant electoral and ideological presence..

On the one hand, the there are critiques who think that Marxism, as a system of thought and analysis cannot be used to understand Indian society, for its complexities and differences from the European context. Hence, the Indian communists failed to understand caste, which is the most fundamental category of social stratification as well as injustice and inequality. By using class as the basic unit of analysis Marxism cannot take these into sufficient consideration. Contemporary Malayali social thinkers Sunny Kapicadu and K. M. Salim Kumar represent this position most rigorously (Kapikadu 2015, Kumar 2006). Their ideas will be discussed later in detail. Many scholars including them also have the second strand of critique in their works that the Indian communist

movement from the early years itself was dominated by Brahmins and other upper castes, especially as ideologues and intellectuals which made them blind or prejudiced against the relevance of caste in their social analysis.[65]

In this chapter, we have a more limited aim of looking into the *techniques* of representation of caste in communist literature and responses to those techniques and mechanisms from the Dalit literary and intellectual interventions in Malayalam public sphere. We are focusing on a range of writings from the progressive literary period to the late 1980s through the different literary moments and styles. The decade of 1990s mark the beginning of a strong Dalit movement in Kerala, in both political and intellectual spaces, contesting the dominant politico-aesthetic conception of Kerala modernity and development that was primarily defined by the communist movement. It was also a period that witnessed the emergence of feminist scholarship and movement in the region that tabled women's writing as a significant critical stance vis-à-vis the left-oriented patriarchal public discourse of the state. These two streams of critique along with other marginalized voices became stronger in the 2000s and more in the contemporary times with a stronger minoritarian presence in the digital social media.

This chapter will act complementarily with the previous chapter that looked at the mechanisms of constructing the intimate in left literature through accessing notions of morality and social progress and by defining family, gender and sexuality in particular ways. We looked at various literary works in order to mark the significant means deployed by different writers that raise questions about the imagination of a new, model society by the left writers in Malayalam. In this chapter, we shall extend and complicate the discussion further by probing into the aesthetic mechanisms and techniques that were used to produce and re-produce the idea of *jati* in general and the socio-political life of various caste groups in particular.

In the Indian context, *jati* forms the basis of not only socio-political and economic organisation of the society but also a deeper configuration of the aesthetic experiences of

[65] Though the first strand of criticism is shared by some of the conservative, cultural nationalist critiques of the Indian communist movement (along with criticising Indian liberalism) terming it 'foreign' and 'alien' to Indian culture and history, here I am not discussing those. The differences between those and the Dalit and other subaltern critique are too significant to be ignored. The former presents an anachronistic and stagnant approach to history and culture whereas the latter attempts to question and disrupt the existing power relations.

individuals and communities, as it determines the primary and fundamental access each of us has to the general public as well as specific private spheres. Nevertheless, caste cannot be treated as a pre-modern and stagnant category that does not evolve and adapt to changing circumstances. The caste structure in India provides a perfect example for a system of social injustice and exploitation that has managed to survive through several millennia in varying forms and practices, changing and restructuring to suit the social transformation.

The British colonial period re-organized Indian society along caste lines anew, so as to create more stable and marked boundaries and hierarchies while offering certain parallel trajectories of capitalism, economic modernization and modern nation building. B. R. Ambedkar has stressed continuously on the impossibility of India becoming a modern nation where values of equality and justice can be achieved while holding onto the caste system (Ambedkar 2014).

There is a wide range of Marxist theoretical exploration around caste in India and the orthodox Marxist approach to caste has worked around the elaboration of the notion of infrastructure and superstructure, whereby the phenomenon of caste was relegated to the ideological superstructure.[66] More recent works have disputed this conceptualisation; yet here we shall limit our inquiry to the discussions within the communist parties and the positions of party ideologues. It is important to also asses this theoretical orientation of the communist movements in the light of their electoral and ideological strength in certain regions like Kerala where they could establish strong grassroots movements from as early as the 1930s.

Dilip Menon has argued that the growth of communist movement in Malabar in the early years and its later ascent to power has to be seen as a result of its efforts at 'reshaping communism into a doctrine of caste equality' (Menon 1994, 2). In the Madras Presidency, as a result of the anti-Brahminical Dravidian movements, resolution of the caste question seemed to be a more pressing matter than the nationalist activities. Caste hierarchy in the region, resulting from the presence of large land owning *janmi* families

[66] According to Dipankar Gupta, the early Marxist scholars in the fields of sociology and anthropology had 'unambiguously placed caste at the level of superstructure and have not considered it to be a primordial reality of Indian society' (Gupta 1981, 2093). But he has further argued that later anthropologists like Maurice Godelier have challenged this view from the Marxist paradigm itself by allowing certain autonomous role to 'caste actions' and 'caste consciousness' that can work against casteist hierarchy.

and the exploitative and slave-like lives of the tenants and landless labourers forced the early communist movement to imagine 'a new community' on the basis of caste equality. Other conceptions of community like that of nation, Menon argues, were also present in the public sphere contesting for primacy (Menon 1994, 2).

We will comprehensively discuss a few party intellectuals and their arguments regarding caste before going onto discuss the critique of these positions. EMS has consistently engaged with the question of caste, both as a historical category that has to be analysed and theorized as part of writing the Marxist historiography of the region and as a practical political category to be understood and strategized about. The structure of these arguments and the reasoning behind it will be elaborated without going into the details of the historiography itself. *Jati* system is understood by an early Marxist scholar K. Damodaran as follows, 'the society is divided into a large number of mutually exclusive socio-economic groups of people organized in a hierarchical order with immutable hereditary occupations, endogamy and commensality' (Quoted in Acharya 2010, Para 5).

According to B T Ranadive, the colonial period witnessed two contradictory processes in the political economic sphere; on the one hand the colonial administration unleashed the modern relations of production and communication that could undermine the overarching feudal control and on the other they helped the landlords maintain the feudal land relations that strengthened the caste system. Since the Congress-led democratic national movement was not built on anti-feudal politics and hence did not produce a strong bourgeoisie, the post-independent nation with its emergent capitalist mode of production had to co-exist with the pre-modern feudal structure. The caste dynamic of rural India demands that the form of class struggle should be that of agrarian revolution and 'the social reformers have not understood this link between the agrarian revolution in India and the retention of caste and communal inequalities, outlook and prejudices' (Ranadive 1979, 339). To sum up his position that has influenced most of the communist parties afterwards, caste sensibility is a feudal vestige that will be eventually eliminated once the mode of production reaches the advanced stage of capitalism (Ranadive 1979).

EMS has maintained what he calls a historical materialist approach to the phenomenon of caste that he had tried to understand in relation with not only politics, but also other spheres of social life. He argued that the *varnashrama dharma*, which eventually 'developed itself into a hierarchy of innumerable castes and sub-castes' came into existence after the tribal society was 'disrupted' (Namboodiripad 1977). He draws from the imagination of the mythical kingdom of Mahabali to represent this primitive communist past where there was no inequality, injustice or hierarchy. The production of surplus that resulted from the development of means of production, led to the possibility of a minority enjoying certain leisure, free from material labour and it in turn made the production of 'cultural values' possible. An argument against revivalism is made from the perspective that if not for the class division that ensued in the society such developments in the form of philosophy, arts, literature, science and technology could not have taken place in any society, including India.

> Thus the institution of caste in India had a positive as well as a negative element. Its flexibility made it possible to adjust itself to the two revolutions which in Europe created slavery out of the ashes of primitive communism and feudalism out of the ashes of slavery. This was its positive element enabling it to continue as part of Indian society for centuries. Negatively it however created conditions for social stagnation. The uninterrupted repetition of social, economic and cultural life as embodied in the nature of caste organisation, led to an absence of vigour and continuous change, so that when Europe began to undergo its transitions from feudalism to capitalism, India with its caste hierarchy was unable to catch up with it (Namboodiripad 1977, 8).

The understanding of caste as a social institution that continued throughout the ancient and medieval times, enabling India to be an accomplished civilisation in terms of the development of intellectual and scientific arenas stands in direct contradiction with the notion of Marxist social history as 'history from below'. The development of a society is analysed solely in terms of the lives and achievements of the high castes and classes in ancient and medieval India, whereas the effects of the caste system on the slave-castes or the untouchables is hardly a point of consideration. Apart from the aspect of historical blindness visible here, one is tempted to think that the strong trans-historicity and teleology makes the trajectory seem like a natural progression 'as seen in Europe'.

EMS argued that the persistence of caste system along with the village system and joint family system prevented capitalist development in India in the modern period. The first major blow to this system happened when the colonial powers came to India and

linked the Indian village economy to the world capital. Then gradually through the changes in land relations, agricultural production, trade and commerce, education and employment opportunities, the societal landscape of Indian villages and urban spaces began to be shaped by classes, cutting across caste and community divisions. The majority of peasants, artisans and people of other occupations were systematically pauperized as the small minority that 'anglicised' themselves and worked with the British colonial state received 'enviable emoluments'. This new bourgeois class became the leaders of 'modernisation'.

In another article, EMS denotes the 'disintegration of the prevailing social organisation in Kerala, including the division of society into castes' (Namboodiripad 1976, 65) owing to the new capitalist developments. He tries to historicise the transformation of the caste system in Kerala whereby different communities benefitted differently from these processes according to their status in the earlier caste hierarchy and their ability to adapt to the new system. Syrian Christians, Nairs and Tamil Brahmins were the most successful in doing so. Muslims and Namboodiris on the other hand chose not to adapt, holding onto their 'old socio-political outlook' and ended up being far behind the former groups in education and employment. But they made up for this lag soon after realizing their mistake. The scheduled castes and tribes were the most oppressed in the pre-British set up and continued to be the most marginalized even after the colonial period.

EMS argues that these processes produced a new class structure with a new entrepreneurial class and a proletariat and semi-proletariat. The SC/STs were not affected by this formation because they could only move upward through their access to modern education and employment. The social reform movements from various caste groups were the products of the aspirations of the emerging classes of modernization like manual wage labourers and middle class employees, and the peasants and artisans who were more impoverished in the process.

It is interesting to see the way EMS marks the modern political trajectory of Kerala as moving away from 'caste-based sectarian political agitation towards modern secular democratic political movement' in the middle of the twentieth century (Namboodiripad 1977, 20). He points out that in the colonial period, two strands of the

bourgeois movement occurred in Kerala; one politically radical, yet socio-culturally regressive, for example the nationalist movement led by the Gandhian Congress, and the other one radical in social agenda, yet politically aligning with the colonizer, for instance, the pro-British agitations of many lower-caste reformers (Ibid).

C. Keshavan's efforts at mobilising public opinion through his journal Mithavadi in Travancore at bringing together the struggle for Responsible Government and the fight for social justice against caste-based discrimination were supported only by the communist publication edited by EMS and the journal *Kesari* run by Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, he argues. The demand for reservation for the backward castes and communities were part of this movement and a similar movement took place in Kochi too. The socialist-communist position on reservation for the socially backward groups is explained by EMS as recommending full reservation to the SCs and STs while suggesting the implementation of selective reservation for other backward communities, excluding those belonging to a certain economic strata. The communists had to face opposition from two fronts in doing this. The nationalists blamed them for being sectarian and divisive along caste lines whereas the lower caste agitators accused the socialists-communists for being anti-reservation.

In a more recent article that explains the position of CPIM vis-à-vis caste in India, the author terms Dalits as the most exploited proletariat of India. There is a correlation between social backwardness and poverty that the Mandal Commission also identified. The way out of this problem is a 'radical restructuring of relations of production' because the basic economic dependence of the masses without the means of production on the propertied classes has led to the spiritual and mental bondage. The author goes on to add that this cannot be accomplished solely by an economic transformation and suggests a three-pronged India-specific class struggle (Bandopadhyaya 2002).

According to the author, there is an apparent 'misconception' among the SC/ST masses about the left parties being anti-reservation which needs to be dispelled with as they are the 'natural allies' of the left. Hence, the communist parties need to draw more members from these groups, by being sympathetic to their life experiences and aspirations. Secondly, in the united front tactics of cross-party alliance, the highest priority should be given to SC/ST parties. Thirdly, cultural revolution converged with the

anti-communal fight should be an essential aspect of the future struggles of the communist movement in India, only which can radically restructure the society.

Though the later ideologues of the communist movement and the numerous parties and groups differed on many theoretical issues regarding the nature of the Indian state, the level of the mode of production and the nomenclature of the political economic conditions in India, a continuity can be seen in the understanding of caste up to the contemporary period as seen above in the case of reservations. Let us take up a few positions from various periods and different parties to Examine this aspect.

Vinod Mishra was one of the significant leaders of the ML movement at the national level. He was an ideologue and a mass leader who wrote and spoke extensively on all fields. One of the major concerns of the communist movements in the post-Emergency decades was the rise of populist regional political parties that gained their mass base from the backward castes movements. Vinod Mishra responded to this changing political scenario with a disdain for identity-based political formations which according to him were 'only tokenism' if the political-ideological orientation (of the party) is not considered (Mishra 1994, Para 4). He tried to theorise the dalit political upheaval in the following manner. B R Ambedkar and his approach to Indian social transformation, Mishra opined emanated from the Dalit petty bourgeois and small peasantry in the country.

> [Their] particular socio-economic conditions were the basic roots of Ambedkar's radicalism and also the source of his limitations. In given conditions he could only strive for a full-scale development of capitalism and a strong capitalist welfare state which shall be instrumental in breaking the age-old social immobility and inertia. His approving references to some aspects of communist practice and invoking socialist jargons only reveal his radical bourgeois democratic essence. This is not an indictment of Ambedkar. On the contrary, it places him high above many historical figures of his times who stood for a conservative path of capitalist development preserving the "Brahminical-Bania alliances" to use Ambedkar's own phrase (Mishra 1994, Para 21).

It is interesting to see how the social location of Ambedkar, his class belonging and his philosophical and ideological orientation as co-related here is reserved for the non-Marxist thinkers. Similar considerations are not employed while talking about a communist ideologue like Mishra himself. The differentiation between the scientific approach of Marxism and the ideological underpinnings of other ways of thinking is starkly evident. Drawing from the examples of Nair and Ezhava communities in Kerala,

he argues for the possibility of upward social mobility of lower castes. Mishra argued that '[L]and reforms and various other measures of socio-economic upliftment, coupled with different varieties of anti-Brahminical mass movements led to this upward mobility of several major backward communities. In Hindi belt, the credit goes chiefly to the Lohiaite socialist movement' (Mishra 1994, Para 32).

Vinod Mishra undertakes a historical analysis of the Indian caste system, in a manner not much different from EMS' trajectory. He draws close comparison between the emergence of social estates in the pre-capitalist Western societies and caste stratification in India, whereby both these mechanisms were intended at 'adjusting the economic surpluses'. In Europe, the internal cohesion among existing clans blocked class formation in the classical sense, and socio-political formations based on extra-economic coercion perpetuated the system of social estates. In India the stratification did assume a greater permanence owing to the divine sanction accorded to caste system and more importantly due to the coexistence of a despotic central power with the self-sufficient village communities. Following the classical Marxist method he evaluates the path of capitalism in India as conservative. Since caste as an organisational principle is capable of dividing and undermining class solidarity and class consciousness, the communist movement cannot promote mass organisations based on caste identity.

The growth of Dalit politics led by Kanshi Ram in north India was perceived as reactionary and divisive by the communists. However, class based organisations like trade unions and unions of peasants and landless agricultural labourers can address the caste question effectively as class and caste intersects at the level of landless labouring groups. Alongside the need to strengthen mass organisations for students and women and cultural platforms for literature, art and performance was recognised. The attempt here is to locate caste hierarchies along the grids of class distinctions and make them interchangeable for all political purposes.

Apart from these dominant positions represented by B. T. Ranadive, EMS and Vinod Mishra, the left's initial responses to the policy of reservations in India were confused at best and mechanical to be precise. This was reflective of the reluctance of the communist parties in accepting the Dalit identity as one of the most oppressed identity in India irrespective of the class background of the individuals or families. Another

mainstream Marxist understanding of caste system maintains a constitutional approach to it by pointing out the constitutional remedies and safeguards provided to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backwards Castes in India.

Now let us wrap the discussion before going on to see the challenges faced by these approaches of the communist parties by briefly discussing the more recent positions with regard to caste in the dominant party discourses. Prabhat Patnaik in a recent article in *People's Democracy* discusses the three major positions regarding the relationship between caste and class. The first position maintains that we need to use the 'caste-class' category as they overlap and constitute each other. The second privileges either of them like the orthodox Marxist discourse or the identity politics discourses. A third position is derived from Althusserian theory which contends that '[I]n our context caste, class, and gender may emerge at different points of time as the primary sites of struggle, and progressive forces have to engage in struggle at whatever site has come to the forefront. The question of privileging in any way "the class contradiction" over other contradictions does not arise' (Patnaik 2017, Para 4-5).

He argues that all three are flawed because they all start with a 'snapshot view of society' and a 'frozen frame' and misses out on the totality of social relations, that Marx called the ensemble (Ibid, Para 6). Hence, a constructive Marxist position must look not for elements in the ensemble that becomes important at different moments, but for the force that propels the ensemble forward. This is the way forward for a Marxist thinker who employs the materialist conception of history. Patnaik locates the solution to caste oppression back to the narrative of 'transcending capitalism' and does nothing more than 'universalising' the question of caste without seeing its singularity and specificity.

Now we need to dwell upon the critiques of the above discussed positions emerging from different political and intellectual projects. Let us analyse the issue at two major levels. Firstly, there is a vacuum in the Marxist theoretical analysis of the Indian society in terms of its fundamental social, economic, ethical and aesthetic life that can only be engaged by acknowledging the singularity of the phenomena of *jati*. The efforts at negating its uniqueness (by conflating it with other singular categories and experiences like race or religion) or supplanting it with class cannot help us in understanding either the limited presence of left in the country or the complex nature of its ideological and

political presence in places like Kerala. Secondly, any criticism of the contemporary left politics need to aim at historicising the communist approach to caste from the inception of the movement and its modes of interaction with other socio-political movements including the anti-caste social reform movements and the national movement.

Let us take up a well-known critique of EMS Namboodiripad and his intellectual and political work by Dilip Menon that primarily problematises the nature of historiography undertaken by EMS owing to the fact of him being a Namboodiri-Brahmin. Menon argues that the contra Dravidian ideology in EMS' history writing in a period where Brahmins were facing criticism and resistance in neighbouring Tamil Nadu needs to be seen as his attempt at historicising the caste system by bringing back the role played by Brahmins in the development of Kerala (Menon 2006).

EMS, according to Menon, used the teleological and reductionist variety of historical materialism that reached Kerala through 'guidelines' like *Short Course* from the Soviet Union to establish the 'historically inevitable character' of the caste system due to its efficiency with regard to the processes of material production (Menon 2006, 15). It is important to see the connections Menon makes between the reductionist character of the Marxist approach, especially in the early years when only a few texts were available, and the 'justification' of the caste system in EMS' history writing. It is also pertinent to note the different trajectories adopted by the anti-caste movements in Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the appropriation of the languages of these reform agendas by the communist movement (Ibid).

However, the correlations the author makes between the upper caste origins of an individual communist leader like EMS and his mechanisms of historicising caste and establishing the inherent casteist nature of the communist movement in the region seems insufficient, if not misleading. I would rather argue that the pitfalls in EMS' historiographical account of Kerala's past points towards a deeper crisis of Marxist historiography of the non-western societies and their relations of production and socio-cultural structure. There should be analytically sounder ways of reaching at both the lopsidedness in history-writing and the history of caste in the communist movement and organisations. Also, rather than attaching the peculiar nature of this historiography to the lack of the early communist thinkers' access to 'authentic' Marxist texts and their use of

certain other texts, which they simply 'transmitted', the success of the movement in the region at both hegemonic and electoral levels force us to think more about the grounded translation of the Marxist conceptual vocabulary these early activists had carried out.

A significant Dalit critique of the mainstream left in India is criticised for its refusal to engage with caste-question without subsuming it in other paradigms like economic or class questions. On certain issues Marxism is equated with Brahmanism and Gandhism. Caste is considered as a feudal social formation whereas the Dalit scholars reject it by pointing towards the ability of the structure to negotiate with neo-liberal capitalist mode in the present scenario. Brahmanism enables the metamorphosis possible. EMS has mentioned the political-economic theoretical study he undertook while serving as a member of the Malabar Tenancy Reforms Committee and throughout his decades of activism. The phrase *jati-janmi-naduvazhi medhavitvam* (caste-feudal-landlord domination) was coined by him in order to understand the peculiar character of the feudal relations in the region. Even after undertaking some nuanced studies, the Marxist ideologues fall short of incorporating the experiential registers of caste into the structural ones and we shall look at some of the reasons behind this gulf in later sections of the chapter.

The Dalit critiques point out to the fact that maintaining the 'purity' of working class politics by not 'dragging in' questions of other marginalised identities has been a significant aspect of the Indian communist movement and it is part of their euro-centric inheritance. In a Dalit studies volume titled *Dalitapathakal* (The Dalit Paths) published in 2006, the editor, Bobby Thomas calls the work an attempt to 'compile the details of a war' that's taking place in Malayalam at the theoretical level. He notes that from the earlier political agenda of 'anti-casteness' the present day discourse has moved to the politics of 'Dalit identity formation' (Dalit *svatwa-nirmiti*) (Thomas 2006, 8). Why Marxism has been skeptical of identity issues like racism, casteism and patriarchy, Thomas asks. He points out that in the French communist party, the race question and the black liberation movements were not accepted as communist program (Thomas 2006, 19).

One of the strongest critiques of Marxist politics in Kerala and in the country in general is voiced in K. M. Salim Kumar's article titled 'Caste of the Communists' in the

same anthology. He contends that the Indian left has 'imported' a Euro-centric model of Marxist social analysis and has approached local issues from that vantage point. This amounted to being pro-*Savarna* and anti-Dalit in practice. He goes on to argue that the Indian communists followed the path of the national bourgeois in emphasizing on the centrality of national sovereignty and nation building while ignoring the domestic political issues pertaining to caste hierarchy and social injustice. In the context of Kerala, the left thinkers did not actively take up the 'Dalit question' until the beginning of the twenty first century. (Kumar 2006, 159-173).

This critique points towards a few pitfalls in the Marxist approach to the problemaitque of caste in India in general and in Kerala in particular. Firstly, the Marxist approach tries to confine the discourse of caste differences to a 'pre-modern', pre-Renaissance consciousness and 'neglect' (*tamaskaranam*) the contemporaneity of caste as a political-economic, socio-cultural question to be confronted. Caste is seen as an impediment in being the remnant of the feudal pre-modern past that restricted the growth of class consciousness. Secondly, this led to the distorted understanding of the peculiar capitalist mode of production in the region that could co-opt and utilise caste system to the end of maximising profit. The faulty idea of the withering away of caste and the emergence of 'pure class' once the unfolding of capitalism is attained stems from the first misconception (Ibid).

In the same volume, left critics like P. K. Rajasekharan and E. P. Rajagopalan maintain the argument about the 'uniqueness of Kerala' and accuse Dalit intellectuals to be imposing the North Indian or other regional Dalit conditions onto the educated Malayali Dalits who gained social equality and do not have to face communal violence (Thomas 2006, 88). On the one hand, the caste question was relegated to the ideological superstructure as already discussed in the beginning of the section; on the other, it was argued that the renaissance initiatives continued to be active through the communist mass politics and building of class consciousness. This was peculiar to the history of Kerala that made the region immune to the 'caste crises' that other regions faced. These left intellectuals disagree with the Dalit intellectuals on the 'lived experience' of Dalits in Kerala being that of victims of caste atrocity and accuse them of 'exaggerating the victim position of Dalits' in order to 'live off it'. Essentialism embedded in their convoluted

theorisations leads to the creation of a metaphysical portrayal of the Dalit identity, according to the left scholars like P. K. Rajasekharan and E. P. Rajagopalan (Thomas 2006).

However, many Dalit scholars including K. K. Kochu and Salim Kumar argues in this context that the image of Kerala being a 'casteless' and 'caste-neutral' society is far from being true at many levels. The 'post-liberation movement' (*vimochana samaram*) period in the history of the state unravelled consolidation of *savarna* interests and the dilution of the communist policies regarding land reforms and education reforms from which only the Dalit community was totally excluded (Kumar 2006, 162). Hence, the 'myth of the casteless Kerala' society was reinforced from the politics of negligence and deliberate superimposition of the language of class over that of caste. Moreover, the communist imagination of Kerala renaissance is one of a 'finished revolution' without inherent faults that only needs to be taken forward as time goes by. The criticality emerging from various quarters including the Dalit one is seen as counter-revolutionary tendency that would only strengthen the communal-fascist forces in the state.[67]

Nissim Mannathukaren has pointed out that the influence of the Nehruvian liberal model of democracy is evident in the positions adopted by the mainstream left in India. Whether it is the stress on constitutionalism or the position regarding nationalism or secularism, the mainstream left in the country has always aligned with the national bourgeoisie. He contends that since the communist movement failed to 'radicalise the language of caste' in Kerala after the period of 'Kerala Renaissance', the 'most revolutionary currents from this renaissance were left untapped' (Mannathukkaren 2013, 508). Now let us briefly map the ways in which the category of caste was present in modern Malayalam literature before the communist intervention in the 1930s.

[67] The reality of land reforms that systematically kept the Dalit labourers out of re-distribution of cultivable land by providing them with small household plots is discussed in detail by K. T. Rammohan in his article "Caste and Landlessness in Kerala: Signals from Chengara" published in 2008. It substantiates the Dalit intellectual criticism regarding the consolidation-exclusion argument discussed above about the communist governmental policies (Rammohan 2008).

4.2. Caste in Modern Malayalam Literature before the Progressive Movement

No, not a single letter is seen
On my race
So many histories are seen
On so many races…
There was no one on this earth
To write the history
Of my race in the olden days
What a pity!
Think of it
Regret fills within
Let me add something
In my own melody
The story of
A people who lived in Kerala
Since the ancient times
And how they became demons[68] (Swamy and Anil 2010, 11-12)

The presence of the 'caste-subjectivities' and lived experiences have been central to Malayalam literature from the nineteenth century itself. Most of these works were written by upper caste writers; the first novel in Malayalam, *Ghatakavadham* that had a Pulayan in a central role, was written by a lady missionary called Mrs. Collins and was influenced by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In his literary historiographical work on dalit literature, K. C. Purushothaman contends that 'almost all of the landmark works of Malayalam literature embody the landscapes of Dalit life fully or partially' (Purushothaman 2008, 196).

