

**LABOUR AND LITERATURE IN MARXISM: THE EARLY
COMMUNIST DISCOURSE IN KERALA**

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|--|
| AIPWA | All Indian Progressive Writers Association |
| CPI | Communist Party of India |
| CPI (M) | Communist Party of India (Marxist) |
| CSP | Congress Socialist Party |
| IPTA | Indian People's Theatre Association |
| JSS | Jeewal Sahitya Sangham |
| KPAC | Kerala People's Arts Club |
| NBS | National Book Stall |
| NSS | Nair Service Society |
| PSS | Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana |
| Pu Ka Sa | Purogamana Kala-Sahitya Vedi |
| SNDP | Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam |
| SPSS | Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham |

Glossary

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <i>Achhan</i> | Father |
| <i>Adiyaan</i> | The Dalit bonded labourer whose family was considered to be part of the assets of the landlord household |
| <i>Amma</i> | Mother |
| <i>Charitram</i> | History |
| <i>Janmi</i> | The old-fashioned formal term for the landlord |
| <i>Janmi sampradayam</i> | Landlordism |
| <i>Joli/ Pani/ Vela</i> | Work, in a general sense either formal or informal, with/without wage |
| <i>Karanavar</i> | The eldest male head of the matrilineal Nair <i>tharavad</i> , who primarily had to look after his sisters and their children. |
| <i>Karshakar</i> | Peasants/ Cultivators |
| <i>Katha</i> | Story |
| <i>Kavitha</i> | Poetry |
| <i>Kudi</i> | Home, specifically the house of the tenant in the land owned by the landlord, it also means consuming alcohol |
| <i>Kudiyaan</i> | The tenant of a big landlord who cultivated the land on behalf of the landlord and paid him rent. |
| <i>Mappila</i> | The term used for Muslims in some regions and for Christians in some other regions. |

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|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Nair</i> | The affluent upper caste in Kerala who used to be matrilineal in family arrangements and inheritance patterns |
| <i>Namboodiri</i> | Malayali Brahmins who are further subdivided into several sub-castes and groups like Namboodiripad, Bhattathiripad etc. |
| <i>Natakam</i> | Drama/ Play |
| <i>Paattam</i> | Rent to be paid by the tenant to the landlord after every harvest. |
| <i>Parayan/ Pulayan</i> | Two Dalit castes that used to form the vast majority of agricultural labourers in Travancore and Kochi regions |
| <i>Prasthanam</i> | The term used to denote any political/ social or intellectual movement. |
| <i>Premam</i> | Love, in a more strict sense as romantic, conjugal love. |
| <i>Sahityam</i> | Literature |
| <i>Shanidasha</i> | One of the <i>mahadashas</i> in the <i>Vimshottari</i> system of planetary positions according to the lunar mansions in the 120 year long cycle that is 19 years long and considered to be dominated by the influence of Saturn/ <i>Shani</i> and full of difficulties, problems and misfortune in Indian astrology. |
| <i>Thamburan</i> | Lord, mainly used by the lower caste labourers to address the upper caste landlord |
| <i>Tharavad</i> | The large matrilineal Nair households where many families lived jointly |
| <i>Thendi</i> | A beggar/ Scoundrel |

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Thotti</i> | The manual scavenger who removes human excreta from old-fashioned toilets and carries it to the night-soil depots |
| <i>Thozhil</i> | Labour/ occupation |
| <i>Thozhilali</i> | Labourer |
| <i>Thozhilali Vargam</i> | Labouring Class |
| <i>Veshya</i> | The more commonplace usage for prostitute that is different from ' <i>laingika thozhilali</i> ' which means 'sex-worker'. |

Introduction

Malayalam literature, which had been peopled by gods, kings and the genteel, suddenly broke out in a rash of characters who were poor, indigent or criminal. Their heroism lay in the fact that they were rebels who were cynical of a society where caste, birth and privilege determined the status of a person. Between 1900 and 1950 a new aesthetic emerged [in Kerala]. (Menon 1994: ix)

In The Progressive Writers' Association, therefore, we have the broadest organization of the Intellectuals of India, the largest bloc of writers, whatever the difference in their standpoints, whatever their contradictions of philosophical, religious and cultural belief, join for common actions, in the defense of our old culture and the development, through a proper criticism of the past, of a new culture ... It is of utmost importance that we must unite, all of us...to save our