Dilip Menon has argued that the nineteenth century Malayalam novels written by lower caste groups 'project the imagination of a place elsewhere characterized by redemptive death (where the old caste self dies)' and they point towards the yet-to-be-realized aspect of modernity (Menon 2006, 75). His argument revisits the causal connection assumed between the rise of nationalism and emergence of novels from the specific context of Malayalam language where he contends that in all these novels that he reads the axes around which the narrative is imagined is not that of the nation; rather it

[68] This is an excerpt from a song written by Poykayil Appachan who was one of the prominent spiritual and political leaders in the social reform movements. He established the *Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha* (God's Church of Visible Salvation) in 1909. He worked among the converted Dalit Christians in Travancore and tried to organize them into self-respecting communities. His songs, written between 1905 and 1939, vocalise the unwritten histories of the 'untouchable' communities in Kerala. This translation is done by Ajay Shekhar.

pertains to the 'fashioning of the caste self and a new collectivity within a religious imagining' (Menon 2006, 83). The rationalist thrust of these novels and their attempts at inaugurating dialogue between old-age customs and the new rationality unleashed mainly by the missionary activities and Christian religious principles are to be noted.

A parallel narrative runs in the field of modern Malayalam poetry too. In his foreword to the birth centenary edition of Pandit K. P. Karuppan's *Jatikkummi* K. S. Radhakrishnan writes about the specific languages 'structured through caste-based experiences and controlled by caste-signifiers'(Radhakrishnan 2012, 9-10) that different castes and sub-castes used in different regions of present day Kerala. Hence, the most important aspect of 'Kerala renaissance' was the creation of a standardized Malayalam and this could have been possible only through the creation and dissemination of a new set of knowledge, free from feudal privileges and accessible to all. *Jatikkummi* is a long poem, modelled on the *advaitic* text of Sri Sankara called *Manisha Panchakam* written in a contemplative fashion explaining the transformation he underwent after his encounter with a *chandala* who debated with Sankara about the meaningless of caste hierarchy and the real spirit of *advaita* thought.

Pandit Karuppan uses this model in order to bring home the idea of underlying unity of the universe as understood in ancient Hindu philosophy. *Jatikkummi* proclaimed as early as in 1912 a princely state that was ruled in accordance with Hindu scriptures that observing untouchability is completely against the essence of Hinduism itself. *Jatikkummi* can be considered as the first text written in Malayalam that critiques caste division and discrimination in Kerala society. This was written in a language that was accessible to all and in a rhyme that could be sung along in large groups and used for group dance performances too.

The literary and aesthetic discourses in the final decades of the nineteenth century were dominated by the Namboodiri poets and their royal counterparts and patrons. One of the most important writers of that period who is known for his Malayalam translations of the epics, Kodungallur Kunjikkuttan Thampuran wrote a poem titled *Kavibharatam* in 1887. P. Govinda Pillai notes that this text undertook a caricature of the contemporary Malayalam poets and their followers falling into the Pandava and Kaurava camps. This text mentioned no *avarna* poet even though there were a number of significant writers

especially from the Ezhava community writing in Malayalam during that time. To counter this, one of the budding *avarna* writers, Muloor S. Pathmanabha Panikker wrote a text titled *Kaviramayanam*. This inaugurated a debate that later contributed to the more democratised literary public sphere that we encounter in the early decades of the twentieth century (Pillai 2013a, 38-39).

Kumaran Asan's long poem *Duravastha* that came out in 1922, depicts the story of a young Namboodiri woman, estranged from her family as a result of the 'Mappila riots' and a young Pulaya man who provides her a place to live in his hut, who decide to share their lives at the end. Asan ends the poem by substantiating that 'just like rivers meeting the ocean and mountain peaks stretching to touch the sky' human beings are made to naturally fall in love with other human beings unless the social relations intervene (Asan 2004, 521). This created much uproar at the time of its publication from many quarters for its subversive potential. Purushothaman argues that the protagonist in the poem is the 'Pulaya community' itself that could enter the field of literature and be a participant in love (Purushothaman 2008). Asan was influenced by Narayana Guru's writings and teachings and the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) movement in Travancore.

Asan discussed the question of caste in his other poems like *Chandalabhikshuki*, which discussed the arrival of Buddhism to the caste-ridden North Indian society and explored the gender dimensions within Buddhist ascetic practices. Sahodaran Ayyappan was another significant figure in this history who wrote many poems that contributed to the anti-caste discourse in Kerala. He ran various magazines and other publications to propagate his anti-caste ideas.

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai published *Vazhakkula* in 1937, which narrated the story of feudal exploitation whereby the Pulayalabourer is denied the fruits of his labour. It is to be noted here that communist ideologue P. Govinda Pillai marked this poem as the first Malayalam text that 'resonates the idea of modern class struggle' in a foreword he wrote for its recent edition (Pillai 2013b, 7). Pillai has not mentioned the caste angle to the poem even though it is explicitly expressed in the poem that the labourer is a Pulaya one. The year of the publication of this poem coincides with the inauguration of JSS.

Dalit literature is also a relatively recent theoretical consolidationand some Dalit writers like Kamalakar Gangavane argue that this could happen only after the adoption of Buddhism by Ambedkar. It's a move away from myth to history, freeing oneself from the de-historicized experience of caste. 'Dalit literature is characterized as a literature of protest and historical revisionism, typically with an emphasis on the documentation of the violence, oppression, and structural inequality engendered by casteism'. It is intrinsically connected to Dalit consciousness or *avabodham* that challenges the traditional aesthetics in being anti-feudal and anti-casteist (Quoted in Gajarawala 2013, 1-2).

In the case of Malayalam, Dalit literature in the way we understand it now, emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s. However, apart from the works of non-Dalit writers who brought the caste question to centre-stage, there were only a few Dalit writers like T.K.C. Vaduthala who were present in the literary scene before 1990. C. Ayyappan stands out in this narrative as the single most important figure in Malayalam Dalit writing. We will read from both their oeuvre in later sections in this chapter and situate them vis-à-vis their approach to the communist movement and response to the communist engagement with caste in Kerala.

In the following sections in the chapter we will read the selected texts from different periods to analyse the techniques of representation and imagination of caste in them. Since the term Dalit as a political location that can encompass the untouchable identity emerged and gained currency only in the last three decades, most of the works discussed in this thesis (whether written by Dalit or non-Dalit writers) use other terms like *hairjan*, SC/ST or particular caste group names. I retain these terms in such places where the use of Dalit would be ahistoric and anachronistic.

4.3. Caste in the Writings of TKC Vaduthala and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai

In Malayalam literature T. K. Chathan Vaduthala (henceforth TKC) pioneered what came to be called Dalit fiction decades later. TKC was actively writing in the 1950s and 60s, 'two generations before Dalits were born' says C. R. Omanakkuttan in a foreword written to a posthumously published collection of his hitherto unpublished stories (Omanakkuttan 2011, 9). Some of his major works include short story collections namely *Randu Thalamura* (1950) and *Chankaranthi Ada* (1959) and novels namely *Kattayum Koythum*

(1960), *Nanavulla Mannu* and *Changalakal Nurungunnu* (1979). Omanakkuttan goes on to recollect his first meeting with TKC who was to be his superior in a government department, saying 'I was meeting a dark-skinned short story writer who was a graduate and who sports thick moustache and wears [sic.] shirt and pants for the first time; until then I had met Karoor [Neelakanda Pillai], [Ponkunnam] Varkey, [Vaikom Muhammad] Basheer, [Lalithambika] Antharjanam, [Kesava] Dev, Uroob, [SK] Pottekkad etc' (Ibid). These are the most celebrated writers of the 'progressive era' in Malayalam literature and TKC was different from all of them in such stunning ways.

TKC, Paul Chirakkarode and C. Ayyappan represent the three phases of the Dalit writing in Malayalam before the advent of the concerted intellectual and aesthetic intervention made by Dalit politics during the 1990s. TKC was a university educated government employee who wrote numerous novels and short stories and also held responsible positions in various literary and cultural organisations. Some of his works were radically ahead of the intellectual-aesthetic and even political climate of his times. But his works were not categorized as part of any of the literary movements in mainstream literary historiography like the progressive or modernist ones. Many later Dalit scholars have pointed out this negligence shown by the literary critics of his time who did not engage with his works with due respect and seriousness.

In this section, we will read a few selected works of TKC, focussing on the ways in which he imagined the relationship between caste and the left politics and aesthetics that was in currency at that time. We will also juxtapose his writings alongside the works of his contemporary writer Thakazhi Sivasakara Pillai (henceforth Thakazhi) who is known for his engagement with the lives of untouchable castes and other figures from the margins. Thakazhi's two prominent novels *Randidangazhi* (Two Measures) and *Thottiyude Makan* (Scavenger's Son) will be read in order to identify the representational techniques and mechanisms they employed to narrate these untouchable lives and situate them in relation to the same in TKC's writing. As Renukumar has pointed out, it will be more expedient to term the works of non-Dalit writers that express sensitivity to Dalit lives and their issues as *Dalit-paksha* (Dalit-oriented) literature and the writings of Dalit writers prior to the emergence of the political category of 'dalit' as Dalits' literature

(Renukumar 2006). Hence, here Thakazhi would belong to the former and TKC to the latter categories.

Such a comparison between Thakazhi and TKC becomes relevant not only because of the chronological proximity of these works, but also for the fame and negligence they respectively received for writing mostly about the same sociological realities of the political-economic and socio-cultural relations that existed then. Let us begin by delineating some of the mechanisms in TKC's writing that mark the untouchable lives in the context of the emerging communist movement in the erstwhile princely state of Cochin.

Pradeepan Pambirikkunnu identifies three main features of TKC's fiction; first, use of regional and caste specific expressions, second, realistic depiction of life and third, the dilemma related to the selection of ideology (Pambirikkunnu 1997). K. S. Ravi Kumar situates TKC's stories as the first Dalit stories in Malayalam with *swaanubhava theevrata* (the intensity of first-hand experience). He began writing in the 1950s, in the middle of the progressive literature movement and the aesthetic debates associated with it. He identified his times as one of feudalism that was moving towards capitalism. He wanted to guide his community, Pulaya agricultural workers, in the direction of progress along with other communities. Yet, his stories were not consciously filled with ideas of social reform. They depicted the everyday lives of his community, their livelihood, religious and ritual practices and spaces like the toddy shop, paddy fields, marriage ceremonies and exorcist/magical activities were discussed in detail (Kumar 2012).

Some of his stories deal with class-formation within the Pulaya community who were agricultural labourers. Unionisation among them and the confrontation between the categories of caste and class are frequently portrayed in his stories. The social reformist tendency among the Pulaya youth and the communist trade union mobilisations occupy his literary imagination at various levels. On the one hand it seems that TKC Vaduthala is in consensus with the reformist sections, especially with regard to primitive rituals and superstitions prevalent within his community. Yet, on the other, he was suspicious of the external interventions that maintained a hierarchic and pedagogic relationship with the Dalit communities. The Dalit-subaltern experiential register in literature that became

stronger only in the 1980s and 1990s is present in TKC's stories that came out almost four decades before.

Nanavulla Mannu (The Wet Soil), a novel written by TKC in 1970 is situated in the communist trade union activities among the Pulaya agricultural labourers in the middle of the twentieth century. The protagonist believes that the communist movement is beyond the caste structure that exists in the rest of the society and there is no caste discrimination in the communist party. During the course of his activism in the union, his belief is proved wrong. As a result, he returns to his community, to address his fellow-Pulayas as 'their' leader. He urges them to stop being the 'wage-army' or mercenary of the party. He proclaims that 'class consciousness is not enough [for the untouchables]; if [you think] it's enough [then] the community can only remain as a wage-army [of the party]. You are happy with a few more measures of paddy' (Quoted in Purushothaman 2008, 228). Then he goes onto organise his fellow-Pulayas to fight for education, employment and representation.

One is reminded of the radical legacy of the reform movement where leaders like Narayana Guru raised the importance of both *vidya* (knowledge) and *sangham* (unity). He also reaches Ambedkar from the anti-caste reformist position when he stresses on the slogan of 'educate, organize and agitate'. On the one hand, the communist movement is criticized for retaining casteist structures in its entire organisation and the Dalit labourers are offered an alternative platform to organize themselves. On the other, this novel severs the Dalit consciousness from the communist offer of trade unionism and welfare to bring it to the sphere of caste-based agitation and organisation.

His other two major novels namely *Kattayum Koythum* (1977, The Paddy Sheaf and Harvest), *Changalakal Nurungunnu* (1979, Chains are Breaking) are also placed in the context of the emerging resistance from the untouchable castes, Pulayas in particular, against *janmitham* (lanlordism). In the former novel, there is a significant ideological tussle that takes place between two young Pulaya labourers, namely Choti and Mailan. Choti is inspired by the budding communist movement in the region and follows the ideas of the upper caste communist leaders regarding the necessity of working class unity across castes and the economic inequality being the most fundamental inequality in society. He also believes that through organized union activity the dignity of labour and

higher living standards can be achieved for the Pulayas and once economically all are equal, the other differences will vanish too. Hence, he is not in favour of valorizing or consolidating the Pulaya identity.

However, Mailan differs from Choti by saying that with equality only in the economic sense the untouchable castes cannot reach up to the level of the socially higher castes. The community needs to strengthen on its own and gain education and social mobility. Here Mailan reaches the same point where the protagonist in *Nanavulla Mannu* also reaches; i.e. the need to carry out socio-cultural initiatives among the untouchables apart from political trade unionism. He argues with Choti that the trade union and the community organisation need to be two separate entities. Otherwise, the untouchable labourer will only think of his labour in the field. They need a space for cultural growth which alone would bring them forward ultimately.

Without going into the relevance or valence of these critiques, we need to approach them for the language of politics they unleash in Malayalam, when the only available language was that of class consciousness provided by the communist movement. After 1957, the movement managed to systematically subsume the earlier discourses of social, spiritual and religious reforms in the matrix of class politics in a governmental fashion. Electoral compulsions and majority dynamics in the region forced the mainstream communist parties to succumb to the demands of the dominant communities. But in TKC's works, a criticism (at both theoretical and practical levels) is produced from the perspective of the untouchable labourer himself.

We cannot read this novel today without some sense of wonderment as such a strong Dalit critique of the communist modality of mass mobilization and organisation had been present in Malayalam literature years before the advent of Dalit fiction and criticism. I would argue that the negligence TKC and his writings faced then has to be understood as determined by both the hegemonic presence of the mainstream left in the literary scenario and the unacknowledged determinant of caste identity of the writer.

While reviewing *Wind Flowers: Contemporary Malayalam Short Fiction* edited by V. Abdulla and R. E. Asher, literary critic P. P. Raveendran has pointed out the absence of TKC's works from the anthology. He specifies the contemporary interest in 'marginalized writers like TKC Vaduthala who are now being re-read from new

perspectives as part of the "culturalist" exercise' (Raveendran 2006, 192). Most of the literary criticisms of his times mention his name and a few of his works just as part of a large list of names, without even attempting to engage with his works.[69]

TKC wrote extensively in the decades of 1950s, 60s and 70s when several transformations occurred in the sphere of Malayalam fiction. During the years that immediately followed independence a split in the Progressive Literature Association between the communist writers and non-party liberal writers and critics occurred around questions of 'artistic freedom', 'disciplining by the party' and politicisation of literature. Some of these debates are discussed in detail in the first chapter. The organisational activities of the Association were weakened afterwards until the mid-70s when the CPIM took the initiative of establishing the cultural platform of Dehsabhimani Study Circle.

Meanwhile many modernist works appeared and these works, including those of O.V. Vijayan, M. Mukundan, Anand and V. K. N., were vehemently critiqued in the communist literary circles in a manner similar to the earlier debate between realism and socialist realism (which is discussed in the Chapter 2 of the dissertation). The modernist works were accused of 'modelling on western literature' without having any roots in the local sensibilities. They were considered to be influenced by the existential and high-modernist philosophy and art and literature of Europe and to be devoid of any relevance toKerala society or its problems. This criticism has been raised from various quarters including the left and Dalit discourses. Moreover, they were blamed for their excessive individualism, anarchy and sexual overtones.

It is not the intention of this section to dwell upon these concerns about the reception of the modernist idiom in Malayalam by the communist critics. Rather I mentioned this to point towards the attention these writers received in the period after progressive literature. In contrast to these heated debates, a writer like TKC and the critique he raised against the communist movement was not addressed by the communist critics and ideologues.

[69] Azhikode (1977), Tharakan (1978, 1979), Namboodiri (1965) are some of the examples.

> Just like my own diffidence, the negligence [from critics and readership] has affected me. The absence of both good and bad opinions. Even bad opinions would have been better. I have published since 1960s...What's the point in speaking to an empty hall? An entire side was empty. We get bored when it's always one-sided…It must have been in 1984-85. Someone sent a leaflet on Dalit literature to my father-in-law T. K. C. Vaduthala. Its title was 'What is Dalit Literature?' I remember what he said after reading it. 'I have been writing Dalit literature for the past 30 years. Still, they say there is no Dalit literature'. He did not say it scornfully or angrily. He said it as if it's inconsequential. Later, I had asked many Dalit activists if they have read his works. Including the theorists no one had read them. Neither Hindus nor Christians were offended by his stories (Ayyappan 2008, 180-184).

This is an excerpt from an interview of C. Ayyappan (c. 1949-2011) who was one of the most significant Dalit writers in Malayalam. Like he says, the absence of opinion about an entire corpus of works by a writer, in the Malayalam literary public sphere is conspicuous. When we extend this to the contemporary debates surrounding Dalit writing it can be argued that until the Dalit writers forced the discourse of caste on the left dominated public sphere, by questioning the lofty claims of Kerala renaissance and the Kerala development model, the hegemonic participants of this sphere continued to ignore and in turn subsume these uncomfortable questions. This process of invisibilising through negligence is nothing new in the history of Dalit experience. Many scholars have studied various aspects of this process of historical and structural erasure of Dalit experience and its singularity.

The short story *Achanda Ventheenja Inna* (Father, Here is Your Scapular) by TKC is included by the mainstream critics in their historical accounts of Malayalam short story at least for the sake of tokenism, says T. K. Anilkumar. 'This story attempts to create ruptures in the structure [of language and aesthetics] in both narration and theme (Kumar 2004, 83). Here, TKC reflects on the issue of religious conversion of the untouchables into Christianity. The story ends with the realization of its protagonist Kandankoran who converted and assumed the Christian name Devassy that the untouchable will always remain an untouchable in the eyes of the upper castes even if you convert. The story ends with the dramatic utterance of Kandankoran to the priest that goes thus, 'Father, here is your scapular; I will go on living as the old Kandankoran' (Ouoted in Kumar 2004, 83).

In order to challenge the *savarna* politics, Dalit writers profusely used their community specific expressions and songs in their writings. Some of the titles of

Vaduthala's stories like *Aan Maka Cheemeni*, *Iragikodante Kandankora*, *Enda Vitiya* deviate from the 'standard' Malayalam. With the use of expressions specific to Pulaya community TKC was trying to make a space for them in the literary field of Malayalam literature. Some of his stories like *Chankarathi Ada* begin with the songs of Pulaya community which was again an attempt to articulate the life of Pulayas which is intermingled with farming. These stories deal with the marriage, funeral, death rites, some belief systems, etc. in the life of the Pulaya community.

C. Ayyappan has opined that TKC tried to introduce rationality and modernity into his community and wrote against ritualistic superstitions among the Pulayas. According to Ayyappan, it was part of a reformist effort that tried to cleanse and sanitise the untouchable life-world along the lines of 'sanskritisation'. K. S. Ravi Kumar compares these stories with the stories of V. T. Bhattathiripad as they depict the society in a particular historical juncture and attempt to retain one's caste/community identity (*unma* or truth) after purging the decadent and immoral aspects from within (Kumar 2012). This tendency has been criticized by later Dalit critics including C. Ayyappan for being an imitation of the upper caste values and sensibilities, 'whereby the one who has rescued himself ends up idealizing his state of affairs…that's why some of his works feel like they have just been ironed out'. This has given rise to a sense of scorn towards the lower caste life worlds that the individual writer had left behind (Ayyappan 2008, 184).

Now we will discuss the works of Thakazhi who wrote around the same time as TKC and gained much more popularity and critical reception from not only the communist critics but also in the general regional and national literary scenario. *Randidangazhi* and *Thottiyude Makan* written by Thakazhi are the novels under consideration here. We will attempt to unravel the mechanisms that went into the representation of Dalit lives and resistance and politics in these well-known novels. We will also analyse the criticisms their works received during the time of their publication and the Dalit criticism of these works from more recent times. Pradeepan Pampirikkunnu has argued that the seemingly casteless language present in these stories silenced the aspirations of the Dalit community and privileges upper caste Nair superiority (Pambirikkunnu 1998).

Thottiyude Makan (The Scavenger's Son) was published in 1947 and it generated a controversy in the progressive literature movement in terms of its explicit and intimate depiction of a night-soil carrier's life.[70] The key spaces in this novel are the night-soil pickers' colony, toilets, streets and the night-soil depot. A brief summary of the novel is necessary here. Chudalamuthu became a *thotti* after his father Isahkkumuthu's death in Alappuzha Municipality in south Kerala. He thought and lived differently from other *thottis* in his colony. His sole ambition was to be able to leave this job behind and live 'like a human being'. He had to betray his colleagues and their trade union many a times as part of his larger efforts to achieve upward social mobility. He sets up a family so carefully imitating his upper class employers. Somehow he manages to rent a house away from the *thotti* colony and begins to send his son to school. He also gets a job as a caretaker in a cremation ground.

However, he and his wife die of a cholera epidemic that attacked Alappuzha region and their son starts living in the street. Later his son, Mohanan becomes a *thotti* in the same municipality and part of the organized trade union movement that was disintegrated due to Chudalamuthu's betrayal. Mohanan burns down a large building owned by the municipal president and the story ends with the description of a large march attended by the poor and workers in the town led by Mohanan and his union. The final remarks are as follows.

> The demonstration was far from being violent. But, the immensity of the half-naked, half-hungry, miserable masses scared not only the city, but the entire country. It included not just the worker, but also the beggar and the leper! They [the lower classes] have been our neighbors; known by us; stood as servants in front of us. They have lived depending on us. None of them could scare us till now. But, now in the demonstration they seem terrifying to us. His eyes are revolving. Where did this strength and anger hide till today?" (Pillai 2009, 124).

The entire narration in the novel is in third person like most of Thakazhi's other writings. But the last section brings in a split narrative where the writer calls the workers,

[70] *Thotti* means the one who carries human excreta from the old-fashioned toilets and dump it in the night-soil depot. *Thotti* colonies were established by various municipalities and corporations in Kerala as urbanization began in the early twentieth century. Mostly they came from the Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu and were engaged in the job generation after generation. In his translation of *Thottiyude Makan*, R. E. Asher (1993) uses the term scavenger for *thotti*. But, I felt that the activity of scavenging or waste collecting cannot capture the real meaning of a *thotti's* job of removing human excreta from toilets and carrying it all the way to the night-soil depot. Hence, I chose to use the word *thotti* itself throughout the discussion.

beggars and other lower classes as 'them' thereby exposing the difference the writer has from them (Pillai 2009, 123-124).

Another novel by Thakazhi, *Randidangazhi* (Two Measures) was written in 1948. The story is set in the late 1940s in Kuttanad that is known as the granary of Kerala. It is one of the best paddy-cultivated regions in India and due to its peculiar geographical location and resources leads a different lifestyle from the rest of the state.[71] A Paraya labourer, Koran marries Chirutha after a lot of efforts. They try hard to make both ends meet working for a huge landlord on a seasonal basis. The landlord cheats Koran and his colleagues after the harvest by forging their accounts of work and wages. Many instances of exploitation and repression motivate them to organize as a trade union of the agricultural labourers. Koran becomes the leader of the union and works in an underground set up. He is arrested and imprisoned by the government later. They have a baby and Chathan, another Paraya-labourer who wished to marry Chirutha, takes care of the mother and the baby. Thakazhi describes a period of utter turbulence and transformation in the agricultural scenario of Kuttanad and the union emerges successful in many respects. Finally Koran is released and the family is reunited. Thakazhi ends the novel with a scene where all of them begin shouting communist slogans of 'revolution long live' and 'land to the tiller' (Pillai 2010, 116).

Pambirikkunnu in an article about the novel has argued that 'the characters in Thakazhi's novels are destined to become a race or a movement. They [his characters] grow not into depth; rather they spread widely like waves. An individual is a society on his own, here' (Pambirikkunnu 1998). I want to argue here that in both these novels, the protagonist, who is an untouchable labourer, is portrayed as someone who thinks 'differently' as is the case with TKC as we discussed earlier.

The paths these 'contemplative labourers' take as a result of their thinking is very different. Whether it is Koran in *Randidangazhi* or Chudalamuthu in *Thottiyude Makan,*

[71] Thakazhi belongs to this region in Alappuzha district in central Travancore. It is situated below the sea level and constructed by human labour by filling the banks of the lagoon with clay from its depths. The major land owning families in Kuttanad were some Nair *tharavads* and a few Brahmin households. Later in the twentieth century more Christian and Muslim households began to gain more profit as a result of mechanization and commercialization of agriculture. Alappuzha district was also well-known for its coir industry, where the labourers were organized by the socialists and later communists in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1946 the historic Punnapra Vayalar incident took place in the district where a thousand workers were killed by the army.

the entire trajectory of the story changes as the labourer begins to doubt or to think for himself. They become an unprecedented literary and social presence in these texts. Chudalamuthu thinks

> If there were no *thottis*, if man (*manushyan*) refused to be *thotti*, then how would this town be like? It [the town] will be destroyed. All these big people will run closing their noses. It will be destroyed. But, they know how to create *thotti*. *Thotti* shall be there (Pillai 2009, 13).

A hard-working and sincere *thotti* will never be noticed as he erases the dirt that reminds the people of him and the protagonist Chudalamuthu realizes this fact. He refuses to clean the toilets thoroughly unless he gets enough money. He is different from his father and his colleagues in many ways. Thakazhi argues that nobody would like a *thotti* like Chudalamuthu as he seems like a human being. "Your women will find it difficult to enter or come out of the toilet in such a *thotti's* presence. Your *thotti* should be a drunkard, shabby and filthy looking, should live in disorder, and a wrong-doer" (Pillai 2009, 24). Chudalamuthu does not drink, nor does he collect the leftovers from the houses where he goes to clean the toilets. He shaves, takes bath regularly and wears clean clothes. He bargains for his payment and eats clean food. He keeps his house clean and pray regularly.

Contrary to the hard-working, work-loving and community-oriented labourer who is ready to sacrifice everything for his rights, Chudalamuthu is a *traitor* of his class. A traitor is an important category in communist literature and is portrayed as the most despicable creature, worse than even the capitalist. However, here the protagonist is a traitor who breaks the union for his *personal* gains.[72] He despises his work and lifestyle. He does not want to improve his working conditions or have more wages. Unlike the protagonists in TKC's novel, here Chudalamuthu does not imagine a collective liberation. What he wants is an upward mobility for his family.

[72] Thakazhi describes the establishment of another union after the breakdown of the earlier one. Here, the initiative is taken by the municipality itself and it was not a communist trade union. The union was inaugurated by a *sanyasi* and chaired by a big entrepreneur of the town. The *sanyasi* asked the *thottis* to pray to god and not to drink toddy. The municipality paid for their entry fee to the union and served them all a grand meal. The overseer Keshava Pillai was the president of the union. An early instance of the institutionalization of militant trade union struggle by the combined interest of the capital, state and religion is portrayed here.

After being cheated by the landlord, Koran becomes totally disappointed with his work and his landlord and he begins to think more about him and other labourers. He changes his attitude towards work and begins to borrow money from the landlord without any concern about repaying it. Whenever anyone warned him about this he ignores it by laughing aloud. He builds a decent hut and treats all his people with a feast when they start staying there. Hence, the sincere labourer in Koran changes into a rebellious political being who stops showing reverence and fear to the landlord. But here he is ready to make the sacrifices necessary for a collective struggle and liberation and he is closer to TKC's heroes in this regard.

However, Koran is inspired by the communist idea of unionization and class struggle whereas Mailan or other heroes in TKC transcends this phase of left politics and reaches the stage of caste-based mobilization and assertion for rights as untouchable workers. Such a transformation is not to be seen in Thakazhi. Yet, there is an interesting aspect that keeps the narrative in *Randidangazhi* different from other narratives of trade unionization of landless agricultural labourers. The labourer begins to question the existing social relations and the disproportionate cost he pays for the progress of the society in terms of his labour in the production process. This is not something induced from outside or from above by the middle class leaders of the trade union. The intellectual activist plays a much lesser role in the scheme and the reasoning of the labourer that leads him to the mode of suspicion and enquiry seems more down to earth and intrinsic to the peculiarities of the class itself. For instance, the Paraya labourer, Koran begins to doubt his location (as a Parayan) vis-à-vis agricultural production in Kuttanad in his regular after-work conversations with his colleagues in some toddy shop.

> Chennan had a doubt: "if there were no Parayan and Pulayan how will the cultivation happen in the field?
> That was an unavoidable question. Nobody dared to say that it would not be possible. Ittyathi told that only the Parayan and Pulayan could do cultivation in Kuttanad. Many outsiders have tried; but, could not do it.
> Shamayalpulayan said: "it has never been the case that there are no Parayan and Pulayan!" Even though entwined in inebriation Koran also had a question in his mind: "what if we are not ready to work?" Kunjappi's aslant head had an answer: "We will be starving". Ittyathi added: "Even the lords will be starving". Chennan opined: "The entire land will starve". Shamayal burst out laughing (Pillai 2010, 26-27).

They talk about how it had been their forefathers' labour that created this land out of water by filling the water with clay from the lagoons. 'Parayan and Pulayan worked;

produced paddy. They (landlords) filled their granary. Parayan and Pulayan worked and created all this land. They plant coconuts and they collect the fruits' (Pillai 2010, 27). All the land and all the fields were the result of their hard work without any benefit. They wondered how these landlords had the money to build all this. Their money came from the labour of generations of Parayas and Pulayas.

These conversations are put aside once they start working in the next season. Most of such conversations take place in a toddy shop where all the workers are drunk. But, they seem to be directly linked to the emergence of the trade union in the region and the active participation of the workers in it. These thoughts about the ownership of land, the importance of labour and exploitation and the relation between their labour and everyone's hunger (or well-being) are the foundation upon which the Paraya and Pulaya agricultural workers of Kuttanad built the political movement for fairer wage-structure and better and secure working and living conditions. There is an interesting point to be noted in this particular narrative about one of the most celebrated episodes of successful communist mobilization among labourers in Kerala.

As mentioned above, if the troubling questions and disconcerting thoughts of these illiterate Dalit labourers is the spark that further gets consolidated into a movement that leads to such a huge transformation in the social and economic relations of the region, then that movement has to be of local origins as against the more familiar narrative of communist activism that has to be imparted from above.

In other words, in *Randidangazhi*, the trade union is shown as something evolving organically from within the Paraya-Pulaya solidarity. The labourers' decision to organize themselves occurs when they realize that the landlords were also organized. They call a meeting that was chaired by a young Paraya man called Narendran. Initially the farmers do not take this 'untouchable' initiative seriously. But once the labourers manage to stop a boat filled with paddy that was being smuggled from a Congress leader's house the landlords became alert.

The assembly elections are round the corner when the *Karshaka Thozhilali Union* (Agricultural Labourer's Union) is registered in Kuttanad. Since they are an organized force all candidates try to woo them with money. An independent candidate contesting against the State Congress candidate in Kuttanad offers the union ten thousand rupees for

their votes. But they refuse to take the money and decide to vote for the Congress. Initially the labourers belonging to the Ezhava and Nair castes refuse to join the union calling it a lower-caste initiative. This is an instance of caste undercutting the possibility of working class solidarity. But later they join the union once they realize the importance of this union in fighting against the big landlords and the government that works in favour of the landlords. There is significant success in the activities of the union as the wages are re-fixed as two measures of paddy and money at the government rate. The union starts demanding for their fair share in the harvest as wages. Kuttanad witnesses many strikes, meetings and marches under the banner of the union. As the union gets strengthened the government begins to suppress the strike and other activities of the union.

A different story is unfolded in *Thottiyude Makan* regarding the trade union. When a trade union activist came to organize the *thottis,* Chudalamuthu refused to accept the arguments given by the activist. Thakazhi writes about Chudalamuthu's thoughts as follows.

> This union is for those who will always remain *thottis*. This is good for him who remains in the dirt forever. Chudalamuthu does not think so – rights should be snatched! That means we should quarrel with the authorities? We might even lose the job tomorrow. He [the trade union activist] also said something about god and fate also. No, this union is dangerous (Pillai 2009, 27).

Chudalamuthu cannot accept it when the activist said that the work of the *thotti* is important in the society. Chudalamuthu feels that if this is an important job then they will be forced to do it always and will never be able to live like other human beings.

Chudalamuthu does feel excited listening to the activist. But he is scared of the union. He feels that this union will further establish his position as a *thotti* in the society and he will never be able to quit this job. His strongest ambition is to ensure that his child will not become a *thotti* at any cost. He does not believe in getting rights for a work that he does not enjoy doing. Rather, he despises this work due to its filthy nature as well as the total ostracizing that the *thotti* suffers from the rest of the society. He believes that only an organized and planned life with some financial security can ensure his family upward social mobility. The entire novel is the narrative of Chudalamuthu's efforts towards this goal.

Thus, Koran and Chudalamuthu are both rebellious against the systems of exploitation, but in radically different ways. The trade union is a source of hope and motor of change in *Randidangazhi* in contrast to its utter failure in *Thottiyude Makan*. Another figure of the labourer also looms large in *Thottiyude Makan,* who is substantially different from Chudalamuthu. Chudalamuthu's son Mohanan, along with his friends, has realized the socio-economic reason for the creation of *thotti*. He is neither satisfied in his job as his grandfather, nor does he desire an *individual escape* from the job like his father. He is not a selfish traitor, as he knows about the social, political and ideological aspects of his life in relation with others around him. His *knowledge* about his class position has given him a new perspective to approach life. He is 'conscious' of his social location as a *thotti* as a result of his engagement with some theory that is not spelt out clearly in the novel. This theory that talk about of class differences and exploitation, oppression and rights resembles the popular understanding of Marxism.

Paul Chirakkarode has argued, comparing TKC's works with those of Thakazhi's, that 'when non-Dalit writers write about Dalit life, the inner world of the latter evades them'. Thakazhi looked at the Pulaya community of Kuttanad predominantly in terms of their relationship to the landlord whereas TKC was the first writer to depict the communal life of Dalits with regard to familial, ritualistic and other relations (Quoted in Purushothaman 2008, 226).

I contend that the 'invisibilising technique' of negligence that TKC faced has more to do with his subject position as a Dalit writer than the criticisms he raised against the communist movement and their appropriation and betrayal of the untouchable cause. On the contrary Thakazhi's novels were thoroughly debated upon and criticized by the communist ideologues for their approach to communist politics and ahistorical approach to the organisation of the untouchable labourers. *Randidangazhi* was criticized for removing the 'communist leader' from the picture and portraying the union as solely emerging from the Dalit labouring classes.

4.4. Body, Caste and Equality: The Inevitable Death of an Untouchable Organic Intellectual

K. Satchidanandan argues that M. Sukumaran[73] and his generation of writers struggled to control emotionality with contemplativeness and maintain a certain aesthetic distance from their tropes. There is a certain philosophical commitment there. Satchidanandan contends that the significance of Sukumaran's literary oeuvre lies in its seminal contribution to the birth of political modernism in Malayalam fiction. Satchidanandan has observed in a Foreword he wrote to the anthology of Sukumaran's short stories that Sukumaran politicised modernism with revolutionary social vision and ethical commitment and modernised politics with the awareness of modern human condition and novel sensibility and paved way for political modernism in Malayalam short story (Sukumaran 2012, 52).

Seshakriya is one of the most important works of Sukumaran and a novel that created vehement debates in Malayalam literary public sphere. The autobiographical references in this novel are not insignificant when we read about Sukumaran's personal and political life. The spatial and temporal backdrop and even instances in the protagonist's life are directly taken from the writer's personal experiences. For instance, the description of the village he grew up in not only corresponds to Sukumaran's the native village but also to the most recurring landscape in his fiction in general. Moreover, the first three jobs the central character loses in this novel are very similar to the writer's occupations. The writer was also dismissed from a government job for being active in the trade union activities, just like the protagonist, Kunjayyappan. To begin with let us briefly summarise the central narrative of the novel.

[73] M. Sukumaran was born in 1943 in Chitoor, Palakkad district. His formal education was discontinued after completing the High School. Then he went on to work in a sugar manufacturing factory for a brief period and in a primary school as a teacher for six months. In 1963, he was appointed as a clerk in the Accountant General's Office in Trivandrum and he was dismissed from there in 1974 as a result of his trade union activities. Sukumaran became a proof reader at a printing press and worked there for many years until 1991. His writing life began in 1965 and came to a halt in 1982. The story he wrote later in 1992 titled *Pithrutarppanam* became one of his most significant writings and it received the Padmarajan Memorial Award for best short story in the same year. His major works include *Paara, Azhimukham, Seshakriya, Shudhavaayu, Janithakam* (novels) and *M. Sukumarante Sampoorna Kathakal* (short story collection). In 1976 he received the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award for his short story collection titled *Marichittillathavarude Smarakangal*.

4.4.1. Summary of 'Funeral Rites': The Caste-ridden Tale of Revolution in Kerala

The novel begins at the point when Kunjayyappan receives a letter of termination from his job in a magazine run by the *viplava party* (revolutionary party), owing to the ongoing 'cold war' between him and the editor of the magazine. The narrative structure is divided between the past and present of Kunjayyappan's life with his thought process keeping a loop between the two. He has a wife and a little son to take care of and they live in a rented shanty in the outskirts of the city. He hails from a '*Harijan'* family and from a distant backward village. The flashbacks in the narrative are vivid and give us access to the material and emotional life of Kunjayyappan from an early age itself.

Poverty, hunger and manifold aspects destitution draws him closer to the suffering of fellow-human beings and makes him very sensitive. This sensitivity and empathy for the poor develop later into his conviction for social transformation towards equality and justice. There is a brief description about his lost love also. Kunjayyappan is appointed as an accountant at a sugar factory with a meagre salary that barely enabled him to sustain his small family. He lost that job after he witnesses a moment of intimacy between the manager and a female employee at the factory. He is threatened by the manager with dire consequences and Kunjayyappan never goes back 'as he was scared of police from a young age itself' (Sukumaran 1997, 17).

Later he gets a temporary teaching position in an elementary school. He grows closer to the barber in the locale called Kittunni who is also a communist activist and Kittunni introduces him to the socio-economic and political issues around them in a systematic manner. He starts following the 'newspaper of the revolutionary party' regularly from Kittunni's barber shop. Kunjayyappan is terminated from the school for continuing his friendship with Kittunni even after being advised against it by the school manager several times. Then unexpectedly he receives the job of a lower division clerk in a government office in the state capital. There, he begins organizing the fellow employees in the trade union of the revolutionary party and leads some strikes for basic minimum wages and he is terminated from the job under the charges of violating service rules, unauthorized absence from work and for organizing anti-state activities. The job at

the revolutionary party magazine is the fourth job that he loses and he was confident about the justice he would receive from the party in this matter.

The present scenario of Kunjayyappan's life is bleak with no income and a family to take care of. His son falls ill in between and the family goes through severe crises while he keeps writing letters to various levels of the party organisation from the Branch, Area, District, State and ultimately the Central committees. The discrimination he faces as a Dalit from the party leaders is evident throughout the narrative and most of his fellow comrades lose faith in the party and leaves the party. Kunjayyappan is pained at the lack of confidence shown by his comrades. Towards the end, once he receives a response in negative from the Central Committee that asks him to reflect and reconsider his position rather than giving him his job back, he decides to end his life. He writes one last letter to the party leadership and hangs himself on the mango tree behind his hut.

Such a detailed summary will not be amiss here as the novel has a complex and dense narrative to offer interspersed with questions of politics, ethics, morality and justice and deeply rooted in the philosophical terrain of Marxism and its practical ramifications. The points of contact between the personal life of Kunjayyappan and the political genealogy of the communist movement in Kerala are marked by memories of pain, humiliation and helplessness faced by an 'untouchable-communist'.

The text not only disrupts the dominant flawless narrative of the communist party with words and sentences formed in an alien language that forcefully makes their appearance only to be subsumed again and again in the superficial and deceptive language of class that party officialdom articulates. The novel also brings out the numerous contradictions underlying the hegemonic presence of the communist party in the local context with regard to its relationship vis-à-vis the different class-caste groups in society. Let us take up some of the particular issues this text throws up in the context of our larger project in this chapter i.e. mapping the representation of caste in communist literature and politics.

Apart from problems of a more local nature, a number of theoretical dilemmas in Marxism also keep surfacing in the novel like those of structure and agency, freedom and discipline, and individual and collective. We will briefly point out some of these from the text and connect them to the larger process of translation of Marxism into the vernacular.

I argue in the following section that caste division in the society works in an extended and even rationalized fashion in the structure of the revolutionary party and the lives of the party members in both overt and covert manners.

4.4.2. Bureaucracy in Communist Organisation

As discussed above, the novel starts with a termination letter Kunjayyappan receives from the 'revolutionary party' and ends with his suicide note that is a submission to the Politburo and the Central Committee of the party. Moreover, the affective map of the narrative is strewn with different letters written by Kunjayyappan and his branch members to each of the tiers of hierarchy of the party i.e. the committees at the district, state and central levels. Once he is expelled, he is not as anxious as other members of the branch committee of the party or his former colleagues or his wife as he strongly believes that 'he will get justice if he works with total discipline and in accordance with the party constitution, contrary to his own previous experiences' (Sukumaran 1997, 5-6).

He starts this procedure of grievance redressal through the 'proper channel' whereby he presents his positions regarding the termination at his Branch Committee and listens to the opinions of the other four members. Then he drafts a resolution which is passed by the committee and undersigned by the Branch Secretary and sends it to the District Committee. There begins his long wait for responses from the higher levels. At every stage he receives 'brief and clear' responses from the party committees about the need for him to reconcile his differences with the editor who is 'an important and useful person' to the party. His final decision to end his life comes after reading the response from the Central Committee along the same lines.

Kunjayyappan is critical of the bureaucratic tendencies of the magazine editor that 'does not befit a comrade in a responsible position in the revolutionary party'. But, in the name of discipline he follows the bureaucratic path in the party structure and waits for justice to be delivered to him. He miserably fails in his pursuit. We need to read this moment along with the critique of bureaucratization and institutionalization of the communist party raised by Cherukad in the novel *Devalokam* that is discussed in the previous chapter. Now we will go on to discuss the peculiar nature of Kunjayyappan's

engagement with the principles of socialism and communism that drew him to the revolutionary party and its discipline.

4.4.3. Embodying Empathy: Pre-rational Tryst with Communism

Kunjayyappan's journey with socialist principles began even before he was acquainted with any ideology. He was 'naturally' attracted to poverty, affected by destitution and inequality in the world around him. He was empathetic to the downtrodden and his encounter and friendship with barber Kittunni only moulded and guided his feelings in a more rational and scientific fashion. Later, he learned to tackle the emotionality associated with his empathy and constructed a structure of thought around it that drew him closer to the organisational structure of the communist party.

Kunjayyappan undergoes two streams of politicisation; one more sensuous in terms of its relation to what he saw, heard and felt since his childhood and the other more cognitive and contemplative through reading, debating and thinking. He tries to bring these together in the practice of the revolutionary party by constant discussions, reflections, criticism and self-criticism. It is described in the novel that he had a 'blood relation to poverty' that made him empathetic towards the sufferings of others since childhood. His social location as a poor, untouchable *harijan balan* (Harijan boy made it more than sympathy as he did not have to come out of his location to experience it. He did not have to de-class himself (more importantly de-caste) to be a communist or socialist.

In the novel, Sukumaran tries to make the connection between the lived experiences of the individual and the process of politicisation in a manner less familiar in Malayalam literature and left politics. We have discussed elsewhere in this thesis that in the process of 'becoming a communist' the emphasis has always been on the aspect of de-classing. Here, the story is more of becoming a communist by embracing and politicising one's lived experience and identity rather than transcending it as in the case of middle class upper caste activists. Later, as he becomes acquainted with the ideology, his transformation is depicted with images and sounds taken from the nature. The first exposure he has with the ideology of socialism is through Kittunni, 'on whose sea shore of knowledge, did Kunjayyappan sit and enjoyed the breeze' (Sukumaran 1997, 20).

> He could not imbibe everything in that book [The Communist Manifesto] in the first reading. With Kittunni's help, he cleaned the cobwebs of doubts. He read it again. Then, the ideas stood up with beautifully developed organs…the proclamation of the leader of the October Revolution flew in the vast skies like a dove…all the borders were broken by the rhythmic progress his thought had acquired. Dialectical and historical materialism fed his brain with milk...the streams of value and surplus value flowed on his sides. He submersed into the principles of capital. The birds of his quest for knowledge flew beyond the fields of economics and nested in the distant gardens of socialist spring (Sukumaran 1997, 21, 26-27).

The portrayal of Kunjayyappan's sensuous and bodily experience of becoming a communist and the organic growth of his thought process is evident here. Hence the unbroken flow from his empathetic and emotional phase to the rational and epistemological phase of becoming a communist makes Kunjayyappan different from the familiar figures of communist intellectuals and activists whether in fiction or in (auto)biographies.

At the end of the novel, Kunjayyappan reinforces this connection between one's sensuous experience and (potential) political orientation when he requests the party to make sure that the house they shall provide to his wife and son after his death, to be well away from the poor neighbourhoods of the city.

> Kochunanu is my son. If he sees the experiences of extreme poverty around him, he might go in search of an answer to them. That might lead him to think more and even act along the lines. We need to make sure that he will not end up becoming a romantic revolutionary like me. Let the history not repeat itself (Ibid, 84).

Thus, the organic nature of this relationship needs to be framed in the caste loci too, even though Kunjayyappan does not explicitly bring up the dimension. In the following section we will follow the silences of Kunjayyappan that the writer has tried to write down in the third person, especially on the question of caste and its role in the revolutionary party.

4.4.4. The Idea of Equality: the Contradiction of being a *Harijan* Communist

Kunjayyappan is expelled from his job at the magazine run by the party as a result of his constant criticism against the editor who 'lived a bourgeois life, unbefitting for a member of the revolutionary party' (Sukumaran 1997, 11). The rich and affluent life the editor lived enabled him to 'exercise bureaucratic control over his subordinates and unfair

influence over the party leadership' (Ibid, 12) and Kunjayyappan is critical of the difference in the class position and living standards of the editor and the office assistant, whose large family lives off the meagre income he receives. According to his wife, Kunjomana, Kunjayyappan has the 'disease of not being able to compromise' (Ibid, 13) with the realities.

He is criticised and his termination from the job is justified on the basis of him being a 'romantic revolutionary' who tried to divide the party members on the basis of their class position. The peon wants to leave the exploitative and demeaning job at the magazine office and restart his father's cycle repair shop. But he does not possess sufficient capital for the venture. Nevertheless, he seems to have compromised with another kind of inequality that is prevalent in the society in general and this gets surfaced in the text several times in his interaction with the party leadership. The caste identity of Kunjayyappan gets in the way of his ideological engagement with the leadership that constantly asks him to compromise and remain reflective about his own limitations. There are groups in the party based on the caste to which the members belong and he is being asked about his caste by a leader. Kunjayyappan never addresses this problem in his contemplative process that runs throughout the text. I would argue that he did not possess the vocabulary to talk about it.

Instead he raises the question of class differences in the party. He believes that such differential treatment of rich and poor members of the revolutionary party goes against the basic principle for which the party stands; the equality of all human beings. His wife warns him of his 'blind belief' in the idea of equality. She says there are 'differences among human beings just like the differences in the topography of the earth with hills and low lands. Even God could not change it. You will sacrifice yourself one day at the altar of this idea of equality' (ibid, 13), she advises him. Yet, Kunjayyappan (the name literally means little Ayyappan) named his son Kochunanu (little Nanu) and convinced his wife Kunjomana (little Omana) about the logic behind such adding such a prefix to his name. Since they are all little people, their names should reflect that 'smallness'. Else, big people will have uneasiness towards them in their minds, Kunjayyappan reasons with his wife (Ibid, 9). This is a difference that he has accepted and rationalized.

This is a contradiction that is central to the protagonist's life as a 'Harijan' communist who cannot completely imbibe the idea of equality even when he is ready to die for it in principle. On the one hand he believes in the equality of all people based on his class politics and belief in the transformatory potential of the revolutionary party. But on the other he acknowledges the differences in the statuses of people that need to be recognized and sustained. I want to argue here that the latter part of his politics whereby he recognizes and even supports the status quo is based on his location in the caste hierarchy.

This unspoken language of caste in Kunjayyappan's life is presented to us at various moments in the narrative. Most importantly, when we read the two themes we discussed above– that of the organic and sensuous engagement Kunjayyappan has with socialism and his subtle compliance with caste inequality and status quo, we come to the central thread that connects caste and communist politics in a regional context that historically perpetrated the worst forms of untouchability and unseeability and associated forms of casteist practices– body. As we have seen in the chapter earlier, many of the Dalit critiques of contemporary Kerala politics stress that body serves as the most important site of caste practices and experiences of humiliation, exclusion and invisibilisation.

4.4.5. Body as the Impediment to Class Politics through Self-Disciplining

In her article regarding the possible points of conversation between the philosophical and political projects of Ambedkar and that of Marxism, Anupama Rao (2012) has argued that there are strong 'affinities between the critiques of *labour as exploitation* and *caste as degradation*' (Emphasis in original). She denotes the complexity of Dalit political subjectivity as being 'caught between caste-as-labour and caste-as-identity'. Rao maintains that 'ultimately, the struggle for Ambedkar was with specifying caste (and untouchability) as a peculiar kind of *body history*' (Rao 2012, Para 3).

Here in this novel, Kunjayyappan's fatigued body, along with the configuration of similar bodies around him mark the space where Dalit labour and Dalit critique emerges from, even when they are not acknowledged or articulated for what they are. The shanties, dirty markets, dried up rivers and hungry crowds are all places that

Kunjayyappan's body identifies with. The malnourished Kochunanu and emaciated Kunjomana are bodies that remind his fellow comrades of the gulf between the ideological and material worlds that Kunjayyappan dwells simultaneously. Throughout the text Kunjayyappan tries to strike balance between his material existence and his intellectual and political convictions. His body – in extension including his wife's and son's body, along with the fatigued and bony bodies with which he empathise – restricts his desire to maintain the discipline which he takes to be the lifeline of the revolutionary party.

It is important to substantiate the centrality of the idea of discipline in the life of Kunjayyappan as a card holding member of the revolutionary party. The key words to understand his relation with the revolutionary party are *achadakkam* (discipline), *charcha* (discussion), *vasthunishthata* (objectivity) and *vimarshanam* and *swayam vimarshanam* (criticism and self-criticism). He is situated in the narrative as a person who has evolved through empathising, reading, thinking and debating with others with humility and openness. As opposed to the emotional outburst expressed by other party members, Kunjayyappan's responses have always been measured and rational. His reverence to and trust in the party constitution remains intact until the very end. As we already discussed Kunjayyappan organically evolves his emotional approach to poverty and destitution into the scientific-rational philosophy that is capable of transforming these conditions. But, his weak, malnourished and fatigued body is the ultimate determinant that overpowers his ideological convictions. The materiality of his existence and his politics is reinforced through his '*Harijan'* identity and extreme poverty. It is his body that will not allow him to be a party member anymore. In his suicide note, he writes

> Let me begin with an example. It is the immunity of our body that keeps us safe from the attack of germs. My commitment to the party (*partykkoor*) and my sense of discipline represent these immune systems. But, unfortunately, with lack of food and timely vaccinations, my immune power is deteriorating day by day. If the anti-party germs carry out an organized attack, I will end up being a patient. Let me give an assurance to the Central Committee. I will not wander around with the open infected wounds, singing the psalms of misfortune, in this vast, great holy land of party members and sympathizers, spreading my disease (Sukumaran 1997, 83).

The only way out for him to escape this dilemma of living as a mad man or as an anti-party person is destroying the body itself. Kunjayyappan is unable to do manual labour owing to his body. Kunjomana cannot get even the job of a domestic help because she is

an untouchable and 'there are plenty of women available in the market even from the Nair community' (Ibid 23). After describing Kunjayyappan's early life, the writer justifies the detailed description that might seem unnecessary for the contemporary story with a metaphorical reference to the Marxist notion of base and superstructure.

> A doubt, again. Was the detailed and even boring description of these past events necessary, at all? There is a justification for it. Now, if the roof, that is Kunjayyappan's life, is to be so weakened as to fall down in a light wind or rain, his picture might fade off [in our minds] as affected by anaemia. Over a vast and strong base of his past, this roof [that is his life] may stand intact like a fortress made of stone (Ibid, 31).

The narrative that follows this keeps this promise by weakening his life, part by part, taking all his certainties away one by one, whereby life becomes a mere superstructure to his beliefs and ideological commitment, turning the Marxist binary upside down for Kunjayyappan. In the end he realises the heaviness of the body, his personal life, its inadequacies and weaknesses that weigh him down, way below the ideological convictions that he thought were the substructure. He is forced to look down at the real structural dimension of his life. This is an intimate narrative of disenchantment with communist politics and destitution at both physical and ideological levels. Sukumaran makes Kunjayyappan 'drill the mines of language in search for the meaning of 'the party of the poor', for him to find 'only boulders there' (Ibid, 82). This narrative asks us the complex underpinnings of the process of politicisation in a caste-ridden society. Who can afford to be politicized in a society like Kerala? What does one's caste do to the process of politicisation one goes through? Some of the questions raised by Kunjayyappan are disconcerting precisely because of the location from where he is raising them. These questions will be taken later in the concluding chapter that looks into the issue of the political subjectivity in the communist imagination in Kerala.

4.5. Dialogues between Marxist and Dalit Aesthetic Criticism

Dalit political and aesthetic critiques strengthened in the period after the 1990s and became a significant presence in the intellectual public sphere of Kerala. Works of Dalit fiction and poetry too were published more and more in Malayalam refashioning the literary paradigm radically. In his article titled "Antarvahiniyaya Jeevitham: Dalit Vimarshanathinte Saidhantika Padhangal" (The Sub-marine Life: Theoretical Lessons of

Dalit Critique), Pradeepan Pambirikkunnu draws the connections between the ancient materialist positions like Lokayata and e Buddhist philosophy and modern Dalit criticism that was theoretically developed by B. R. Ambedkar. In every society, Dalit criticism has to attack and subvert the mainstream aesthetic notions itself based on the recovery of the forgotten epistemological, cultural and imaginative worlds of its own and develop a singular Dalit consciousness and collectivity anew (Pambirikkunnu 2013, 40-41). In turn, in Kerala, the peculiar trajectory of Kerala modernity and political life and the interventions of the communist movement had been vital to the transformation of the cultural and aesthetic terrains, not to mention all other fields like economy and politics. This trajectory has also been one of omission, exclusion and silencing of various marginal experiences and languages.

Hence, here the Dalit critiques focus on the hegemony created by left cultural engagements and attempt to point out the limitations and violence that has gone into its making. There are diverse currents in these critiques. Some focus on the 'narrative's discrimination' perpetrated by *savarna* literature, even when the thematic and problematic of the narrative remains sympathetic to questions of caste inequality. As we already discussed, the presence of caste subjectivities and material conditions in Malayalam literature had to be critiqued for their ethical and experiential valency from the Dalit location. These critiques had to be seen as part of the larger upheaval in the academic and cultural fields that tried to retrieve the subaltern agency and presence in disciplines like history, sociology and political science. The political churning of these years in terms of the Mandal Commission recommendations and the rise of regional backward identity based parties also enabled the articulation of these critiques of the dominant sensibility.

In this section let us briefly encapsulate the Dalit critique of left literature in Malayalam and the complexities they unfold. I want to argue that even when these critiques occupy a central position in the current aesthetic-political discourse in Kerala, there are deeper connections, if not continuities, between the left and Dalit aesthetic discourses in Malayalam. I borrow the larger argument from the book titled *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste* written by Toral Jatin Gajarawala (2012). She has argued in her seminal work that since Dalit literature is a literature that

can only emerge out of a movement of political protest, it has to undertake documentation of violence, oppression and structural inequality engendered by casteism in respective contexts. Its reliance on realism as the preferred technique of writing and the method of historical revisionism brings it closer to other literatures of protest.

Gajarawala argues that the Dalit literature in India is indebted to the socialist realist method propagated by the Soviet ideologues in the middle of the twentieth century. This relation is not without equally relevant qualifications that distinguish between the origins, orientation and sensibility of realist techniques used by the progressive writers and Dalit writers. Since the centrality of realism (including socialist realism) in the left literary initiatives is discussed elsewhere in the thesis, we will not go into it here.

Gajarawala asserts that the Dalit critique of the leftist/progressive literary initiatives reveal the difficult relationship that the 'progressivist literature' has had with the question of caste which has in turn contributed to the larger critique of majoritarian politics and aesthetic sensibilities from non-hegemonic locations. When we extend these arguments to the context of Kerala, it is clearer in terms of the hegemonic position of the left in the local context even when it is out of electoral power.

Pambirikkunnu points out certain convergences between left literature and Dalit literature as follows. Both are parts of respective social movements and they cannot be dissociated from the political and social claims of the movements. Both these writing practices have to be critical and oppositional and have to make aesthetic departure from the existing canons. They also have the human being at the centre as the category around which to build their hopes. At the same time he goes on to add that the Marxist classification (*vargeekaranam*) has proved inadequate and violent towards the marginal identities that might not conform to this classification perfectly (Pambirikkunnu 2013, 39-57).

Nevertheless, I want to emphasis on a different yet related point here. While the Dalit critiques point out the history of exclusion and invisibilisation that characterise the relationship between the left literature and untouchable subjectivity, the theoretical frameworks of Dalit and left literature movements share some central features. Apart from the use of realist technique in fiction by both these movements, as argued by

Gajarawala (2012), I want to delineate some connections between the yardsticks and principles of literary criticism in both.

There are continuities and ruptures between the anti-caste, community formation movements of the early twentieth century and the Dalit politico-intellectual activism from the late 1980s and specifically 1990s. The concept of left literature equalled to progressive literature remained unrivalled (albeit being criticised and renewed *from within* the Marxist paradigm during the period of Naxalite and modernist literature) until Dalit and women writing and more importantly aesthetic criticism gained ground in Kerala. Hence, the continuities between left and Dalit aesthetic criticisms need to be marked out.

Sharankumar Limbale (2004) points out to a few similarities between the Marxist criticism and Dalit criticism in his landmark work on Dalit aesthetics. Both these discourses emphasise on historical materialism and they are founded upon humanity. They are also irreversibly tied to practice and stress upon the idea of human freedom by choosing to stand by the oppressed and exploited identity. Both these critical practices are invariably aimed at bringing about the consciousness of these oppressed groups against the structures that oppress and exploit them. Limbale attempts to tie the Dalit critical discourse to the Black, African-American aesthetic paradigm too. Ambedkar's thought that works as an anchor for the contemporary Dalit discourse has had a complicated relationship with Marxist philosophy and more so with the communist practice in India. Anupama Rao has pointed out that *in his famous 1917 essay in the Indian Antiquary, "Castes in India: Their Genesis, Mechanism, and Development" Ambedkar dealt with the notion of labour universalism, by describing 'caste as an 'enclosed class'. He maintained that the 'regulation of female sexuality' was 'responsible for producing caste as a deformed version of class' and this 'biopolitical element of caste differentiates it from class' (Rao 2012).*

According to Rao in his engagement with Buddhism, Ambedkar emphasised on the presence of body as the place and instrument of all enquiries including the metaphysical ones. His fundamental task was to historicise the brahmanical intellectual traditions that enslaved the Dalit communities as he believed that this process of

historicisation will help them define themselves through embodied labour (*adhwanam*) as against meditation (*dhyanam*).

Moreover, regarding questions on the nature of literature, Ambedkar has argued that science and literature have much in common as both are based on observation, comparison and study and both needs imagination and intuition at the right proportions argues Gajarawala (Gajarawala 2012). Such a position resonates with the Marxist position adopted by EMS whereby, in order to defend progressive literary movement, he has drawn parallels between the academic or scholarly works and literary works. EMS has argued that the term literature should be applicable to even writings carried out in the fields of objective research and analysis as creativity and imagination goes into both these processes (Namboodiripad 1974).

These undercurrents between Marxism and Dalit thought had been significantly present in the early Marathi discourse headed by Baburao Bagul (c. 1930-2008), Namdeo Dhasal (c. 1949-2014) and others in the Dalit Panther movement. However, in the context of Kerala, due to the hegemonic presence of the Communist Party of India and CPI (Marxist) and other communist formations varying in size and reach, the Dalit critique had to start by attacking this hegemony of Marxist thought itself. But, increasingly in the context of urban experiences of Dalitness, precarity and absence of state welfare, the double bind Ambedkar had conceptualized in posing Dalit identity as political universality and historical exception has become more relevant.

Another question that further complicated the relationship between Marxist and Dalit aesthetic trajectories was the peasant problematic. The economy-based ic description of the peasant had to be sensitive to the caste hierarchy within the category itself, as the middle caste groups were small scale land owners or landless tenants while the predominant landless bonded labour in agriculture were Dalits. For the Indian Marxists, this conundrum was not easy to address and in the works of progressive writers of Hindi-Urdu, Bengali, Malayalam and other Indian languages objectification nearing 'voyeurism' played out regarding the life world of the rural agricultural labourers. Writers ranging from Premchand, Manik Bandopadhyay and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai have been criticized by the contemporary Dalit scholars for relying on the realist technique that objectified these 'other experiences'. Sudipta Kaviraj (1992) argues that

the orthodox Marxists looked down upon the peasants as inferior to the working class as a class, from the early Soviet politics itself. But, there was an alternative imagination among the Soviet communists who looked at the peasant class more sympathetically and this need to be connected to the radical posturing of the peasants in Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the Russian society. Kaviraj writes that '[Bakhtin] saw in peasant traditions a carnevalesque, anti-puritan, scatological disruptiveness of the solemnity and rational puritanism of Soviet Communism itself' (ibid, 96).

Om Prakash Valmiki has criticised Marxist writers and critics for their 'romanticisation of the village produced by peasant sympathies' without focusing on the mechanism of economic exploitation that is characteristic of the caste-based social stratification. The rural life of the Dalit labourer was constituted by 'deprivation of property rights', 'forced labour and/or labour without systematized wages' and the leftist movements organized around class struggle have been unable to accommodate such paradigmatic experiences, and in fact have remained blind to them (Quoted in Gajarawala 2013, 132). The absence of any possibility of capital accumulation and contractualisation of labour are direct results of caste oppression.

Pradeepan Pambirikkunnu further delineates some of the vital aspects of Dalit criticism. Firstly, the anti-individualistic thrust of the Dalit epistemological and aesthetic criticism is unmistakable as casteism is experienced by each as a problem that starts from birth and the survival has to be social in nature. Each Dalit experience feeds into the collective experience of stigma and oppression and each Dalit subject represents a society itself.

Secondly, Dalit writings are 'purposive activism' (*soddesha pravarthanam*) that can be used for social transformation. Self expression in a Dalit sense (*aatmavishkaaram*) is not dissociated form the social motions (upheavals/*chalanangal*). The Dalit literature or art cannot be confined to the art-for-art understanding. According to Pradeepan Pambirikkunnu, Dalit literature's aim is to 'raise the social consciousness against injustices. They do not consider [these] injustices as personal/individual follies'. Dalit criticism gives importance to the 'life outside of literature' (Pambirikkunnu 2013, 39-57).

The attempt here is clearly to establish a fundamental break from the characterisation of Dalit literature as narratives of victimhood, tales of individual

suffering or even autobiographical interiorisation of the caste structure. It has to be transformed into a collective resistance against not only the social structures of caste oppression but also to run deep into the subterranean sphere of aesthetic hegemony based on the former. The title of this essay demarcates between these anterior and ulterior apparatuses of caste lives in the region and language. At the same time, the resemblance this conceptualisation bears with another from decades ago is unmistakable too. The beginnings of the progressive literature in Malayalam were marked by a debate between the communists and the established writers and critics of late 1930s. The central point of this debate was about the 'purpose' of literature and art drawing inspiration from the art for art's sake discourse and its varied critiques in Europe from the late nineteenth century.

> Just because we reject the notion of art for art's sake, [the critics of the *JSS*] cannot say that we do not subscribe to any ideas of beauty in arts. In fact, when you say you do art for art's sake, you are in fact reflecting and encouraging the traditional surroundings in a conservative manner, as no one can carry out artistic production if he distances himself from his circumstances. The context that you are bringing in whether consciously or unknowingly would reflect either of these currents in the society. It is inevitable. So you are asked by the *jeeval* writers to make that context progressive (Namboodiripad 1974, 20-1).

In the debate that followed, the communist intellectuals constructed a vernacular aesthetic discourse which grew in different directions and assumed varied meanings in the times to come, which is thoroughly discussed in the first chapter.

Pambirikkunnu goes on to say that indolent appreciation is not the aim of Dalit literature. Instead, comprehending the mainstream epistemology and aesthetics is its forte. It does not reproduce itself in the mainstream space. Rather it re-produces its own episteme and aesthetic going beyond the former on the basis of this comprehension. Hence, the possibility of Dalit literature emerging solely out of its dependent role on the *savarna* aesthetic as its negation or 'other' is overcome. He draws on the relation between production and Dalit aesthetics as against the aesthetic of consumption. Dalit communities as resource producers through many millennia produced their arts in opposition to the consumerist brahmanical aesthetics that plays out in the *rasa-dhwani* theories. Since Dalit aesthetics emanates out of productive activities, the worldview associated with it is formed by the same forces. It is against all exploitative relations and hence able to attain solidarity with the likes of Black art and feminist ideology. There are

several questions that bring the Dalit and Marxist critiques closer as the caste experiences are firmly grounded on labour as an activity that produces and reproduces the world around.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we attempted to trace the genealogy of caste in left literature in Malayalam from the progressive literature movement to the 1980s. We began with an analysis of the theoretical articulation of caste by the ideologues of different communist movements including B.T. Ranadive, EMS and Vinod Mishra during the time period and also looked at the critiques of these positions. Then after undertaking a brief account of the presence of caste (as descriptive as well as affective category) in modern Malayalam literature before the 'progressive phase', we went on to read the novels of TKC Vaduthala and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai side by side keeping in mind the mechanisms they used in order to depict the Dalit life-worlds in the middle of the twentieth century.

In the central part of the chapter we dealt with Sukumaran's novel that opened up significant avenues of reviewing the relationship between labour, caste, communist organisation and the body in the post-colonial Kerala society. In the final section we engaged with certain Dalit aesthetic perspectives that engage with the continuities and breaks between the communist and Dalit critiques in general and particularly in Malayalam.

Chapter 5

NATURE, MODERNISATION AND HISTORY IN MARXISM: CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF THE MALAYALAM LEFT LITERATURE

> Men cannot change Nature without changing themselves. The full understanding of this mutual interpenetration of reflexive movement of men and Nature, mediated by the necessary and developing relations known as society, is the recognition of necessity, not only in Nature but in ourselves and therefore society. Viewed objectively this active subject-object relation is science, viewed subjectively it is art; but as consciousness emerging in active union with practice it is simply concrete living... (Caudwell 1937, 279).

The overwhelming thematic of the communist writing practices in Malayalam is the modern social development the region underwent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. One of the fundamental tasks of the communist movement in the region, or anywhere for that matter, had been documenting the changes in the political economic relationship that exist. Marxism was born in the European continent during the nascent years of industrial capitalism and the political economic analysis of the capitalist economy and its transition through epochs characterize the foundational inquiry that Marx and others undertook. Marx's analysis tries to overcome the compartmentalisation among various disciplines and fields of knowledge by identifying the interconnectedness of the system as a whole and the underlying material structure.

Though the relative autonomy and determination of each of the spheres of a particular society might vary from time to time, the historical-materialistic nature of Marxist analysis underscores materiality of each of these spheres and their rootedness in the political economy. Marxism, as a modern philosophical and political practice has had a difficult yet engaging relation with modernity.[74] Even though Marx had carried out one of the most vehement attacks on European modernity since enlightenment, ruthlessly dissecting each of the associated ideas that of the isolated individual, bourgeois morality, family and liberal democratic politics, it still remained within the large matrix of modernity in spatial and temporal dimensions. This chapter attempts to reflect on the

[74] For detailed discussion on the relationship between Marxism and modernity see Adorno (1990), Kellner (1989) Kaviraj (1992, 2005), Ziyi Feng and Lijun Xing (2006) etc.

literary representations of this relationship and its complexities as played out in the Malayalam literature of the post-independence period.

In the post-Second World War era, Marxism, especially its Soviet statist model was criticised for being uncritical of the processes of modern production and following the statist model of capitalist expansion and development along with a dictatorial political regime. Marxism was said to be indelibly Eurocentric, complicit with the master-narratives of modernity (including that of colonialism) and, in its approach to texts, vulgarly reductionist and totalising. There are differing approaches to these issues within Marxism and it is important to see the nuanced and more local experiences of communist politics to understand this complexity. This chapter will closely analyse the engagement leftist literature has had with the material transformations the region experienced; especially the changes in the production relations, living patterns and approach to nature and natural resources. Before heading to the exploration of the local context, it would be expedient to undertake a brief discussion around the theoretical issues of environment, modernisation and rationality in Marx's writings and the later Marxist discourse.

The question gets complicated further when we trace the Marxist engagements in the colonies. Modernisation of the political economy and society at large came to the colonies in the form of colonial state apparatus, both coercive and ideological. The communist movement that led to the electoral victory of 1957 had its roots in the efforts at mobilising peasants and agricultural and other labourers around the central slogan of 'land to the tillers'. It is commonly argued that the cultural activities like theatre and literature played a significant role in the dissemination of the idea of land reforms and social welfare among the gradually modernising population. Hence, it is important to examine this claim by closely reading some of these works of literature for their rendezvous with the theme of modernity and its core elements of rationality, development and environment.

Communist writers adopted the newly introduced idioms of the Marxist ideology to the expanding public sphere by both reframing the existing aesthetic paradigm and its representational strategies with regard to social development. Issues of starvation, poverty, illiteracy, inequality and injustice were brought to the forefront as vestiges from the feudal-colonial past and various imaginations of a possible future society were

offered. There was no unanimity among the writers as to what that future entailed and those inspired by the party activities were different from others in their ways of writing about the social transition and the role the party played in it. In fact the ecological dimension of Marxist thought that is considered to be a relatively recent addition to the philosophical corpus finds reflections in literature as early as in the 1940s and 50s in Malayalam.

The direction in which the political economic changes were taking place, including the entry of newer technologies in the fields of production, position of the labouring class vis-à-vis the technology, the question of changes in ecology, the violence carried out in the processes of development were all reflected in the writings since the time of independence in conversation with the Nehruvian model of development. Though similar debates might have been present in other contexts too, these debates in Malayalam were more intensified in the communist intellectual sphere in Kerala as a result of its direct encounter with land and labour relations at the grassroots.

A significant example of the communist aesthetic engagement with the political economic changes and questions related to class exploitation is from the Bengal famine period. P. C. Joshi who was the General Secretary of the CPI then had mobilised an array of artists, writers and intellectuals as a cultural front of the party during the 1930s and 40s. They carried out meticulous and ideologically intense documentation as well as various modes of representation of the famine in visual arts, performances and literature. Bengal famine was infamously called a 'man-made famine' by many scholars due to the political economic backdrop created by war, crop failure, the inept and corrupt colonial administration, and excessive hoarding and black marketing.

Rajarshi Dasgupta (2014b) has argued that a certain 'documentary role of art' that was emphasised by Lenin was central to the artistic activities of Chittaprosad, a young communist party member and artist, during the famine. He along with other artists like Somnath Hore and photographers like Sunil Janah constructed a new imaginary of the common people that situated the category of people in their concrete class locations as singular entities. This singularity that did not submerge the individuals into their class yet marked them as political beings with collective interests, played immense role in the affective registers of the viewers.

Apart from the direct questions of environment and development, in the terrain of modernity and the transformations it unleashed, questions of civilisation and the historicisation of such changes in the production relations also pose formidable challenges. Especially, in a post-colonial society like Kerala that is part of a diverse national space with the constant presence of the anachronistic cultural national ideology, ancient and medieval pasts and their relation to the modern present is a complex issue. For Marxist historians, the issue was further vexed by the teleological-historicist legacy available at the time of de-colonisation from the official Soviet historiography with a thrust to negate the regressive past and move *forward*.

The binary of tradition-modernity was to be 'scientifically historicised' by moulding it in accordance with the derivative categories that left little space for the varied cultural, aesthetic and mythical resources that the Indian past offered. The caste system further deepened the complexity as it continued to exist and flourish in the modern era of Nehruvian developmental narrative by contradicting the mainstream liberal and Marxist social analysis. In the critique of civilisation as an alienating and marginalising process is strong in western philosophical and aesthetic tradition. In India too, the modern anti-colonial forces had to critically engage with their own past and present around certain 'primitive practices' emblematised in untouchability or *sati.*

Arya-Dravida conflict in the ancient past that established the rule of the invading Aryans over the native Dravidians became a conundrum in historiography and in politics. The mythical approach to a glorious past was interpreted by leftist writers in ways unlike the anachronistic cultural nationalists. The pre-class era of primitive communism was imagined using the available indigenous myths and folk tradition to talk about resisting the present status quo and fighting for a communist future. The latter section of the chapter will look into these issues of civilisation, myth and memory of the people in the post-independence Malayalam leftist literature.

5.1. Rationality, History and Modernisation in Marxism: Producing Nature in Soviet Writing

This section tries to bring together two aspects of the history of Marxist thought in the twentieth century; the institutional Marxist discourse on modernisation and nature represented by the Soviet Union in the middle of the century on the one hand and the critique of this trajectory of rationality and economic development from an alternative reading of Marx's philosophy on the other. The former is epitomized in the Stalinist approach to notions of history, productivity, rationality and development that tried to compete with Western capitalism by imitating it. The linear and teleological understanding of history on which this 'application' of Marxism was founded, justified certain social engineering in the society undermining any criticality and opposition. This in turn valorised values of productivity and efficiency as the yardstick of economic development and social progress. Here we will briefly discuss the Soviet literary world with regard to the representation of nature, ideas of science, progress and rationality.

The latter aspect identifies the former approach with the Enlightenment rationality of modernity that gave rise to liberal-capitalist society in Europe. Scholars who put forth this position assert that the Soviet model undermined the critical analysis Marx offered on this rationality itself, in his criticism of capitalism and liberal ideology. If we need to challenge the ethos and modes of capitalist production, consumption and re-production, we have to radically oppose this notion of Enlightenment rationality itself. We can identify two stages of such a critique; first during the 1960s and 70s when the Soviet experiences were discussed in the international academia, second 1990s onwards after the fall of the Soviet Union. In both these stages several theoretical as well as political critiques of the Soviet model arose and since it is not part of the scope of this thesis to discuss them all here, we will focus on two positions from the post-1990s that try to suggest an alternative approach to Marx's writings that will in turn reveal the non-teleological, ecologically-sensitive and non-positivistic lineage that can be traced from them.

5.1.1. Representation of Notions of Science, Rationality and Environment in Soviet Literature

The famous euphemism 'a writer is an engineer of the human soul' came from the Stalinist-Zhdanovist cultural experimentation in the Soviet Union from the 1930s (Zhdanov 1934, Para 25). This approach towards the activity of writing and the role of the writer later became vital to the Marxist discussions on literature, especially in contexts like Kerala, where the communist movement was attempting to create hegemony through literary and cultural activities. We have discussed these problems in detail in an earlier chapter. This instrumental role of the communist writer in Soviet Union was later regimented and disciplined during the middle of the century leading to the execution or exile of many eminent Russian writers and artists.

As far as the questions of science, technology and environment are concerned, Susan Layton (1978) contends that a significant feature of early Soviet literature is its suspicion towards technology and in a compelling comparison she makes between two poets of the post-revolutionary era, namely, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Yevgeny Zamyatin, she argues that the former had more faith in technology. Zamyatin approached the existence of the individual in a technocratic society with scepticism and cherished the romantic, bohemian and avant-garde spirit, mourned the loss of village landscapes and nature and believed that art and literature would face 'terrible fate' in the regime of technology.

Mayakovsky rejected this romanticist position and argued that technology as such poses no threat to human nature or art. Faith in the 'new man' was to be established in Soviet Union as the revolution has toppled all the existing foundations, he believed. He approached technology as a productive, liberating force and thought that an age of 'machinisation' would bring an end to alienation and sufficient leisure time would enable everyone to engage in such 'free play of the cognitive aptitude which is art' by reducing the gap between the poet and a worker (Quoted in Layton 1978, 11).

In the literary works to be discussed in this chapter, we will see various idiomatic and conceptual references to this ideal of the 'new man' who is free from the clutches of the age-old aesthetic of romanticism and religion. Poetry needs to 'install electricity and steam in the human soul' where religion and tradition used to dwell, according to

Mayakovsky (Layton 1978, 11). The idea of transforming physical nature radically so as to even materialise inter-planetary travel had been part of his larger enquiries into the secrets of creation and the universe, by suggesting parallels between nature, revolution and poetry (Ibid, 12). 'Singer of machine' and 'bard of technology' were some of the terms he used, in order to define his role as a poet in the post-revolutionary Soviet social life.

However, his views changed towards a more ambivalent position in later years, especially after Lenin's death. Portrayals of the experiences of intense disharmony and suffering and Christ's figure as the redeemer and an imagination of 'pastoral paradise' appeared frequently in his poems. During his last years before committing suicide he fell out of popularity among the officers of the government for criticising the technocratic state and society that existed then. He wrote about human being becoming a mere object there as technology without vision had become a bane. Layton has argued that a 'quest for immortality' and desire to 'escape to future' characterised Mayakovsky's approach to technology (Layton 1978, 16).

Another fitting example in this discussion can be seen in certain observations regarding the presence of the tropes of nature, technology and progress in the children's literature in Stalin's period. The central activity of building a socialist society is the upbringing of children based on scientific and technological knowledge, which will be an antidote to backwardness. William B. Husband (2006) has argued that the Stalinist approach to scientific and technological progress was propagated as 'correcting nature's mistakes'. For no topic was considered 'too serious or too delicate' for children the presentation of issues of exploitation of natural resources, scientific detachment and 'circumspect nonconformity' in Children's literature was not seen as a contradiction. Children's literature was to be 'the didactic tool of modernisation' from this point of view (300-302).

At the same time, it is also noted that at the level of higher scientific education, researches toward theoretical scientific inquiry that had no immediate technological goal were not encouraged in contrast to those needed for technological advancement. Husband makes an interesting point here regarding science education that 'science for science's sake became derision' and in the context of our larger discussion we realize its resonance

with the debate around arts for art's sake vs. art for society (Ibid, 305). In the following section, we will discuss an alternative critical tradition that can be traced back to Marx's writings and has radically different foundational rationality to it.

5.2. Critique of Modernity from a Revisionist Marxist Position

Marxism, in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and Eastern European communism, has been criticised for being practically redundant and theoretically flawed. Many scholars have tried to resist such a position with newer analyses and theorisations in various disciplines including political economy, history, sociology and philosophy. Sudipta Kaviraj in an essay published in 1992 titled 'Marxism and the Darkness of History', has argued for a reconsideration of the nature of Marx's writings and their relation to the Enlightenment modernity. Kaviraj points out that the nineteenth century intellectual configuration in Europe, from which Marxism emerged did not have a monolithic character.

Though the emergence of Marxism is intricately connected to the processes of Enlightenment, the peculiar nature of the rationality that Marx inherited from this project needs to be analysed, for its relationship to nature and history. Kaviraj argues that the larger project rested on an irreconcilable contradiction that enabled an alternative trajectory to be pursued by many philosophers of the time. This contradiction that Kaviraj points out lies in the fact that the 'irresistibility of this [Enlightenment] rationalist project of transformation of nature and society' stems from the 'principle of unconditional doubt of all premises' (Kaviraj 1992, 83). But it also constructed self-exempting ways not to shed critical light on their own enterprises, for which the most striking example is that of colonialism.

Yet, this criticality was defined differently by the 'dark tradition' that has been overshadowed by the other stream that attempted to only 'shed light'. For Kaviraj, liminality, tragedy and irony are vital components of this metaphor of darkness and though Marx's writings were rich in these elements the later Marxists followed the mainstream Enlightenment tradition instead that lacked these essentials. Kaviraj goes onto suggest that there are two aspects that differentiate this 'dark tradition of modernity' from the Enlightenment variety; self-criticism and self-limitation.

> It turns critique on itself, making its claims to rationality self-limiting and fallible; it uses for purposes of historical reasoning at least…a gradational theory of truth-adequacy. What is important in these differences is not just the more likable mood of modesty, which might only be contingently present in one's views, as distinct from others, but rather the principle of self-doubt and self-limitation as a constituent of rationality (Kaviraj 1992, 84).

By equating rationality with control and instrumentality, the Enlightenment knowledge tradition of which the Stalinist and other orthodox Marxist intellectual traditions were part of, were excluding any inquiry without these two purposes, as irrational. An example of this was given in the above section in the case of restrictions over scientific researches in Soviet higher education on the basis of their immediate relevance to technological innovation. This 'subterranean presence' of this marginal tradition of rationality founded upon recursive self-correction was explored by Lenin, who successfully reinterpreted Marx's theory (Ibid, 90).

Kaviraj (1992) also contends that Marx's relationship to the advancement and use of technology was ambiguous and mixed, considerably different from 'technological instrumental rationality', but later Marxists, from Stalin onwards, adopted a more unconditional celebration of it, as a panacea to socio-economic problems. One of the major fallouts of such an approach has been the large-scale environmental degradation and the negligence towards the issue. The socialist camp was not substantially different from the capitalist one in this regard and this is reflected in the positions of the Marxist parties and intellectuals that consider the spread of predatory capitalist growth, especially into the third world as 'progressive'. The Enlightenment rationality that anthropomorphised the non-human world and hailed man's conquest over it enabled the capitalists and the socialists alike to uncritically accept technology as the way forward. In the context of India and other agriculture-centric economies the orthodox Marxists have found it easier to treat 'peasants as inferior subaltern population, lacking rational working culture' unlike the industrial working class (Ibid, 96). This discussion leads us to the second related theme that of Marx's approach to ecology and the role it plays in the material processes of production.

5.2.1. Environment and Development in Marx's Writing: Reading *Marx's Ecology*

As we discussed above, one of the foundational ideas of the Enlightenment rationality was 'man's' (sic) domination/control over nature, which in turn distinguished him from other animals. Human beings consistently increased their control over the non-human environment, exploiting raw materials and primary resources for the creation of a material world marked by the constant processes of production and re-production. They use their labouring capacity as the mediation between 'raw' nature and 'processed' end products that enabled them to progress from each inferior stage to a more superior stage in historical development. In the previous section we dealt with a 'revisionist' reading of Marx's legacy that tried to attribute a parallel tradition of modernity to Marxism, different from the Enlightenment tradition that the Soviet Marxism followed. In this section, we shall look at a specific re-reading of Marx's writings by John Bellamy Foster, arguing for the possibility of finding an ecologically-sensitive aspect in them.

Some of the earliest attempts to criticise the mechanical and orthodox interpretation of Marx's ideas by Stalin came from the scholars of the Frankfurt school in the middle of the twentieth century. However, John Bellamy Foster opines that the Frankfurt School's critique of Enlightenment rationality and its celebration of the exploitation of nature were later extended to a 'critique of Marx himself as an Enlightenment figure' who asserted an 'anti-ecological perspective' that became the basis of the Soviet experience. In his path breaking work *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (2000), Foster unearthed an aspect of Marx's philosophy that was rather opposed to the notion of exploiting and dominating over nature for material development.

Since the prescriptive valency of Marx's writings with regard to the material progress of humanity and the processes that *ought to* form this trajectory is much weaker compared to the analytical potential of his works that studied the nascent industrial capitalism, most of the critiques of the above-mentioned variety focuses on Frederick Engels' work *Dialectics of Nature* that apparently 'extended the dialectical analysis beyond the human-social realm' in a mechanical manner.

In this work Foster has argued that in *Capital*, we can see the perfect integration between his materialist conception of nature and materialist conception of history. The concept of metabolism was deployed there 'to define the labour process as "a process

between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature"' (As quoted in Foster 2000, 141). In capitalism, this process gets disrupted by the peculiar relations of production and the separation of the space between cities and country sides. According to Foster, this also enabled Marx to analyse the capitalist agriculture from the perspective of environmental degradation by bringing together the critique of political economy with the scientific knowledge of soil fertility.

According to Foster, Marx's political economic critique rested primarily on three pillars; the critique of Malthusian demography, critique of the labour theory of value and the capitalist theory of ground rent. In all these cases, Marx's effort was to expose the abstraction and de-historicisation of elements that have gone into these theories and to historicise them by basing them in the particular features of historical development. As far as Malthusian demography is concerned Foster sums up Marx's position as follows: 'overpopulation under capitalism was therefore determined not simply by the existence of a relative surplus population of workers seeking employment and thereby means of subsistence; but more fundamentally by the relations of production that made the continual existence of such a relative surplus population necessary for the system' (Ibid, 143).

Regarding the question of ground rent too Marx rejected the Ricardian notion of 'absolute fertility' of cultivable lands that diminished with time and without human intervention and historicised the issue of soil fertility by bringing in the questions of the class conflict between the capitalist tenant farmer and the landed proprietor that might lead to a lack of investment in the improvement of soil. This historicisation was later developed into a critique of capitalist agriculture from the perspective of environmental degradation (Ibid, 145-146).

Marx could develop a more holistic understanding of capitalist agriculture and the fertility of soil and its productivity because unlike the earlier theorists and his peers, he had engaged with the works in organic chemistry around questions of chemical composition of different kinds of soil and their changes with time and cultivation

patterns. He called the changes occurring in the field of agriculture in his time as the Second Agricultural Revolution.[75]

Initially, there was optimistic outlook regarding the surplus food production for the growing population in contrast to Malthusian predictions among the contemporary economists including Marx and Engels. This gave way to a more realistic assessment by Marx as early as in the 1860s, of the ecological degradation, capitalist agriculture was to cause in the immediate future itself. The major ecological concerns of the times were loss of soil fertility, large-scale deforestation, Malthusian fears of overpopulation and pollution in the cities. Among these Foster considers the issue of soil fertility in detail in his work as Marx was convinced by the time he was writing *Capital* about the unsustainable nature of capitalist agriculture mainly due to the depletion of natural fertility of the soil. From the studies in agriculture in both England and North America, it was clear that the soil nutrients was eroding rapidly and it was tied to the pollution in the cities with human and animal wastes.

Hence, Marx's systematic critique of capitalist exploitation had recognized the 'robbing' of not only the worker but also of the soil, failing to replenish the means of production, by both large-scale industries and large-scale agriculture. The parallel he makes between large scale industry and large-scale agriculture is something of importance here. Marx writes in volume three of *Capital*,

> Large-scale industry and industrially pursued large-scale agriculture have the same effect. If they are originally distinguished by the fact that the former lays waste and ruins labour-power and thus the natural power of man, whereas the latter does the same to the natural power of the soil, they link up in the later course of development, since the industrial system applied to agriculture also enervates the workers there, while industry and trade for their part provide agriculture with the means of exhausting the soil (As quoted in Foster 2000, 155).

It is amply clear from this paragraph that Marx did not deem the technologically driven expansion of agricultural or industrial production could solve the problem of exploitation

[75]According to this conception, the first revolution was a gradual process taking place over several centuries, connected with the enclosures and the growing centrality of the market; technical changes included improvements in manuring, crop rotation, drainage, and livestock management. In contrast, the second agricultural revolution took place over a shorter period-1830-1880--and was characterized by the growth of a fertilizer industry and the development of soil chemistry… The third agricultural revolution took place still later, in the twentieth century, and involved the replacement of animal traction with machine traction on the farm, followed by the concentration of animals in massive feedlots, coupled with the genetic alteration of plants (producing narrower monocultures) and the more intensive use of chemical inputs-such as fertilizers and pesticides (Foster 2000, 148-9).

of labour or the issue of ecological degradation and he considered both these issues as being integrally connected. This is pointed out by Foster to bring home the fact that Marx's study of the nineteenth century capitalist expansion both within and outside of Europe included an awareness about the ecological damage capitalism was capable of creating and an inquiry into the possible dimensions of this damage. Foster has argued that Marx's focus on the 'rift' caused by the capitalist economic processes in the 'metabolic interaction between man and the earth', i.e. 'the social metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life' proves his sensitivity towards ecological sustenance (Ibid).

In the 1960s and 70s when the whole of Western Marxism was under attack for being apologists of 'the philosophical notion of human domination over nature' most of the Marxist philosophers were 'ill-equipped' to confront the critique and review their understanding of Marx's writings and changing paradigms of 'human-nature interaction' (Foster and Clark 2016). However, after the 1990s and the fall of the Soviet Model and transformation of the Chinese model into state capitalism, there emerged numerous ecologically informed socialist and communist positions all across the globe that were influenced by Marx's materialist-ecological approach, especially his notion of 'social-metabolism'.

Foster and Clark undertake a survey of these positions from within the left spectrum that emerged in the last two and half decades, which they distinguish from the first stage of 'eco-socialism' in the 1960s and 70s. In contrast to the attempts of the first stage – to conflate Marxism with 'neo-Malthusian notions of environmental constraints' by avoiding any close 'scrutiny of the foundations of historical materialism, particularly where issues of natural science were involved' – the more recent movements tried to draw on the 'ecological foundations of historical materialism (Ibid).

The second stage eco-socialists rejected the 'grafting' of certain notions of ecologism to Marx's critique of capitalist expansion and tendency to pit the 'early Marx' against the 'mature Marx' as in the case of the Frankfurt School influenced earlier critics. Paul Burkett and Maria Fischer-Kowalski two significant scholars who have tried to argue along these lines by suggesting the possibility of merging Marx's critique of political economy with his ecological understanding so as to point towards 'the

interpenetration of nature and society, as well as the scale and processes through which these interactions had historically developed' (Foster and Clark 2016).

In the following section, we will briefly discuss the peculiar political-economic trajectory that Kerala underwent in the modern period in terms of the transition during the colonial period into the years after independence. It is important to contextualize the literary representations of categories of environment, development and technology in the left writings in the post-colonial period.

5.3. Outlining the Political-Economic Transition of Kerala in the Twentieth Century

The central thread of this chapter is an attempt at mapping the changing notion of environment in relation to the discourse of modernisation and development in the post colonial communist imagination, focusing primarily on literary texts. In order to discuss the changing representation of nature and the processes of modernisation, technological advancement, urbanisation in the post-colonial Malayalam left literature it is essential to briefly delineate the peculiar historical trajectory of these processes in modern Kerala. The ecological landscape of the region was undergoing decisive changes since the advent of capitalist mode of production that is characteristic of the colonial intervention different regions underwent since the early modern period. Kerala was primarily an agrarian society, with strong trade and commercial relations with the Arab, Chinese and European lands from the medieval period. The complex socio-cultural changes associated with these trade relations is the area of much historical scholarship in recent times.

By the end of the nineteenth century land relations underwent sweeping changes in all parts of modern Kerala, either due to the princely initiatives or colonial legislations. Caste structure that worked as the material and ideological foundation of the society too underwent significant transformations due to various processes including the missionary interventions in the field of religion, education and family and the anti-caste social reform movements. This in turn affected the marital relations and system of inheritance. The matrilineal joint-family system that was prevalent among a significant section of the population was getting replaced by patrilineal inheritance and nuclear families.

This was also the time when new cities emerged in various parts of the region that attracted the first generation of educated upper caste young men into colonial

bureaucratic occupations. The geographical and ecological backdrop of these changes witnessed the shift from the pre-modern surplus of vacant lands and scarce labour to work on it to scarcity of land and surplus labour. Introduction of contractual ownership of land, commercialisation of agriculture and the increase in rural population created the category of the landless agricultural labourers, mostly from the 'untouchable' castes who resided on the land of the *janmi* (landlord) without any legal claims to the land or occupation. Robin Jeffrey argues that despite the rigid and hierarchical caste relations class formation took place in the region and the close connection between caste and class in Kerala made the emergence of class politics inevitable (Jeffrey 1978).

The history of the early communist movement in Kerala was built around the struggles carried out among the small tenant farmers (*kutiyan*) of landlords and landless labourers (*atiyan*). The formation of the *Karshaka* (Peasant) and *Karshaka Thozhilali* (Agricultural labourer) unions against the arbitrary evictions and their struggle for stability and increase in wages, safety and dignity of labouring women were central to the earliest efforts of the socialist-communist activists in the region. The conventional studies focus on the 'structural characteristics, such as tenancy relations in agriculture and high rates of proletarianisation, combined with high population growth rates and intense pressure on land', as the core determinants of communist ascendancy in Kerala (Desai 2002, 619). The argument that 'landlessness and high population density together explain a proclivity for radicalism' (Zagoria 1971, as cited in the original) in Kerala, is supported by the fact that most of the rebellions took place in two districts that had a relatively high man-to-land ratio (Ibid, 629).

J. R. Freeman argues that in the post-colonial era, the efforts of the government of Kerala (in line with the national paradigm) were to fasten the colonial policies of commercialisation of agriculture and cash crops (Freeman 1999). In 1957 elections, the CPI led a coalition that came to power in the state only to be ousted after the 'liberation movement' (*vimochana samaram*) mobilised people against the government. One of the central problems that led to the coming together of the landed elites of the region, led by the Nair Service Society and the Catholic Church was the Land Reforms Bill that was initiated by the CPI government. Finally, the Land Reform legislation that was amended and passed in 1963 was substantially different from the original draft. We will not go into

the details of these legislations right now, as different sections of the chapter will necessitate the discussion of the particular features of the process of land reforms in Kerala.

Far-reaching changes in the environmental scenario were effectuated by the establishment of industries, commercialisation of agriculture and emphasis on cash crops, urbanisation and penetration of the modern institutions of offices, schools, colleges, libraries and hospitals across the state. The drive towards mechanisation and increased use of technology in production processes also contributed to the overall transformation. Both the earlier chapters of gender and caste come together here, in the ecological reading of Kerala communism. It includes the reading of left literature in its dealing with the changing notions of nature, environment, development and technology. Caste as the basic principle of productive and re-productive relations, endogamy and caste-exclusive occupational specializations has given rise to 'environmental niches of castes' in Kerala (Freeman 1999, 260).

The caste identity is integrally formed by its relationship to labour and land relations, which in turn defines one's relationship with nature. Women and lower castes and Adivasis are considered to be closer and more associated with the natural habitat and hence 'innocent and easy to trick and more vulnerable'. When we come to the literary sphere, the most important change was the advent of print technology and the spread of printed publication in the form of books, magazines, journals news papers etc. *Literature had been an important space for negotiating different experiences and implications of the transformatory modernity since late nineteenth century.* The literary world was affected by the changes in the material conditions of production and reproduction in much nuanced ways.

It is argued that the disintegration of the large joint families and migration of the educated young men from these families to the cities in search of jobs has been pivotal to the emergence of realist fiction in Malayalam. *The realist ethnographic novels like Indulekha paved the initial steps in this negotiation, which was further complicated by*

the progressive writers of the mid-twentieth century.[76] *There is an aphorism in Malayalam that captures the essence of this aspect of the social change i.e.* 'taravad kudumbabamayi' *which literally means that the taravad (the large joint family) has now become kudumbam (the smaller immediate family). This usage denotes the damage or disintegration happened to something that seemed eternal till then. The complex nature of the 'freedom' these men attained with regard to the matrilineal inheritance structure, matrimonial patterns and education system formed the corner stone of this engagement that had reached a particular point by the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, the* writers of the *progressive movement had to respond to an entire set of transformations that had already taken place both at the material and ideological level regarding this problematic.*

Even though this question of the disintegration of the taravad was concerning only a quarter of the Malayali population belonging to the various sub-caste groups of the

Nair community, this became a central theme of fiction-writing in Malayalam from the late nineteenth century onwards in novels like Indulekha. Apart from the fact that most of the writers, not unlike a majority of the communist activists of this period, belonged to the disintegrating Nair taravad, the new economic compulsions and moral concerns that paved way for this change re-shaped the socio-cultural landscape of Malayali community as a whole.

Since the major revenue of these households was in the form of paddy, coconuts and vegetables from the fields, these families were relatively stable. With the coming up of nuclear families the commonly owned taravad land was partitioned into smaller plots which gradually went out of cultivation. Modern education made individuals more and more dependent on government jobs and wages. Figures like clerks and primary school teachers became the protagonists par excellence *of this transition.*[77] *They were the new educated middle class came out mainly of the moderately wealthy*

[76] See G. Arunima (1997), for a discussion of the ways in which early Malayalam novels produced a dialogic space between the traditional value systems and the colonial modernity as to contribute to the development of a modern Malayali self that was both 'relational' and 'in a state of flux'.

[77] Remember Sumit Sarkar's (1997) discussion about the transition experienced by the colonial Bengali middle class as a result of new administrative jobs.

Nair families and increasingly settled into nuclear families in towns. But, their wages were too little to sustain their earlier lifestyles and privileges.

The memories these writers carried from their rural background that was disappearing in the wake of the material changes discussed above worked as strong catalysts for their writing styles and techniques. In the next section, we will read the works of Thakazhi Sivsankara Pillai, a prominent figure in the progressive literary movement until the 1950s. With an emphasis on his portrayal of the rural landscape and its transformation to towns, the description of the early city in his novels with regard to the presence of 'nature' in it, we will read some of his major writings.

In the following section, we will look into another aspect of this problemaitque i.e. the representation of new technologies and other markers of regional development in the left literature. The complex history of Marxist approach to technology and development as already discussed, has given rise to a range of responses from writers influenced by the egalitarian, socialist and communist philosophy. While some of them were unconditional apologists of the Soviet mode of state-led capitalist development, some others were more cautious of the impact these changes had on the labouring classes in particular and society in general. Some writers wrote about their faith in the idea of controlling and exploiting nature for the material abundance of the human race, whereas some others expressed their scepticism regarding the generic model of development that does not take into account the specificities of the local environment and its limitations. We will read the works of two poets in this section Idassery Govindan Nair and Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon.

In Kerala too, like most post-colonial societies the environmental questions have been pitched against the development agenda, which is based on 'rational choices' of economizing resources and maximizing industrialisation and making tribal population into regimented labour force at the cash crop plantations. The genealogy of *vikasanam* or development in the context goes back to the earlier debates within the Travancore nationalist discourse and missionary initiatives in Kerala in the fields of education, health etc. in the nineteenth century.[78] These themes and issues further complicate the

[78] See J. Devika (2010) for a discussion around the nineteenth century Travancorean nationalist developmentalism' that conceptually borrowed substantially from the missionary initiatives in the region

imagination and representation of labour as the fundamental productive activity. They become decisive in terms of the stand of the communist party on the question of agricultural labourers and their ambiguous identity as 'proper' labourers.

Nevertheless, the watershed moment in the formation of environmental consciousness in the state was the protest movement against the 'Silent Valley Project'[79] which brought together several writers, artists and intellectuals of Kerala. A non-partisan politicisation occurred as a result and a new generation of environmentalists were born during the movement in Kerala. The dominant Nehruvian development rationality, instrumental conception of science, linear modernising narrative of history and progress were also began to be critiqued for the first time around this time in the region. In the post-colonial context these issues are further complicated by the unjust 'applications' of Marx's thoughts onto the native population that was to be 'taught' to be rational, scientific, and progressive by the coloniser. Since the mainstream organised left movement also shared this Nehruvian sensibility, this moment also unleashed a critique of the local communist leadership. Some of the writers, also influenced by the Naxalite movement, tried to explore the complex legacy of Marxist thought away from the more mechanical and economistic and technologically-deterministic varieties. The relationship between the present and past had to be reconstructed for the colony.

In the following section we will see the mechanisms deployed by various writers to depict the local history as the history of class struggles and its connection to the contemporary oppressive structures of marginalisation and oppression. The primitive past and resistance of the 'ancient dwellers' to the internal colonialism, based on the caste/race structure became central to the local Marxist imagination. Two poems by Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon and Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, respectively *Onappattukar* and *Kurathi* will be discussed in the section.

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and how this needs to be seen as being connected to the later Kerala development model and the contemporary neo-liberal development.

[79] Save Silent Valley was a social movement aimed at the protection of Silent Valley, an evergreen tropical forest in the Palakkad district of Kerala, India. It was started in 1973 to save the Silent Valley Reserve Forest from being flooded by the hydro electric project. After long drawn and creative protests that in an unprecedented manner brought writers, artists, students and intellectual together, the project was abandoned and the forest was made into Silent Valley National Park in 1984. There was some renewed governmental interest expressed in commissioning the energy project in Silent Valley by the present CPI (M) government.

5.4. Changing Relations of Production and Class Formation in Urban and Rural Kerala

Processes of urbanisation have a long history in the region that was unified into the state of Kerala in 1956. There are studies about the early modern period when port cities emerged across the region facilitating foreign trade and further development of local agricultural production. However, the establishment of industries and colonial offices since the nineteenth century along with the growing number of schools, modern hospitals, printing presses and libraries created more urban centres in Kerala by the middle of the twentieth century.

As we discussed in the previous section, individuals were uprooted from the rural economies increasingly as a result of interconnected processes of modernisation and the emerging towns and cities adopted them into a wide variety of new occupations, different standards of living and spatial allocations. The 'rift in the social metabolism' caused by the growing distance between the urban and rural life-worlds was marked by Marx as one of the most significant aspects of capitalist development in Europe. In the colonial economies, this 'rift' had occurred within a much shorter span of time and colonial state's coercive and ideological apparatuses added to the complexity of the process.

These processes are represented in modern Malayalam literature from the late nineteenth century onwards in the form of changing social and economic relations between various caste groups and communities. The spread of modern education intensified the growth of new opportunities in the cities as teachers, lawyers, doctors, nurses and bureaucrats. Yet, social relations based on caste hierarchy did not limit its hold to the rural areas; the urban life was also ridden with caste-based occupations and living conditions. Here in this section we will closely look at one of those newly emerged urban labour and labouring classes that bore the markers of the feudal caste hierarchy. The class of 'municipal or corporation workers' the generic term used in Kerala even today to denote the sanitation workers belonged to the lowest level of urban economy and society.

Apart from sweeping and cleaning the streets, offices and other public spaces, the early generations of sanitation workers had to empty and clean the old-fashioned latrines without the facility of septic tanks or other technological advancements. These groups of workers were called *thottikal* (scavengers) and most of them were brought to the urban centres in Kerala from the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu in the early twentieth century. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai published the novel *Thottiyude Makan* (Son of Scavenger) in 1947, which the life story of a group of manual scavengers living in a coastal town in Travancore. The history of town is told in this novel from the perspective of three generations of the *thotti* community. It is also a narrative of urbanisation, weaved with scenes of epidemics like small-pox and cholera. The coastal town had numerous canals, lakes, streams, wells and other water bodies that made the spread of epidemics faster and more damaging than other parts of the region. The novel is discussed in the earlier chapter from a different perspective and a brief summary of the novel will make the following analysis clearer.

An old thotti dies bequeathing his tools of work including a bucket and broom to his son Chudalamuthu, who is the protagonist of the novel. He is a character that stands out because of his efforts to bring some order into the marginalised existence of the thotti. Chudalamuthu runs a small money-lending scheme among his colleagues with his savings. He is very rigid in his dealings and does not show any mercy to the fellow thottis with whom he lives in the 'thotti-colony'. He keenly observes the wealthy people when he goes to work in their houses. He tries to do things the way they do. He tries to live like them. Chudalamuthu's wife Valli tries to talk to him several times about his cunningness, greed and hostility towards the rest of the families in the colony. He has given a reasonable sum of money to the Municipal President to save on his behalf to be returned to him when he could buy a piece of land.

There are three key points on which Chudalamuthu fights with his wife as her lack of cleanliness and religious piety and her inability to plan the household economy the way he wants. 'She [Valli] has never seen such a husband-wife relationship; she is not familiar with it. Wife does not have any voice or rights. Wives generally obey their husbands; [are] even scared of them...In all thotti households the husbands and wives fight a lot. They even beat each other up. But, she has not seen *this* anywhere. At times,

she does not even have the right to speak up. May be, in the high people's houses things are like this. Their love might be like this. Keeping the wife as a slave' (Pillai 2009, 47 emphasis added). Valli feels restricted and timid with Chudalamuthu as different from other women in her community. This was part of the efforts he was putting in imitating the upper class way of life.

When a baby boy was born to Chudalamuthu, he named him Mohanan and gave a pet name Baby, which were used generally by the upper castes and everyone made fun of the name. It seemed like a challenge to Chudalamuthu; the first challenge in the long line of challenges in bringing up his son as a human being. Chudalamuthu never hugged or kissed his son. He never fed the baby with his hands or sat with him for a meal. He restrained himself from expressing any affection towards his son in the fear of polluting the baby with his filthy existence. After all, he was a thotti, who deals with human faeces (ibid, 88-89).

A new set of issues emerged as the boy began going to school. Initially, no school was ready to admit him as he was 'thottiyude makan'. Chudalamuthu realises that the society does not want a thotti's son to be educated as this would finish off the scavenging class itself as an educated person will not be ready to do such an undignified job. Mohanan befriends some street urchins on his way to school. Chudalamuthu and Valli dies all of a sudden cholera epidemic and Mohanan joins the other orphans living on the streets. They all grow up to become scavengers themselves. But they are politically aware and organised. Mohanan is concerned about a sum of money given by his father to the Municipal President as a saving. Chudalamuthu never received this money from the president. Mohanan wants to take revenge on the president for this. All his comrades try to convince him about the futility and narrowness of such an idea as their real enemy is the larger social structure. But Mohanan finally burns down a new building owned by the president. Thakazhi ends the novel with the description of a huge march in the city.

Ishakkumuthu, his son Chudalamuthu and Chudalamuthu's son Mohanan represent these three generations of manual scavengers in the town and the narrative explores the changing nature of the figure of the scavenging-labourer, his approach to his work and his relation with his fellow-workers. The figure of the leader of a class also

emerges in the text which is spelt out differently by Chudalamuthu and Mohanan as both of them envisage differing means to overcome the exploitative life and work.

5.4.1. Figure of the Scavenger and His Filthy Work

Let us begin by discussing the nature of the work of scavenging and the approach three of them had towards it. Thotti and his labour became an essential part of the growing city and Ishakkumuthu identified himself as a responsible servant of the 'lords' of the town like the judge, entrepreneur, lawyer and the Municipal President. He represented the last generation of scavengers who accepted their 'fate' and wanted their sons to inherit their jobs. His son, Chudalamuthu is the protagonist of the novel was a 'different thotti' who wanted to be like the 'high-class masters' by making his son anyone but a thotti. He is a traitor to the working class movement among the scavengers, who scuttles the efforts of unionisation at the orders of the Overseer and Municipal President. He is a moneylender who cheats and exploits his fellow scavengers occasionally and ally with the superiors to plot against even his closest friend. He remains different from them by not drinking, saving money, wearing clean clothes, regularly taking baths, keeping his house clean and staying away from the fellow-scavengers. He closely observes the people of the houses where he goes to clean the latrine and tries to learn and imitate the 'tricks' for becoming like them.

The upward mobility Chudalamuthu dreams of is solely dependent upon leaving behind his job as a thotti and everything associated with it. He gets married and goes on honeymoon for ten days to nearby towns. 'She [his wife, Valli] saw an entirely new world there. A sensuous world! What all places she visited! Even the thotti's tongue could sense taste. Even the thotti's skin had the ability to touch. Even she could recognize good sounds. Valli described the history of this truth to the wives of other thottis' (Pillai 2009, 43). He wants to ensure this sensuous nature of human life for his son, Mohanan without the perennial presence of shit in all his senses. Hence a break from the menial and filthy labour becomes an escapade out of the familiar spaces and people as non-identifiable urban dwellers. During their honeymoon to the nearby town, they had access

to public spaces like restaurants, parks, beaches and means of transport in a manner, which was impossible in their hometown.

Unlike the first and second generations of thotti-class represented by Ishakkumuthu and Chudalamuthu respectively, the third generation of Mohanan and his comrades neither considered it as a destined service to the high-class society nor as something to be ashamed about and individually escaped from. They are portrayed in the novel by Thakazhi as the class-conscious scavenging labourers who have decided to collectively fight for their rights. This novel also becomes a narrative of the dialectical process of *class-in-itself* becoming *class-for-itself* in the context of urbanisation in Kerala. There is an absence of external intervention in the form of a vanguard party here, as the leadership emerges from the scavengers themselves. Interestingly, all the young leaders of this movement including Mohanan were orphaned at a young age and grew up in the city-streets without family or community ties, unlike their earlier generations. They had clearer political-economic understanding of the society and were capable of organising and leading the toiling masses.

5.4.2. The Respectable Working Class and the Lumpen Proletariat

It is tempting to argue in the context of the above discussion that the severed cultural and emotional ties with the community and the 'lumpenness' of their class position enabled the street-dwelling, orphaned young men to radically and objectively review the material conditions of their existence. Chudalamuthu aspired to gain a respectable position in the society by leaving his labour and caste identities behind in order to spare his son the stigma and humiliation associated with being a thotti. This desire for respectability and upward mobility was not present in the next generation leaders who had acquired the language of rights and political mobilisation of fellow-workers.

This leads us to the concept of a new class of urban dwellers who could not assimilated into the productive sectors fully, yet became central to the imagination of the category of urban poor. Apart from the new labouring classes associated with cities like the sanitation workers including the thotti community this underclass was formed in urban spaces that could not be ordered along caste lines. They were unruly, undisciplined and out of the productive economies of both feudalism and budding capitalism. They

were the *thendi-vargam* (the beggar or lumpen class) that consisted of beggars, petty criminals, unskilled informal labourers and prostitutes who were neither the bonded labourers of the *jati-janmi-naduvazhitham* (caste-feudal-landlordism) nor the urban industrial proletariat.

In his novel titled *Thendivargam*, published in 1950, Thakazhi explores the relationship between various urban classes including the proletariat and the lumpen classes. The street-urchin Kesu, in the novel becomes a wage-labourer at a factory and he overcomes the miserable feeling about his own existence after he recognises the 'machine that produces beggars' (Pillai 2010b, 48) The labourer begins to question the existing social relations and the disproportionate cost he pays for the progress of the society in terms of his labour in the production process. This is not something induced from outside or above from the middle class leaders of the trade union. The intellectual activist plays a much lesser role in the scheme and the reasoning of the labourer that leads him to the mode of suspicion and enquiry seems more down to earth and intrinsic to the peculiarities of the class itself. This point can be developed further taking more examples from three novels by Thakazhi, including the ones mentioned already.

5.4.3. Changing Production Relations and Labourer as Organic Intellectual

In the novels mentioned here, the absence of a pedagogic relationship between the vanguard party and its middle class intellectual leadership and the working class is surprisingly absent. Let us elaborate this argument and differentiate the narrative structures of these novels in this regard. In *Thottiyude Makan* and *Thendivargam,* both situated in growing towns, the politicisation of the labouring classes happen in the streets. In both texts, the working class consciousness emerges out of the street-dwelling individuals, rather than the typical figure of the labourer.

In the third novel under consideration, *Randidangazhi* (Two Measures) written by Thakazhi and published in 1948, a similar structure of rationality emerging out of indigenous thought and experiential registers of the agricultural labouring communities. Thakazhi's most important work is a large novel called *Kayar* (Coir) that is situated temporally across the time span of almost two hundred years from the early nineteenth century to the post independence period up to the 1960s and spatially in the central

Travancore region of Kuttanad which is famous for its vast high-yielding paddy fields. *Randidangazhi* too takes place in the same turf but focuses solely on life of the untouchable labouring communities whereas *Kayar* is a complex tale of changing landscape and less optimistic and propagandist than the former. The paucity of space does not allow us to dwell on *Kayar* here as it needs to be studied in detail on its own.

The geographical peculiarity of Kuttanad was something to be studied about. It was not a natural place as it was created by the labourers by filling the lagoons (*kaayal*) with mud. The entire labour was carried out by the hitherto untouchable castes Parayas and Pulayas. In *Randidangazhi*, Koran begins to doubt his location (as a Parayan) vis-à-vis the agricultural production in Kuttanad in his regular after-work conversations with his colleagues in toddy shop.

> Chennan had a doubt: "if there were no Parayan and Pulayan how will the cultivation happen in the field?
> That was an unavoidable question. Nobody dared to say that it would not be possible. Ittyathi told that only the Parayan and Pulayan could do cultivation in Kuttanad. Many outsiders have tried; but, could not do it.
> Shamayalpulayan said: "it has never been the case that there are no Parayan and Pulayan!" Even though entwined in inebriation Koran also had a question in his mind: "what if we are not ready to work?" Kunjappi's aslant head had an answer: "We will be starving". Ittyathi added: "Even the lords will be starving". Chennan opined: "The entire land will starve". Shamayal burst out laughing (Pillai 2010a, 26-27).

Similarly the traditional political wisdom and the indigenous categories of thinking are employed by the labourers to deliberate upon their lives and changing circumstances. We will discuss an instance from *Randidangazhi* which give insight into the peculiar localness of the logic that initiates the workers into a movement for change. In a drunken conversation after a day's work, the Pulaya labourers try to understand the changing nature of the relations of agricultural production.

> All those lords have gone. If they had beaten us, they would cry. They would take care of us themselves. For them, *atiyaan* (bonded labourer) was part of their family. When a child was born, the delivery, naming ceremony, marriage, and funeral – every expense was taken care of by the lord's family. Then, getting beaten by the lord was good. Then, the *atiyaan* was treated grandly. But, today all that has gone…at that time for the landlord, agriculture was not a means to become rich. It was for the subsistence of both *thamburan* (landlord) and *atiyaan*… Today they sell the entire paddy by giving us wages in money (2010a, 37).

The reality of the commercialisation and profiteering in agriculture and contractualisation of labour was understood by the Paraya labourer through the changing nature of the

janmi-adiyaan relation. This realisation about the changed landlordism that has lost its benevolent character enables certain rebelliousness in the labourers. Hence, the material and emotional experiences of the daily life and its immediate logic enabled these labourers to think more into the existing order of things around them and to fight towards changing it. In Thakazhi's own words,

> The economic relations and production relations of that period were based on paddy, not money. Good harvest is in the interest of not just the peasant but also the labourers. There were many nuanced proportions to divide this paddy among them…But they were slaves. Eviction was so common. The word oppression was not there as these acts were so common…Commercialization of agriculture began even before my [Thakazhi's] generation. Money became the central point. Wages were fixed in money. Trade unions emerged and for the first time there was some talk about the rights of workers. Workers movement had a separate existence even in the freedom struggle because of their organisation…I wanted to talk about their life but contextualized in the spirit of the social upheaval. They are no longer complying with the landlords. They were fighting and resisting. I also wanted to show a hopeful picture of the society that was emerging (Pillai 1996, 216-218, 224).

Thakazhi points to the confusion in Koran regarding the result of their hard work for their landlord. While working extremely hard, almost in a competitive manner with others to produce the best yield of the season in the field where he supervises, Koran always entertain certain doubts about it. On the one hand, he feels that Pulayan and Parayan should have utmost dedication to his work as it is divinely ordained to them. Yet, on the other, he realizes that all his work goes in vain as he will not have any right over his produce, not even to know how much paddy he has produced. He realises the difficulty in being a good worker once he begins to suspect the logic of the work itself.

A similar situation is faced by Chudalamuthu in *Thottiyude Makan* when he realizes that a *thotti*'s existence is noticed by others only when he either stops doing his work or do it badly. A good *thotti* is always the least acknowledged. Then onwards he decides to stand apart from his fellow-*thottis* by giving more attention to his personal life emulating the upper class people whom he works for. He hates his job and wants to move out of such a life.

In another instance in *Randidangazhi*, the labourers were listening to the speeches of Travancore State Congress meeting. This was followed by an elaborate discussion among the labourers on those speeches. Most of them agreed that they could not understand many things that were spoken there.

> Kunjappi asked: "that lord said all are equal. But, Koran how is it possible that we and the lords are equal?"… Koran replied: "now we also have votes no! Then it must be true." Koran asked another question: "they [the Congress speakers] told that they will take care of everyone's issues. Is that possible? Will the *sarkar* get us more wages from the lord or what?"
> … A young person in the gathering asked an important thing that was mentioned in the meeting: "One of the speakers said that the hostility between the Nair *thamburans* and Mappila (Christian in this context) *thamburans* has ended? Did such hostility exist at all?" Shamayalpulayan responded to that question: "All this is nonsense son, sheer nonsense. They have animosity only when they fight for more and more assets. Even that is only among the rich ones."
> … Koran, who was not only listening but also thinking about these, spoke up: "It's all lie, all lie. Let me say. Nair bad mouth Mappila and Mappila bad mouth Nair. But in fact, there are only two castes; the ones with money and paddy and the ones without it. Just think! Our *thamburan* (who is Christian) evicted a Mappila *thamburan* (who is a tenant) recently for not paying the debts, no. So when it comes to paddy and money, there is no caste (Pillai 2010a, 47-49).

This excerpt from a long conversation deals with a number of issues pertinent to our discussion. However, here the most important issue is the manner in which certain well-known communist ideas are skilfully incorporated into the narrative, without having to do it through the character of a 'professional' communist activist who is acquainted with the ideological world of Marxism. Their scepticism about the liberal idea of equality preached by the Congress is intrinsically connected to their apprehension about Congress' promise to solve everyone's problem simultaneously. In their daily lives they have experienced the increasing antagonism between their solutions for their problems and those for the landlords. They realise that it is impossible to increase their wages without creating a 'problem' for the landlord. Most importantly, Koran utters the difficult truth about the two large divisions between human beings; the *haves* and the *have-nots*. Their thoughts are clearly mediated through their specific location and experiences.

These disconcerting conversations at the drinking table, ultimately gave rise to the organised trade union movement among the untouchable labourers in the latter part of the narrative. The labourers' decision to organise themselves occurred when they realized that the landlords were also organised. They called a meeting that was chaired by a young Paraya man. Initially the farmers did not take this 'untouchable' initiative seriously. But once the labourers managed to stop a boat filled with paddy that was being smuggled from a Congress leader's house the landlords became alert. The trajectory of the trade

union movement here is dramatically different from the scavengers' initiatives in *Thottiyude Makan*, which was betrayed by the protagonist himself.

In a later interview Thakazhi has mentioned that he could not depict the real nature of the agricultural union movement in *Randidangazhi* as he was concerned about the possible ban on the novel due to the ban on the communist party then. 'In *Randidangazhi* I had to describe a workers march as under the Congress flag which was in fact a communist initiative. Red flag was banned so I did not want a ban on my book then. It was cowardice, I accept now' (Pillai 1996, 34). However, this theme of the emergence of the organic intellectual from the oppressed communities and organisation of the labourers around the indigenous rationality, different from being formed by the middle class intellectual is a recurring theme in Thakazhi's novels.

In *Thendivargam*, the protagonist Kesu's conversation with the woman, who adopted him after he lost his family upon securing a job at the nearby factory, is pertinent in the ideological formation of the future trade unionist. Kesu tells her that numerous vacancies are there in the factory as many workers were terminated. She argues that the reason why the urban poor are produced as in 'by a machine' is to re-fill these posts of labourers who fight for better wages. This resonates with Marx's category of lumpen proletariat that is used by the capitalists to break the organised industrial strikes. The cheap labour they draws from the beggar class enable the capitalists to maximise their profits. Kesu feels enlightened after his conversation with her and from the next morning onwards he watches the society in the new light of inequality, injustice and exploitation. Thakazhi illustrates how he ceased to become 'a mere boy', 'a helpless beggar' and 'a complacent worker; he became a thinking, questioning being in the process (Pillai 2010b).

The ability to think that was only available to the English educated, broad-minded, worldly wise young men belonging to upper, land-owning castes is here, attributed to the uneducated labouring classes. They are capable of thinking for themselves despite being alienated from any knowledge other than that gained through the practice of their trade, just like bees making a honeycomb. This creative thinking is considered to be foreign to the working class as they are alienated from all creative and

hence humanly activities as different from the basic animal-like activities of eating, sleeping and reproducing.[80]

5.4.4. Epidemics and Hospitals: Scientific Living for the People

A significant aspect of this process of urbanisation is the spread of epidemics in unprecedented fashions from the unhygienic management of sewers and other sanitation systems. In Kerala, highly contagious diseases like smallpox (*vasoori*) existed even before the urbanisation spree and their spread was considered to be a curse from the goddess of *vasoorimala*.[81] Related to the conception of Kali, a powerful and warring goddess from the Saiva tradition, the smallpox goddesses named differently in different parts of Kerala, was worshipped and made sacrifices to in the event of an epidemic outburst. Newer epidemics like cholera and jaundice entered the scene with the increase in the urban population, especially among the poor and slum-dwelling population due to the contamination of water bodies and other pollutions.

In the case of newly built plantations in the eastern hilly parts of the region, the working population that migrated there to clear forests and make cultivable land, a different set of epidemics spread. Diseases like Malaria and other contagious diseases spread by insects took a severe toll on these labouring classes who had to migrate to the hills from the plain mid-lands in search of job. The tribal population was used as bonded labour for the construction and running of plantations and this disrupted their natural habitat and ways of life.

These epidemics also paved way for the introduction of modern medicine in the form of doctors, clinics and hospitals in the region. One of the earliest campaigns of the communist movement among the masses were to convince them about the scientific basis

[80] Jacques Rancière in his phenomenal work *Nights of Labour* on the cultural history of the nineteenth century Parisian working classes expounds that in dominant social history scholarships the creative and non-work aspects of the working class life are rarely studied. He recovered an enormously huge volume of writings by the 19th century Parisian workers, who after long days of tiring labour, created nights of poetry, philosophy and politics (Rancière 1989). He criticizes and rejects some of the dearest notions of communist movement such as man's self-realization emerging solely out of free labour or self-directed labour, man as *homo faber*, emancipation coming only through the rational and collective action of workers through political parties and most importantly the idea of a vanguard party to direct the movement with intellectual leaders or worker militants who are different from ordinary workers in terms of their vision, courage and clear-cut commitment who will work towards making a partisan consciousness in the working class.

[81] This trope was discussed in Chapter 3 with regard to the poem *Sankramanam* by Attoor Ravi Varma.

of modern medicine and the need for resorting to hospitals in case of any disease. The spread of science and scientific rationality against superstition was also one of the major practical and ideological challenges faced by the modern Indian nation-state. The Nehruvian state's efforts at popularising scientific living and thinking since its inception, is being studied under various disciplines now.

Numerous novels written in the backdrop of the political economic transformations in the twentieth century depict the spread of epidemics in various landscapes including the low-land urban settlements in Alappuzha and the high-land migrant settlements in Wayanad. Two major phases of communicable diseases of small pox and cholera are depicted in *Thottiyude Makan* and these were crucial events that could turn the flow of the narrative forever. Both Chudalamuthu and his wife Valli die of cholera and their son Mohanan is orphaned and left alone in the town. The deaths of numerous thotti parents left their children on the streets, orphaned. Mohanan made friends with some street children who are beggars and petty criminals who were orphaned as children as their parents too died in the wave of cholera and who were to become his comrades later.

The overseer of Municipal sanitation Kesava Pillai spells out that the extremely unhygienic working and living conditions of the scavengers effectuate such waves of contagion that wipe their population out once in every few years. The scavengers themselves say this when they gather for Ishakkumuthu's funeral that he was the one who lived longest among them as a thotti hardly lives beyond the age of forty.

In this narrative, hospital is shown as the dreaded place, where the patients never return from. When a fellow-thotti's wife was detected with pox Chudalamuthu informs the Municipality and they take her to the hospital forcefully as she 'refuses to die in the hospital away from her family'. Chudalamuthu's intervention was seen as cruel and selfish by everyone including his wife as they knew the poor will not get any attention at the hospital unless they bribe the staff.

5.5. Technology, Development and Nature: Writing Poetry in the Early Decades of Nation Building

A comprehensive comparison of the poetic worlds of Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon and Edasseri Govindan Nair (henceforth Edasseri) is neither possible nor part of the scope of this section. Parallel reading of a few selected poems of Vailoppilli and Edasseri with regard to their engagement with questions of modernity, environment and development is what we intend to carry out here. They occupy the poles of a binary that juxtaposes the processes of development against environmental concerns in modern Kerala. Vailoppilli is celebrated as the poet who 'cleared the forest and burned the woods down' to pave way for scientific human progress whereas Edasseri is read as the poet of ecological sensibilities against such a developmental outrage of modernity.

Sunil P. Elayidom has tried to complicate this binary by pointing out the diverse tendencies in both their poetic oeuvres by arguing that any great poet will overcome such simplistic binaries forced on to them by criticism, with the 'energies of their inner worlds' (Elayidom 2011, 192). The self representation of writers is complicated further with the politicisation of the activity of writing and reading. The communist movement introduced certain idioms and categories that ended up problematising the relationship between the de-mystified writer and the 'product' of his 'labour of pen'.

Vailoppilli has been identified as many things like the poet of 'scientific temperament', 'progressive consciousness' and 'revolutionary rigour'. His poems like *Panthangal* (The Torch Lights), *Sarppakkavu* (The Sacred Snake Grove), *Malathurakkal* (Mountain Drilling), *Jalasechanam* (Irrigation), *Yugaparivarthanam* (The Change of an Era) imagined the technologically aided scientific progress of the society, which conquers the environment and brings civilisational light to the world. Yet, the other side of his poetic universe, filled with ambiguities, scepticism and uncertainty associated with the modern institutionalised tropes of individual, family, state and revolution is exposed in Elayidom's article. These contradictions can be appreciated for their role in enriching the poetry only when we stop looking for unchanging ideological orientation in them. In fact, they are testimonies of the poet's fearless engagement with history, its light and darkness alike. Vailoppilli has admitted that his poems have 'scratched and re-wrote over the pleasant light [of history] with shadows of knowledge' (Quoted in Vijayan 2008, 223).

Edasseri's poem titled *Kuttippuram Palam* (The Bridge of Kuttippuram) has been celebrated as the first attempt in Malayalam poetry to sceptically approach the paradigm of Nehruvian development whereby new bridges, dams and industrial complexes were considered to be the benchmark of progress. Right at the beginning of the post-colonial, national building discourse heralded by Nehru all over the country, Edasseri's poem written in 1954 depict the concern for the natural world and the symbiotic relations human being share with it. Nevertheless, some of his later poems emphasis on the technological intervention needed in irrigation and agricultural production needed to sustain a growing society. In poems like *Pazhakiya Chaalukal Maattuka* (Replace the Old Streams) and *Kudam Nirakku Koode Varu* (Fill the Pot and Come Along) he is enamoured by the development his rural homeland has undergone with the 'temples of the nation' including dams and canals for irrigation.

Hence, in this section we will read a few poems by both these poets in search of the complex poetic negotiations they have made in the face of processes of development and modernisation. Let us recollect the earlier discussions on urbanisation in the region and the emergence of new classes of labourers as well as lumpen proletariat. Poetry being resistant to the naturalist-realist discourse that was favourable in the case of fiction, took up the more complex challenge; imagining modernity in the philosophical and political landscape of constant change and turmoil. These poets wrote at the time of intense political action whether in the form of anti-colonial activities or subaltern resistance to feudal power, making sense of the larger oppressive apparatus at work and the subjective positions they occupy in it.

5.5.1. Belief, Doubt and Self-criticism: The Dilemma of being a Progressive Poet

Vailoppilli was celebrated as the poet of a new dawn, that of scientific rationality, progress, social justice and equality. His adept use of mythical idioms like that of Mahabali and Onam into talking about the contemporary society and the possibility of an egalitarian future was pointed out as the poetic sensibility gesturing towards a democratic collective. Similarly some of his poems were read as embodying the pioneering spirit of Nehruvian model of development and modernisation of the national life.

In his poem titled *Panthangal* (Torch Lights, a euphemistic expression for marching forward in darkness) Vailoppilli's optimism about the future is the bright radiance that lights the world. Here, history is laid bare by these lights held high by the youth. In its rhetoric style, evocative of a sense of urgency and accomplishment, the poem urges the torch bearers to 'burn the forests of wilderness down and process nature into a useful material'. This poem in fact resonates with many a 'progressive poems' that tried to contextualise the transformation of the collapse of feudal social relations and the emergence of a democratic and participatory state formation. The fire of these torches is inherited by the present generation from the earlier ones and they will hand them over to the coming generations. This short poem shares the sense of enlightened optimism and faith in human ability to labour and produce a free society with other communist poets like Vayalar Ramavarma and O. N. V. Kurup. The darkness is compared to the feudal relations that denigrate individuals to mere cogs in the wheel of stagnation and exploitation and the light is the source of knowledge, solidarity and cultural advancement that ensure social progress. The forward march of history is propelled by the development of productive forces enabled by creative and subversive human labour.

Another instance is Vailoppilli's poem called *Malathurakkal* [Mountain Drilling] published in 1950. In a footnote to the title of the verse, the poet says that the inspiration behind this was a short story by Maxim Gorky. The narrative of the poem portrays an old man and his son as part of a group assigned for drilling a mountain in order to build a railway track through it. In the beginning when all of them are drinking, the father is disinterested and suspicious of the task as it seems impossible to drill through the vast mountain range. He considers mountain as divinely created and impossible to be conquered by mere mortals. But the son is confident of human labour power and believes that no matter how many years it may take in the end they will accomplish it and trains will run through it. There are moments again when the father expresses his doubt and the son assures him of the abilities of human labour power. They are drilling the range from both sides. Finally, when they reach to the middle of the mountain, from both sides the son calls out his father and the father responds by saying 'I believe now' (Menon 1984, 132). On the one hand, this is a typical story that hails the potential of human labour and its victory over the nature. Moreover, in Gorky's story the context

must have been the emerging Soviet Union where human labour was employed to perform miracles in terms of infrastructure and production. The picture is quite clear in these lines uttered by the father:

> Is the mountain a lump of salt
> To melt in our sweat?
> What a task they have given us
> The leaders, trying to make this land heaven (Menon 1984, 130).

The contradiction is between two kinds of beliefs; one in the omnipotent creator and the hierarchy set by this act of creation and the other an equally spiritual belief in the human potential to labour. This resonates with the popular articulation of Marxism as a 'scientific faith' to be believed under all circumstances. *Paurusham* (manliness) is an important marker of humanness along with the ability to labour. The typically modern trope of the human being who conquers nature and builds a new world where old 'natural' hierarchies no longer exist is perfectly presented here through this group of labourers.

Sudipta Kaviraj's argument discussed earlier in this chapter talk about the complex legacy Marx's writings that tried to gain insights from the subterranean 'dark' tradition of modernity and the refusal of the more orthodox strains of Marxism to engage with this complicated legacy. Elayidom connects the post-colonial communist imaginaries of history, progress and development to the peculiar processes of modern nation building in the former colonies that embodied the conflicted spirit of modernity through colonialism. The contradictory currents of our national modernity moulded and restructured the poetic imagination deeply (Elayidom 2011).

On the one hand, the notion of development framed in the linear, quantitative and competitive rationality for which the genealogical particularities and diversity of the region was a burden to be left behind. On the other, the painful poetic sensibility associated with the idyllic life and its loss as a result of the modernisation drive thrives too. The state-led capitalist development in the early decades after independence inspired this dialectical sensibility in poets that had elements of both hope and disenchantment about modernity.

In another poem titled *Yugaparivarthanam* [Transformation of an Epoch] Vailoppilli depicts the feudal mores of life as existed before the rapid changes

transformed the rural landscape in Kerala. The narrator who is married to a girl from an affluent landlord family remembers the layered changes that occurred to their life in the village. The innocence of the rich girl who 'hailed from a family that knew how to make others work, rather than work for themselves' is lost along with the value systems of the past.

> Patience has become weakness now,
> Law, treachery
> Time has become money
> And food, god itself,
> They see love as mere spit
> And value flower only for its fruit
> They take nothing as blessing (*punyam*) (Menon 1984, 364-5).

The list of losses is long and saddening for the poet and everyone who shared it hitherto. However, Vailoppilli is confident about the changes as he visualises the gains in terms of the emergence of a new community founded upon equality and solidarity. 'We will join the group song of this great initiative and feel an unprecedented sense of pride and even when we lose all our assets, we will gain a new land and numerous friends', poet proclaims to his wife (Ibid, 366). He is convinced of the technological advancements that would bring 'new energy to the veins of the youth' (Ibid).

It is accepted here that nothing can be gained without losing something else. The profaning of the sacred is recognised and even accepted as necessary and progressive. Here, he is conscious of one's class-caste location and its contradiction with the aims of the revolutionary changes as it goes against his class interests. He realises the emerging class of proletariat used to be the 'tenants and bonded workers' of his feudal legacy. Still, he feels confident about his ability to negotiate with the changes and go with the flow of time. C. R. Parameswaran has argued that Vailoppilli was the most self-conscious poet about his middle class identity who realised the aesthetic limitations that position imposes (Parameswaran Jan1980).

This confidence and clarity is totally absent in Valoppilli's masterpiece, *Kutiyozhikkal* in which self-doubt and ambivalence about the nature of progress are emblematised. It is charged with a different sense of historical rationality, idea of development and a complex meaning of radical politics. His mechanism of configuring the political subjectivities around his poetic world destabilises figure of the radical or

progressive writer.[82] The chronological mapping of the poems will not unravel many of such complexities as *Yugaparivarthanam* was published in 1958, six years after the publication of *Kutiyozhikkal* published in 1952. Nevertheless, in terms of the complexity of the theme and treatment of the poem, latter is a more mature work.

Since *Kutiyozhikkal*, which can be loosely translated as eviction is a long poem dealing with different yet connected threads of the poet's life, a comprehensive analysis of the poem as a whole is not feasible here. Instead, how the poet tries to configure his own subjectivity along different identities and social relations and how this converse with our discussion of the socio-political-economic transformation the region underwent in the middle of the last century would be interesting questions to begin with.

Kutiyozhikkal presents a different and more complex picture of the particular question of land-labour relations in Kerala and the class-caste-gender dimensions of this question. The Malayalam term *kuti* literally means one's dwelling though it's predominantly used to mention a lower caste house mostly that of a tenant or labourer living within the property of a land lord *ozhikkal* means emptying or removing. Hence the term '*Kutiyozhikkal*' signifies the forced uprooting of the tenant/ labourer from his house, by the landlord who is also his employer. There is a complex narrative that's unfolded in this piece centering around the peculiar relationship between a poet who is part of the landlord family and a labourer who works for the family in their paddy fields.

Even though many concerns peculiar to the historical, political and sociological location of the poet are dealt with in the poem like the inequality and exploitation perpetuated by the feudal order, forced labour, caste hierarchy, gender questions etc. the most important question that it attempts to talk about (not just in terms of this dissertation) is the question of the precarious position of the petty bourgeois intellectual/writer vis-à-vis the class for which he should/would like to stand for i.e. the

[82] Let us recollect here the earlier discussion about the ideas of 'people's poet', 'labourer of pen', 'adopted poet of the working classes' etc, used by communist ideologues in order to label the poets in the communist bandwagon most of whom did not belong to the toiling communities or classes. The most striking example was that of K. P. G. Namboodiri who was praised by EMS for being the prophetic voice of revolution. Similar examples can be found in both the international and other regional communist movements, especially since the 1940s.

working class. In the given context this question is further complicated by the enmeshing of class with caste as well as gender.

Unlike the earlier instance in the poem *Yugaparivarthanam* where the protagonist is hopeful of negotiating the future amidst the radical transformations that try to uproot the very system that he is embedded in and benefitted from, here the poet, who is also the protagonist, is confused. The subject positions of being an upper caste man who is a landlord and that of being a 'progressive poet' who 'loves the downtrodden' are perennially in conflict in the poem. He oppresses and eventually evicts the landless labourer from his land, betrays his lower-caste beloved and searches for a world that is solely poetic.

His responses to the social transformation are not merely based on his approval or disapproval of the modern means of production or relations of production. Rather he reflects about the changing sensibility regarding social relations which are caused by the material changes. On the one hand, landlord-labourer relation was irreversibly changing with anti-eviction legislations and unionisation of the labourers. On other, the private sphere of life was also changing by breaking certain caste and community barriers that worked as pillars of feudal society. In most of the poems we discussed above, the focus was on the political-economic aspects of this transformation and the scientific-rational attitude the communist poet tried to propagate. Here, the focus is on the deeper layers of the materiality of the social relations that were changing as radically as the former.

Summarising the events in this long poem would not be amiss. The protagonist who is a poet hailing from a wealthy upper-caste landlord family is disturbed by the loud rants of a drunken labourer (*thozhilali*). The labourer abuses and beats up his wife in the evening when the poet is trying to peacefully contemplate upon the beauties of this world and conjure up a poem. He goes and warns the drunkard with the threat of eviction from his land if he does not change his drunken behaviour. The labourer is scared and silently walks away. The poet is troubled by his conscience, realising how he used his dominant noble-status to 'threaten and reform' the labourer. The labourer comes back next evening, again drunk, and abuses the landlord and the women in his family and curses the landlord household to be ruined. The poet goes to the drunken labourer again and repeats his threat and he leaves, pale and submissive.

Then Vailoppilli describes the poet's encounter with a lower-caste labourer girl in the village whom he falls in love with. The above-mentioned labourer witnesses to one of their secret meetings and mocks at the girl for trusting him. The poet is deeply disturbed by this scorn and realises that he is not capable of fighting against the casteist status quo in order to marry her. The poet breaks the relationship and searches for various justifications for his action. Yet, he is constantly haunted by an inner voice that mocks at his cowardice, hypocrisy and moralistic efforts at justification.

In another incident the labourer's hut is burned down by his own son's carelessness and the drunken labourer comes to the landlord and blames him for the same. Even though he manages to send the labourer back he is aware of the fact that his exploitation had done more damage to their lives than what he did not commit for a fact. The labourer leaves the place taking some money from the poet. Now the poet focuses more on his poetic inclinations saying that even if this life is bad and unbearable he had 'another life' that is poetic. At times, the labourer comes drunk and abuses the poet and mocks at his poetry.

After this, Vailoppilli describes a fantastic event of uprising or a revolution, which he witnesses in complete helplessness. Among the marching masses, he notices his labourer and the girl whom he loved. They crowded around him, shouting and howling. They ignored him when he said he always loved them and stood for them. When he tore his chest open to show them his heart, the girl spits on it and the labourer squeezes the blood out of it and drinks it along with his toddy. The poet feels totally misunderstood and lonely and finally he falls down and the masses march ahead, trampling over him. His body is merged with the earth, a hundred crickets chirping around it. The last section in this poem is titled as the 'Song of Crickets' where the poet reflects upon the revolution and afterlife. M. N. Vijayan has opined that this 'epilogue' stands apart from the rest of the text as it is introspective and didactic at the same time (Vijayan 2008, 240).

One of the most distinguishing things about the protagonist-poet's subjectivity in the poem is the intense self-reflexivity. He is constantly questioned and criticised by the political consciousness in him. He is not at ease with himself merely by proclaiming himself to be a 'progressive poet' who along with his upper-caste comrades 'yearned to re-write this world as a garden of equality'. He is aware of the limits of such

'revolutionary ideas'; but he is also conscious of the significance of the 'aesthetic transformation' of society in the larger trajectory of progress when he says 'these progresses are the children born to the human aesthetic senses' (Menon 1984, 704).

The scene of the revolution as depicted in the poem is to be read closely here as it denotes the helplessness the poet experiences in coming to terms with the radical social transformation he imagines as a progressive poet. The stormy and thunderous night is the backdrop to the vigorous march of those 'whose hands are shackled, pregnant women hanging from ropes, hungry stomachs, wounded and bleeding heads, the skeletons of the hidden mortuary of the past and present' (Ibid, 702). As above mentioned, the marching people including his labourer and his former beloved tramples upon the fallen poet and his body that got decomposed in the earth re-emerge as a cricket.

> There I fell,
> The human army, the flow of time
> Trampled upon me…
> Still today, we sing
> We crickets from the soil
> The background score of the past
> In the lustrous scene of today (Ibid, 706-707).

In Vailoppilli, the poet is a cricket, not a nightingale or koel who sings beautiful songs to enthral you; rather, he creaks loudly to your annoyance. He does not wish to transcend his location in order to be adopted by the working class nor does he want to be a soldier of pen. He knows he cannot sing like a nightingale or roar like a tiger. He realizes that he does not labour like his tenant. He can only be a cricket that will disturb us even in the post-revolutionary socialist society. It troubles us not just by its annoying noise but also by its camouflage with the soil and tree trunks. It's partly invisible and discomforting presence allows it to remain in the fringes of our lives always. In Malayalam one of the colloquial terms for cricket is *mannatta* which literally means the worm of the soil. Cricket is the closest to the soil we can imagine still being above it. It gives a close view of the soil/of life the way an eagle cannot. The second poet Edasseri who is known for his strong ecological consciousness and clear leftist sensibility will be read closely in the following section.

5.5.2. Mounting Infrastructure of Modernity: Two Tales of a River

The poetic trajectory of Edasseri is complex like Vailoppilli's, but the overall sceptical content of his works is less encompassing as in the case of Vailoppilli. Though two of his poems, published with a gap of seven years, *Kuttippuram Palam* (The Bridge of Kuttippuram) in 1954 and *Kudam Nirakkoo, Koode Varoo* (Fill the Pot and Come Along) in 1961 are about the same river, they convey completely different ecological and political sensibilities.

In *Kuttippuram Palam*, the poet stands on the newly constructed bridge above the river that flows through his village. The bridge connects his village to the nearby town, and hence to the outside world. This bridge is supposed to build the gap between the archaic backwardness of the village to the modern and progressing city. The bridge would bring the mechanised and technologically-driven modern life to the village and subsume the pastoral life and its values in the former. Poet recognises the nature of the feelings behind the poem as a mixture of 'joy and discomfort' alike. He stands over the bridge, overlooking the 'slender river' with pride and contentment, which soon turns into nostalgia about the unobstructed relationship he had with it before and then a vague sense of pain (*ariyaatha vedana*) (Nair 2012, 388).

His friend since childhood, the grace of the village (*gramalakshmi*) seems like bidding him farewell as a new set of images appear to replace the existing views of lush green paddy fields, plantain groves, blossoming hillsides, the celebrations and rituals of the temples, the music of farming days and the frightening silence of the nights. The tropes of modernity that arrive the village via this bridge are cement, coal and steel, petrol, and screeching tyres, walls dividing houses and plots and the unbearable noise in day and night. The feeling of unfamiliarity and strangeness in relationships between people which is shown as the symbol of urban life reach the rural life. The local god will be a street-god and the sublime hill will be a toy in the hands of the 'mischievous machine-child' (*yanthrakkidavu*). The poem ends with a question addressed to the river, 'will you become a dirty drain, if the human becomes a machine?' (Nair 2012, 390).

It's the bridge between the fading picture of the village, where the human being was only one of the species in the cycle of the organic world in which he had to co-exist rather than dominate. The river, the most important link in the civilisational history of the

human species awaits a dubious future. The future that is opened up by this bridge already overcame the river, the flow of nature that had already been dammed, tamed and brought under the anthropocentric notion of development in the Nehruvian agenda. The position of human being as an ecologically secondary species or inter-dependent species is transformed to that of the dominant species. The written history always had to build bridges to narrate the leaps in the trajectory of human innovation. Elayidom argues that the prophetic nature of this poem that was sceptical about the Nehruvian model of development in its heydays itself is celebrated by the contemporary writers and environmentalists (Elayidom 2011).

In the second poem, *Kudam Nirakkoo, Koode Varoo* the fleeting sense of pride in the previous poem is strengthened and takes the primary position. Edasseri is more confident about the benefits technological advancement could bring to social progress. Here also, like in Vailoppilli's first set of poems, technology is shown as a leveller against inequality, injustice and lack of productivity of the feudal era. The poet questions the natural flow of the Bharathappuzha towards the sea as the decisive factor in leaving his land 'barren' along with the institution of landlordism. The feudal laziness and unorganised and exploitative production patterns left the raw materials of production unexplored leading to the low productivity and insufficient food production in the region and the poet wants the new capitalist relations of production to transform these means of production including land and river to efficient participants in the process. It is interesting to see the polar opposite opinions of the poet regarding the process of modernisation around the same river in both these poems.

> This river shan't flow, anymore
> To merge with the salty sea
> Now, we the tillers are in charge,
> We have readied ploughs on our shoulders
> The new dawn is here
> You, the river of sweetest water
> Fill my pot and come along (Original in Nair 2012, 493).

Both these approaches represented by the two poems discussed above have their origin in the same colonial/post-colonial modernity and its liberal-democratic values according to Sunil. P. Elayidom. The romantic commitment to environment and the anxiety about the loss of its serenity and profoundness and the 'rational faith' in modernisation and its

ability to spread development and progress had shared roots in colonial modernity (Elayidom 2011).

Edasseri has been the poet of possibilities, not necessarily of a monolithic notion of progress but a path that was ridden with complexities. The doubt in the first poem gives it the strength to critique, while gauging the loss it incurred. The story of the civilisation has been multilayered and multidimensional. The vectors of this process are more diverse in the post-colonial scenario owing to its complicated relation with the colonial state and anti-colonial struggles. The idea of the modern ushered in the colony was mediated through the 'alien' and hegemonic machineries of the colonial state apparatus both coercive and ideological. As many scholars have noted, the British colonialism had stronger ideological apparatus than its French or Spanish counterparts and hence in British colonies like India, the hegemony created by English education and intellectual influence of various Western philosophical traditions had been more effective.

In the immediate aftermath of independence the process of nation building witnessed a progressive developmental project unleashed under the aegis of Jawaharlal Nehru that was to carry out a set of comprehensive welfare measures in the society. Numerous scholars have explored various aspects of this project ranging from the infrastructural initiatives, energy projects, industrial and manufacturing investments, educational and health institutions etc. The intellectual and cultural impact this wide-ranging developmental project had on the diverse national community has also been under consideration for some scholars. The Gandhian trajectory of anti-colonial philosophy had a scepticism regarding the processes of modernisation and development, which was renewed at a later stage by environmental activists and ordinary people marginalised by the same processes fighting for life and livelihood. Especially, by the early 1990s when this notion of public development came under severe threat once India joined the international market through different economic, financial and trade agreements opening up the domestic market to global competition the logbook of the Nehruvian model began to be reviewed.

5.6. Myth, History and Memory: A Critique of Civilisation by the Class of Bards and Dancing Outcasts

Any discussion around the presence and representations of history in literature has to encounter the parallel category of myth and its bearing on the contemporary. Every society develops its own narratives of its past (and in turn the past of the rest of the world) in order to make sense of the present and imagine about the future. Efforts at the radical restructuring of a particular society would have at its core, a critical intervention into its ways of linking these temporal and spatial co-ordinates at the level of the aesthetic register of the society. Therefore, the communist movement in the Indian cub-continent had to confront the vast literary and cultural products of an ancient past that was already in currency in various forms during the anti-colonial national movement.

The cultural nationalist and revivalist appropriations of the ancient past against not only British colonialism but also the medieval Muslim rule were problematic for being anachronistic. The early communist engagements with the ancient civilisational past of India were far from being productive; as we discussed earlier in the case of Mayakovsky, the dominant approach was that of rejection in the name of 'progressing forwards'. The myths and memories that were integrally part of the social processes of meaning-making were to be churned for the progressive elements in them rejecting the regressive. For some, the division between classical and folk pasts could be the way out whereby the folk tradition could be used to connect with the masses, a position explored by P. C. Joshi as discussed earlier.

Nevertheless, the selective appropriation of the mythical and the traditional and re-capturing of the 'radical' aspects of the memory were less complex in theory than in actual aesthetic practices. Left cultural activists tried to resist the 'unscientific and ahistoric' glorification of the past and historicise it not as a monolithic entity through an archaeological operation of finding the layered nature of the past.

Civilisation and its violence were to be critiqued in a manner different from romanticism about the pastoral utopia and the history of Indian civilisation was to be constructed as the history of class war, exploitation of the toiling masses and extraction of the nature through labour but in its non-European trajectory. Civilisations have always tried to whitewash themselves off the relations of inequality and injustice created and

sustained by them. The word for civilisation in Malayalam is *nagarikata*, which is etymologically linked to the word *nagaram* or city. The processes of separating the villages from towns began with growth in technology related to material production. The movement away from communal and tribal ways of producing, consuming and reproducing towards surplus production and private ownership of means of production as well as commodities is marked also as the movement towards centralisation of power, to make and safe guard rules by imposing punishments for transgressing the same.

The historical materialist approach to history traces the parallel developments of political power and economic power in all the civilisations by constant exclusion and marginalisation of the less powerful. The class structure of these societies became more complex as the gulf between those with access to political-economic power owing to their ownership of the means of production and others widened with the advancement in the modes of production. The labour of the majority was transformed into speed, comfort and abundance for a minority in the world of class divisions.

Other identities like gender, caste and race too interacted with the class structure and reinforced the processes of exploitation. These methods of historicising the emergence of private property, coercive state power and the oppression and exploitation – of those who toil by those who accumulate the surplus without toiling – as opposed to the classical liberal conception of society, the imagination of a past predating civilisation had been essential. By terming these known civilisations and their transition as historical, Marxist historical consciousness had to conceptualise a beginning as well as an end to these forms of sociality and co-existence and in turn imagine such stages in the past and in the future without the existence of classes, state and private property.

Primitive communism is a phrase associated with this imagination of a pre-historical society that was characterised by the absence of civilisation and its above-mentioned 'evils'. Conceptual categories of liberty, equality, justice and rights would have no meaning in such a period as the political-economic power exercised by a few over the majority was non-existent then. It has been argued by various scholars that different societies and traditions cherish certain mythological ideas encapsulated as memories of such a 'communist' past of abundance and peace. The task of the Marxist thinker is as much to analyse the contemporary society and think towards social

transformation as to remind the society of the past and its lessons for us. The 'struggle of memory against forgetting' is also a struggle of justice against injustice and equality against inequality. This section will look at the vernacular imaginations of the fight between the memory of the primitive past and the forgetfulness of the class-ridden present.

We have already argued that communist ideologues and writers have engaged with the existing vernacular cultural milieu and 'made use of' certain aesthetic tropes and images in their works. Then, the significant question here would be to see how such an engagement happened in the case of traditional imageries associated with the mythical memory of a pre-civilisational era available.

Modernity in Malayalam poetry is closely related to the poetic explorations into fields other than *bhakti* (devotion) and *rati* (erotica). In his significant work about Kunchan Nambiar and his words and worlds, K. N. Ganesh has argued about a rudimentary 'modern sensibility' in Nambiar that conversed with its contemporary both temporally and spatially (Ganesh 1996). This is not surprising when we leave the chronological approach to the theme of modernity that strictly aligns it with colonialism. By the last decades of nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth, Malayalam literature had transformed radically in its engagement with the historical and the social. We have already discussed the various stages in the trajectory of Malayalam poetry in the post-independence period and in this section we shall focus on two poems that have tried to tie the mythical to the historical, primitive to contemporary and the classless egalitarianism to feudal-capitalist exploitation.

The poetic operations, mechanisms of generating affect and the mode of presentation are vastly different in both these poems. The nature of the past they attribute to the present and the claims of the 'singers' of these poems on the past, present and the future is different too. Yet, both of them attempt to draw on a certain idea of history that is thoroughly local in an idiomatic sense and profoundly worldwide in essence. One is tempted to argue that the Marxist understanding of world history characterised by the systemic oppression of the powerful over the toiling classes is poetically translated into the vernacular here. The first poem *Onappattukar* (Balladeers of Onam*,* 1954), written by

Vailoppilli and the second one is *Kurathi* (The Tribal Woman-Performer, 1976) written by Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan.

5.6.1. Bards of the World Unite: Telling the Truth of World-History in the Vernacular

Storytelling has a long tradition in Indian literature in general and in the Malayalam context in particular. For instance, Mahabharata was composed in the form of an oral narrative by a soota who belongs to the caste that sings such stories that are 'great enough to be remembered'. In Kerala too, there was a specific community whose occupation was to sing the tales of great adventures of both mythical and historical characters including warriors and lovers. Paanan (the individual member of the Paana community) would compose songs from these stories and roam around the region singing and spreading them. Vailoppilli's poem is composed in the form of a ballad sung by the balladeers of Onam, who cherish the ancient Kingdom of Mahabali through their songs.

The myth of Mahabali's rule is well-known among various communities in India, with slight regional variations and according to the version that is popular in Kerala Mahabali was the asura ruler of the region in time immemorial. He was the greatest of all kings and his rule was the most perfect one where the subjects were all equal. There were no injustice to be seen, nor was any malpractice in place. The narrative goes onto suggest how the gods (devas) were scared and envious of his rule and how they plotted to oust him out of power. They sent Vishnu in the form of a young Brahmin boy who asked Mahabali for a wish.

Mahabali was known for his generosity and greatness and he promised to grand him anything he wishes for. Then the boy asked for three feet long land and when Mahabali agreed, he grew larger than the world itself and covered all the worlds in just two feet. Then Mahabali bowed in front of him, realising the ploy asking the boy to place his feet over his head. Vamanan (the name of Vishnu's incarnation as the boy) pushed him to the netherworld (patalam) and afterwards Mahabali asked him a wish in return. The wish was the permission to visit his people once every year, during the harvest time and Vamanan granted him the same. Onam is the time when Mahabali visits his former kingdom and his subjects and officially it is celebrated as the State festival of Kerala.

Since it coincides with spring, flowers are extensively used in the celebrations for

rituals as well as decorations. Hence, Onam is also called the festival of flowers. In the period of 'Kerala Renaissance' the myth was revisited by historians, writers and social philosophers alike and re-interpreted it for various purposes. Images of the great king and his perfectly egalitarian kingdom were portrayed as the proof for the Dravida roots of the region that was defeated by the Aryan invasion that is symbolised in the betrayal of Mahabali at the hands of Vamanan.

In his poem, Onappattukar, Vailoppilli depicts the above-discussed story and contextualises it in the world-historical plot of the defeat of the primitive, tribal society by the forces of civilisation. The classless, stateless past of all the regions in the world is recaptured in the regional myth that is sung by the balladeers. The bards are the universal class that make and keep memories alive across times and spaces.

In the land of Keralam
Spreading the aroma of old spices
In the Ganges plains where
A thousand mendicant traditions meet
In the tents that sprout over
The grand bare desert
In the dense forests on the banks of Blue River (Nile)
In the Isles of Greece with eternal beauty
In the wrinkled China, where
The poor watch over the fields
In the eastern land (Baghdad) where
Moon-lit palaces blossom
In those Russian parks where
The horse riding gypsies relax near campfires
In those southern mountains that
Founded the wondrous Mayan civilisation
In different lands, in different costumes
In diverse languages, we narrate
The story of that 'golden-Onam'
That arose in the beginning of time and ended there (Original in Menon 1984, 227-8).

The effort here is to narrate a pre-historic moment shared by all countries, cultures and civilisations which is shown to have made an everlasting mark on the present. The primitive moment's end marks the beginning of civilisations across the globe though they were substantially different from each other. It is this utopian pre-historic moment that deserves to be sung and celebrated by the balladeers of the world. In the following lines, Vailoppilli makes the temporal coordinates of this occurrence clearer as to being born prior to history and the birth of religions. The grandness and profundity associated with the king, his court, his subjects and everything that existed then is devoid

of limits and binaries. In men, pride was not at odds with humility and courage with compassion and in women, friendliness did not contradict with purity of character. The sharpness of intellect did not give rise to shrewdness and old age did not become senility.

The bards are unsure of the reason behind the collapse of this age, as some sing of an apocalyptic flood where others of the 'first god' defeating the benevolent king; yet they know that when 'history opened its tiny eyes for the first time' the earth had greyed; numerous gods, priests and landlords had partitioned everything on it (Menon 1984, 229). The people of these civilisations were petty, nasty and selfish and destroyed the beauty around. In his attempt to de-rationalise the civilisational logic of modernity, he made a philosophical move out of both science and history that dub this primitive ideal as dreams and lies. For the bards, the most truthful narrative is the one that their 'souls whisper' and only 'the flowers are witnesses' to this (Ibid, 230-231).

Here, poet tries to imagine a different solidarity emerging across the world, one of balladeers, artists, writers and anyone who makes art/fiction out of history. The sense in which the pronoun 'we' is used in this poem historicise another social relation apart from the class relations between the haves and have-nots. The poem rephrases the slogan raised by the Communist Manifesto 'workers of the world unite' into 'bards of the world unite'. This solidarity of those who re-produce the memory of the historical in the aesthetic terrain are artists in the modern sense.

This notion of an art collective, a philosophical foundation to the socio-political role of art and literature is a recurrent and evolving presence in Vailoppilli. As we already discussed in an earlier section, Vailoppilli's conception of the role of the writer/intellectual is always oppositional and critical. The role of the bard in keeping certain memories alive, fighting the perennial danger of forgetting is crucial in the path of history in the struggle to imagine another future. Their 'strings' are played with the 'bow of time' in order to invite the new dawn for which the flowers too await (Menon 1984, 231).

In his poem Kutiyozhikkal, Vailoppilli had imagined another collective for the oppositional forces, that of the crickets. The chirping noise of the crickets is the truth to be told about 'the past as the background score of the present'. In both these poems, the activity of uttering the truth is not easy or simple as it costs one the happiness (as

opposed to pain) and tranquillity (as opposed to turmoil). The idea of forcefully revealing a truth that is not visible/ known otherwise is present strongly in *Kutiyozhikkal*. The poet wants his readers to know a truth that may be difficult to understand in the first sight.

> Smile, how noble a lie it is!
> Let me show the truth, gashing my heart open (Original in Menon 1984, 689)

However, showing the truth is not as easy as 'gashing one's heart' because the partisanship one might feel with truth or falsehood is embedded in his class-caste-gender and other societal locations. In the conventional communist party engagements, this job rests on the intellectual class who would align with the working class interests through the process of de-classing and reveal the truth they learn from thinking, studying and analysis and overcome their alienation. In Vailoppilli, on the other hand, this process of de-classing is not as simple as it was considered to be in the party discourse. This is further evident from the following lines from the same poem *Kutiyozhikkal* whereby his dilemma is revealed.

> Wrapped in the silk of a stupid-smile
> Why should I save my heart for the funeral?
> I shall bare it shining with truth
> By spilling my blood (Original in Menon 1984, 691)

In another set of lines, the poet tries to express his *true* concern and love for the working classes at the advent of their revolutionary uprising. The labourer and the lower caste beloved, both of who were betrayed and humiliated by the landlord-poet refused to accept this token of truth.

> "I…we…love you always"
> I uttered somehow.
> I tore open my chest
> Showed them my heart (Original in Menon 1984, 703)

The efforts of the poet in revealing the truth about the world and himself is related in the mechanism that both are hidden unless forced open and in the case of the truth that contradicts his class position it might not save one from the inevitable revolutionary moment, where such truths lose any significance. Yet, the poet holds onto his complex

truths as he believes that in a post-revolutionary scenario the need for an opposition will be all the more relevant and only the artists can carry that burden in the form of annoying crickets. In the following section, another poem that explores another trajectory of the world history with an emphasis on the emergence and development of the class division and production relations between the two classes of human beings and between them and environment is addressed.

5.6.2. *Kadammanitta's Kurathi: Performing the Poetry of Resistance*

The invasion of the Aryans into the Indian sub-continent and the conflicts between them and the native Dravidian population is a contested field of Indian history. The ideological and political significance of the issue is manifold in the present scenario where the anachronistic nationalist positions vehemently attempt to re-mould the 'Indian identity' along the 'glory' of the Aryan past and its cultural heritage. Romila Thapar has shown how the chronological narrative of ancient Indian history was formulated in the eighteenth century by the British scholars.[83] Drawing the origins of some European languages to the Indo-Aryan past and specifically Vedic Sanskrit, they tried to inaugurate an 'Oriental Renaissance' for the European civilisation (Thapar 1996).

Into the late nineteenth century these discussions took a turn to include the issue of biological race and established the 'Aryan origins' of the select European races, to substantiate the superiority of the colonisers over the natives. Max Mueller's theory of the ancient Aryan homeland in Central Asia and the later dispersal of Aryan into Europe and Iran (which further invaded north-western India) had great influence in both European and Indian historical scholarship. In India, the 'fair-skinned' Aryans conquered the 'dark-skinned' *dasas* (Dravidians) and distinguished themselves from the latter through the caste-system.

This eighteenth century British scholarship on India asserted the Aryan-Dravidian division of Indian population and the oppression of the former over the latter as the foundation to caste hierarchy. These studies coupled with the missionary interpretations that rejected Hinduism on the basis of the caste hierarchy informed the early anti-caste

[83] Examples of such British scholarship that Thapar here refers to can be seen in the works of John Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, (1858-1863), and John Wilson's *Indian Caste* (1877) .

reformist positions from the lower castes like that of Jyotiba Phule. It can be argued that many lower caste reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had mixed responses to the national movement led by Congress and Gandhi for ignoring the question of caste oppression including untouchability.

The theories of Arya–Dravida conflict have been challenged by more recent historians of different orientations including Thapar and other Marxist historians and by artists and writers in the field of literature and aesthetics. In the southern Indian states the Dravidian ancestry was invoked during anti-colonial agitations against the north Indian-Hindi hegemony over them. The regional politics, especially in Tamil Nadu was shaped by the anti-brahmin Dravidian movement of the early twentieth century. In literature too, the re-interpretations of the Vedic and Puranic texts and other Aryan literature occurred exploring the marginalisation, humiliation and demonisation of the Dravidian people in them.

In Malayalam, one of the seminal contributions of the 'progressive literary movement' we discussed in detail in an earlier chapter was the 'de-sanskritisation' of the vocabulary and form of Malayalam poetry. Though there had been a previous moment in the literary history called *Pacha-Malayala Prasthanam* (Simple/Pure Malayalam) inaugurated by the Venmani poets challenging the Sanskrit dominance in Malayalam verse, the change was limited to vocabulary alone. The themes and patterns of rhymes and metrical details all remained closer to the Sanskrit tradition. They could not grasp the changes brought about by colonial modernity and its extended socio-cultural paraphernalia.

However, the progressive movement took up this task ideologically and from its anti-feudal, anti-colonial orientation devised various means to radically alter the literary world. The use of Dravidian metres, deployment of language closer to the spoken tongues and the thematic connect to the everyday lives of common masses in the progressive literature had strong philosophical roots to it. Later in the late 1960s the new generation of poets, who were inspired by the political and cultural transformation from all over the world and most importantly the radical Naxalite uprising in West-Bengal, deepened and broadened the query for more vernacular tools to compose poetry.

Apart from the general proletarianisation of the literature several re-readings and refutations of the Sanskrit epics had happened in both prose and poetry in Malayalam form the same period. Vayalar Rama Varma (c. 1928-1975) popularised the genre by his poems like *Ravanputri* (Ravana's Daughter, 1961) and *Thataka Enna Dravida Rajakumari* (The Dravidian Princess Named Thadaka). Emergent Dalit literature and critical discourse in other languages like Marathi and Hindi also must have influenced these treatments along with the anti-orthodox Marxist scholarship of the post-Stalin era that tried to address the issue of de-colonisation at the ideological level. The political context of the peasant uprisings and Emergency, the larger disillusionment with the post-colonial democracy and its development agendas necessitated and provided the space for such rebellious aesthetic experimentation.

Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan[84] is one of the most original voices from the modernist period of Malayalam poetry. Talking about the major poets of this period, Ayyappa Panicker mentions; 'Ramakrishnan's evocations of rustic rhythms help to catch the undertones and overtones of folk dance and folk rituals like *padayani* and *kolam thullal*. He is mainly interested in starting with a well-known metrical base and ringing the changes on it so as to achieve flexibility, and his poems are well-known for their vibrant rhythmic structure' (Panicker 1978, 85). In this section, one of the most important and popular poems by Kadammanitta for its thematic and formalistic uniqueness with regard to questions of tribal or Dravidian subjectivity and its political resonances in the contemporary will be discussed.

As far as the technical aspects of this poetry are concerned, Ayyappa Panicker argues that the use of folk metres that provided the poet with more flexibility and freedom from sophistication and refining.[85] The peculiar applications of the folk metres

[84] Kadammanitta (*the popular name of M. R. Ramakrishna Panikkar* c. 1935-2008) began writing in the early 1960s and actively participated in the political modernist movement during the 60s and 70s. He was actively present in the cultural events of the Vedi and later held official positions in the Pu Ka Sa during the early 90s. He served at the Kerala State Legislative Assembly as an MLA from the Aranmula constituency in his own district Pathanamthitta. Some of his well-known poems apart from Kurathi are *Santha, Kozhi, Kannur Kotta, Kirathvrutham, Kattalan* etc.

[85] Ayyappa Panikker has identified three major sets of metres used in modern Malayalam poetry namely the Classical Sanskrit metres, Classical Dravidian metres and folk metres. He marks Changampuzha as one of the first poets to have used 'folk metres' but it is only in the 1960s that the resurgence of these folk metres and idioms achieved considerable space in Malayalam poetry.

by Kadammanitta helped to convey the thematic orientation of the poem too to a great extent. Kadammanitta is a poet of loud re-entries and re-configurations. He emerged as the 'people's poet' in the late 1960s through his recitals of poetry. His poetry–performances arose as part of modernism in Malayalam according to Narendra Prasad. Those were times of literary, performative and other aesthetic experiments by artists and writers without an organised collective platform like the earlier Progressive Association. The radical left cultural activists were not associated with the mainstream communist parties; rather they were inspired by the peasant uprising in Naxalbari and the Naxalite movement that followed.

It is interesting to note that one of the popular titles given to Kadammanitta was the 'bard of the people'. Narendra Prasad has noted the operation his poems as one that brings together the 'distance of the outcastes' while thinking of a primitive past in which they get lost and the 'proximity of the modern man' piercing into the contemporary (Prasad 1992, 9). Kadammanitta's poetry was also considered to be poetry of non-civilisation (*anagarikata*) and folk tradition (*natoti parambaryam*). Kadammanitta's poetic universe is loudly black in colour...and he proclaimed his attempt at writing poetry as 'drawing over all the whitewashed walls with his bone ash' (As quoted in Vijayan 2008, 540).

In this section we shall look closely at one of his most famous poem *Kurathi* (Tribal Woman-Performer, 1976). This poem was performed at numerous poetry recitals along with Kadammanitta's other poems like *Kaattalan* (The Savage) and *Kiraathavrittam* (The Tale of Savage) and poems of other contemporary poets. These poetry-sessions (widely known as *kaviarangu* which literally means the theatre of poetry) were so popular that common people gathered into late nights in hundreds, to listen to the performances. This was also a period of experimentation with and subversion of various existing aesthetic norms and Kadammanitta along with K. Satchidanandan, K. G. Sankara Pillai, Attoor Ravi Varma and others wrote and spoke extensively about the need to reframe the relationship between poetry and politics. EMS has commented that *Kurathi* was a 'priceless contribution to the revolutionary movement in Kerala' and Kadammanitta was 'people's poet'. His popularity rose throughout the 1970s and many

performative and other art forms and writings were created drawing inspiration from his works.

The poem is set in the form of a performance by a kurathi, a tribal woman who carries out ritual of *kurathiyattam* (dance of kurathi) in front of the local landlords and others in the audience. Her arrival is described in detail with plenty of metaphors from the organic life in forest from where she comes to 'the stage of civilisation'. For instance, she comes from the wild thickets of bamboo like a 'grown bamboo leaf', from the forest of climber plants she comes as a climber and as a muddy river with debris from the hills. She is attacked by wild animals, wounded fatally; yet full of anger, vigour and strength. Upon reaching the stage for her performance, she begins talking, stirring and shaking her body powerfully to the landlords sitting comfortably, ogling at her.

> You are burning and feeding on my dark children?
> You are gouging out their teary eyes?
> You are ransacking our graves?
> You remind yourselves, how you became what you are (Original in Ramakrishnan 1992, 220).

Kurathi goes onto narrate the story of betrayal, oppression and exploitation suffered by the Adivasi population at the hands of the 'invaders' who came to turn forests into profitable plantations. The local history of Kerala's Adivasi population does sync perfectly with this narrative as they still continue to be the poorest and most marginalised communities in Kerala in comparison to the better indices of human development in the state. Nevertheless, it is also a world-historical narrative of civilisation that can be traced in the histories of all modern nations.

The anger and its objectivity in the poem are frightening; her anger is systemic and intimate at the same time. The poem draws on a range of mythical and historical elements from different regions and time periods. The reason behind the choice of this poem for this work is the intricate way in which Kadammanitta brings together the registers of labour, body and exploitation into the performing space of the tribal ritual. In different parts of Kerala, there are different local, non-brahmanical deities and specific rituals associated with their worship. It is argued that many of those rituals carry a subversive performative potential vis-à-vis the Brahmin domination in the feudal system. Kurathi comes to the stage of the ritual to proclaim the shared history between her and her landlord-audience.

Ameet Parameswaran has argued in detail the relationship between Kadammanitta's recitals of poetry and the ritual performances of Padayani based on his use of the Dravidian rhythms and even direct verses at times. His voice can be 'regarded as not simply as complimentary to logos, but seemingly indicating a far more deep structural collective cultural history of the 'outcastes'' (Parameswaran 2017, 70) Kurathi narrates the history of civilisation that spans thousands of years and all the human habitations in the world and she becomes the first mother who comes to seek revenge for her children. The image of the powerful and vengeful figure of Kannaki is invoked directly in the last lines where Kurathi says,

> My children shall come strong, nurtured by my breasts
> If you destroy them
> I shall burn this city by flinging my breast off
> I shall erase this clan by lashing my hair down (Original in Ramakrishnan 1992, 22)

As Parameswaran argues the invocation of the figure of the mother goddess is achieved here through dancing; transcendence without meditating as in the Vedantic practice. This occurs in the field of affect that let go of 'the rational and the historical' by holding onto the ritual and the trance the performance effectuates. In this sense, this 'politically-charged ritualistic space' of the performance creates an 'excessive affective experience that defies the binaries' (Parameswaran 2017, 74).

When Kadammanitta performed kurathi in front of large crowds with loud passion it returns the energy of the primitive ritual that could invoke a rooted collective sensibility. Parameswaran has argued that in his poetry recitals Kadammanitta 'invoked a 'collective'' through the 'absolute singularity' of his voice (Ibid, 70). It brings kurathi on the stage and makes the audience witness to the angry reiteration of a past they destroyed. It is a different class struggle that kurathi relates in her utterances. Once it was built upon conquering the nature, the tribal-toilers became slaves branded and shackled to bondage. This class could never recover even though the nature of the civilisation changed through ages as the '(in)justice of the civilisation' did not change. Kadammanitta was capable of invoking this collective through his poems both at the levels of the theme, configuration of the words and most importantly at the level of the affective register.

This leads us to a related issue that is the portrayal of nature in the poem. The presence of nature is completely de-romanticised and linked to the act of labour that

'separated' the fruits of labour from the raw material i.e. nature. The initial description of kurathi's arrival to the stage of performance is rich with images from the nature in which she is an integral element like trees, animals, hills and rivers. Kurathi and her clan lived one with nature, by using it without exploiting and by taking from it to survive without depleting. Hence the invaders needed their expertise and familiarity with nature in order to conquer it and once that was accomplished and 'they [Kurathi's people] tamed the wildness' and handed it over to the lords, they were made slaves. The disruption and eventual collapse of the 'natural harmony' by the exploitation that ensued is what came to be known as the written history of the civilisations.

Here the question to nature is systematically connected to the world history from the perspective of class struggle. The process of dispossession the tribal communities underwent in different parts of the world to the 'civilizing forces' is also one of environmental degradation. The Aryan invasion over the native tribal population is shown as the beginning of the long history of exploitation of not only the people but also of the nature of which they considered themselves to be a part of. The image of divided world into the conquerors on the one side and the vanquished on the other is closer to the narrative of human history Marx and Engels depicted in the *Communist Manifesto*.

Yet, the landmark event of the formation of classes for the first time upon the division of society based on the individual and collective ownership of property attains crucial significance here. It is portrayed as the moment of betrayal of a trust the labouring tribal population had placed on the invaders. In this division the vanquished and nature were treated alike; both needed to be tamed, to be of use. Apart from this identification between nature and the tribal-labourers who lived as part of nature (as opposed to culture) and worked with it without alienation before the foreign invasion, the formal aspects of the poem like the use of rituals and its stage language and folk rhythms and oral rhythms of the poem too mould the aesthetics from an ecological perspective.

In a similar fashion, in *Onappattukar* the bards mourn the loss of the 'beauty of the earth' at the hands of the 'little-headed' 'downward looking' invaders and their future generations (Menon 1984, 229). They have witnessed to the destruction of the nature that is integrally related to concepts of abundance, spontaneity, excess and emotion as against civilisation and its production processes. Also, it is to be noted here that the binary of

purity and pollution emanated from the caste hierarchy and that of decency and obscenity from patriarchy. Both these are against the organic nature and by-products of civilisation and hence the critique of civilisation and culture becomes central to the task of the poet who tries to sing the songs of the oppressed and the outcast.

In this section we looked at the retrieval of the ancient, pre-historic past and the energy of the primitive in an attempt to connect it to the exploitative, class-ridden contemporary. The mythical is also political here as to differentiate the tribal communist past from the classical elite past that is invoked by the cultural nationalist ideology. The narrativisation of the primitive and mapping of the local onto the world-historical carry a strong political connotation here, especially in the context of the re-emeregence of the category of the peasant with the naxalite movement.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to map the literary representations of the political economic trajectory of the specific modernity of Kerala in the Malayalam leftist literature in the post independence period. The embedded idea of rationality in these approaches to development and environment as connected themes of modernisation was also reviewed with reference to an alternative and 'revisionist' Marxist legacy of modernity different from the Enlightenment variety. Soviet literary explorations into the themes of technology and development and the alternative reading of Marx's approach to ecology in capitalism as presented by John Bellamy Foster were briefly discussed.

Thakazhi's novels opened up the early moments of modern urbanisation in Kerala and the emergence of certain urban classes like the scavengers and the lumpen proletariat. Some of the complexities that these classes introduce to the celebrated figure of the 'respectable', hard-working labourer who fights for better working conditions are explored here. An alternative figure of the labourer as the organic intellectual born out of the contradictions in the changing relations of production is discussed.

Vailoppilli and Edasseri occupy significant locations in modern Malayalam poetry in the portrayal of the forces of societal change and people's resistance. Moreover, the dilemma of being a progressive poet on the one hand and the ecological sensitivity and poetic scepticism of the modernising moment is identified and further elaborated. In

another discussion on poetry, we came across the reclaiming of the mythical past of primitive communism and abundance that was lost. The importance of the task of the poet lies in rekindling these mythical memories that point towards the injustices of the present. The outcasts perform their wrath and revenge tat portray the first moment of betrayal they suffered at the hands of the invaders who made them and the nature slaves to civilisation.

This chapter adds substantially to our larger discussion of the manners in and techniques with which the communist writers of Malayalam engaged with the radical idioms and tropes that came to them through the vernacular Marxist discourse in Kerala. Now we shall bring these separate chapters and their themes together in order to map the broader orientations this inquiry has taken along different directions.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION: THE MODERN MALAYALI POLITICAL SUBJECT AND ITS CONCEPTUAL CONTOURS IN THE LEFT IMAGINATION

> The class struggle, which is always present to a historian influenced by Marx, is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist. Nevertheless, it is not in the form of the spoils which fall to the victor that the latter make their presence felt in the class struggle. They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humour, cunning, and fortitude. [...] As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history. A historical materialist must be aware of this most inconspicuous of all transformations (Benjamin 2007, 255).

This research started with a discussion of how the Marxist theory of dialectics was 'translated' in the communist discourses of the post-independent Kerala. My argument was that much of the appeal and hegemony of communist philosophy in the intellectual and literary cultures of the region were consolidated during this initial process of translation, which was an ingenious attempt to introduce a radically different and modern way of thinking to the popular, and predominantly agrarian, Malayali culture. Needless to say, what was at stake here was how the communist intellectuals of the time made use of the so-called 'scientific' and 'universalistic' postures of Marxism in a radically different regional context, with the concerns unique to Kerala's post-colonial history. In dealing with these questions by historically placing them, I have chosen a few texts from different periods of communist cultural movement, with an intention to revaluate their claims from the critical vantage points offered by the gender, dalit, and environmental studies. Such an approach helps to unravel the limits and conditions within and against which Marxism's 'dialectical world-view' operates, especially in the interventions made by the writers and critics trained in its school of thought.

A problematisation of the removed and scientific posture of Marxist world-view was undertaken in the second chapter, by bringing to fore the affective and amorous dimensions of being-together. A slippage between the peculiar homosocial nature of communist activism and its hardly discussed homoerotic affections was thereby discussed in detail, in order to see as to how the questions of family, sexuality, morality, and life in

general are entangled and continue to shape the political culture of the region. A queer moment of camaraderie has often been repressed or even foreclosed in such cases, as both the family and the party work together as co-terminus forces in disciplining and normalising the idea of a proper communist subject. Preferring the contractual aspect of conjugality, a process of de-romanticisation and de-sacralisation has thereby been established. In such a context, 'decadence' is a major cultural and critical trope through which the communist intellectuals of the time unleashed their vitriolic attack towards both the disintegrating feudal power and the bourgeoning bourgeois culture. Yet the same trope was also used to criticise, from within and outside, the later functioning of the communist party; especially for referring to the self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking life styles of its leaders in contrast to the self-sacrifices made by the earlier stalwarts. Caught in this complex cultural milieu, the middle class intellectual, endowed with a choice to be or not to be a communist crusader, often limited himself/herself to a liberal-individualist paradigm, as the communist party had already failed to offer the assuring avenues of politicisation. Yet, from the perspective of the party, this situation is seen as resulting from an immoral, read bourgeois, pursuit of pleasure and power, further necessitating rigorous disciplinary mechanisms.

It is intriguing to note that in the instances of self-narrativisation, the communist intellectuals and activists often identify with a Gandhian ascetic modality of doing politics, by adhering to the strict norms of self-disciplining, especially when it comes to the matters of sexual conduct and worldly desires. However, this style of representing and fashioning oneself as an ascetic communist takes a more complicated form in the case of the woman comrade, whose political and personal experiences appear more often than not as *gendered*, in contrast to the unmarked nature of the male political subjectivity. Finally, the binaries that operate in the communist autobiographies in terms of erasure and acknowledgement of the personal and its politics were discussed in the chapter. The limitations of these self-narratives will open further way in the following chapter that looks at the nature of the presence of caste as both an analytical and aesthetic category in the left literature of the post-independence period.

The literary representations of the political economic trajectory of the specific modernity of Kerala in the Malayalam leftist literature in the post independence period

forms the third axis along which the thesis is developed. Alternative ideas of rationality and modernity reflected in the responses to immediate forces of development and modernisation in the post-colonial context are mapped in the literary terrain. Soviet literary explorations into the themes of technology and development and the alternative reading of Marx's approach to ecology in capitalism as presented by John Bellamy Foster were briefly discussed. The early moments of modern urbanisation in Kerala and the emergence of certain urban classes like the scavengers and the lumpen proletariat is vividly discussed in some of the novels here and some of the complexities these new class formations introduced to the celebrated figure of the 'respectable', hard-working labourer contributes to the concluding remarks around the limits of the political subjectivity. An alternative figure of the labourer as the organic intellectual is born out of the contradictions in the changing relations of production the work contends.

The modern Malayalam poetry too plays an important role in the portrayal of the forces of societal change and people's resistance in opposition to the sweeping changes in all walks of life. Dilemmas in balancing between being 'the people's poet and 'the poet of progress' at the age of post colonial nation building. Now we shall bring these separate chapters and their themes together in order to map the broader orientations this inquiry has taken along different directions.

One of the anchors that pull this project together is the imagination of the modern Malayali political subjectivity as it in these discussions. On the one hand the question of the political subject seemed were resolves in the beginning of the cultural movement itself as it proclaimed the left collective to be the writers of the exploited and toiling people. The initial efforts were more or less unified as we discussed in the second chapter that the hardened labour was to become the protagonist in the stage of beauty.

Further complications emerged as the divisions within these 'poor, toiling masses' arose as castes, gender, rural and urban. In one of the section in the fourth chapter we discussed how the debate between realism and socialist realism. Led by individual writers and party writers turned out to be an outright rejection of the 'decadent' and 'immoral' elements of the society from literature. Hence, the organised, respectable family-oriented labourers became the model to be emulated by the writers, as against the plethora of luminal characters like beggars, prostitutes, lumpen, proletariat and other unproductive

subjectivities. Yet writers like Thakazhi explored more into the radical potential of this latter group who belonged neither to the caste-ordered feudal rigidity of the village nor the organised trade unionism of the urban industries.

Another aspect of the imagination of this subjectivity, who could politically lead the society forward, was that of the caste of the subject. A number of discussions in the dissertation point towards the inability or impossibility of a lower caste, especially Dalit political subject gaining prominence in the left texts. I have already mentioned the paucity of well-framed Dalit protagonists who politically take the narrative forward. In the writing of TKC Vaduthala, the earliest Dalit writers of Marxism the protagonist begin as the Communist organisers of their communities, especially among the agricultural labour. Nevertheless, they invariably end up disillusioned by the organization or the ideology or both.

Tracing the genealogy of caste in left literature in Malayalam from the progressive literature movement to the 1980s reveals certain historical absences and invisibilising literary techniques. The peculiar theoretical articulation of the category of caste by different communist parties in India as discussed here, afforded them the polyvalent blindness towards it. The presence of caste as a descriptive as well as affective category in modern Malayalam literature before the 'left progressive phase' seem to be confirming the general hypothesis of negligence as mentioned above. The pro-Dalit writers and born-Dalit writers represented here by Thakazhi and TKC respectively used qualitatively different mechanisms in depicting the Dalit life-worlds in the middle of the twentieth century. M. Sukumaran's novel *Seshakriya* opened up an array of possibilities in reviewing the relationship between labour, caste, communist organisation and the body in the post-colonial Kerala society. Here, the Dalit protagonist is forced to end his life itself owing to the impossibility of negotiating between his caste subjectivity and his organisational intellectual life as a communist.

Along similar lines, the genderedness of the political subject defined along the clear-cut boundaries of modern masculine and feminine figures further limited the subversive potential of the left imagination. The impossible realisation of queer camaraderie regimented and de-authorised by the family and party together epitomised the fragility of apparently democratising interiors of this politics of subjectivity.

There are numerous instances in this dissertation where we discussed the centrality assumed by the trope of family and its inimitable connection and resemblance to that of the party. The stable conjugal life, near-ascetic (except for the natural procreational aspect of sex), austere lifestyle and the constant de-classing is required of a stable party member who would fully contribute to the political activities. Indulgences and pleasure-seeking are to be avoided at all costs if one is to achieve this political ideal.

Another related manner in which this imagination of the modern Malayali subjectivity is delineated in the left literature is visibly seen in the retracing of the primitive past and the identification its inheritors as the most exploited group in the world. This political claim on resources on the basis of an ancient labour of civilisation building which in turn marginalised them into the hinterlands and forests has been one of the most significant explorations in these aesthetic experiments. The left movement of different stages skilfully imbibed the motifs and tropes available in the local mythical world into the modern questions of justice, equality and democracy.

These questions posed at the aesthetic imagination of the left literary and cultural activities in the post-colonial Kerala gesture towards not only the crises the movements faced in the past. They point at the present and future scenarios in which the rightwing onslaught on the cultural and aesthetic sensibilities of the society is strengthening at the cost of a final stroke of erosion of the left public sphere. Another detailed study is required to look into the scenario from the 1990s with regard to the communist literary and cultural paradigm in Kerala and the changes it underwent in the aftermath of national and international events like the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening up of the neoliberal economic regime. In this dissertation the limited scope had been that of drawing some of the genealogical roots of the contemporary Kerala society in the hegemonic aesthetic discourse of the communist movement throughout the post-independence period up to the middle of the 1980s.

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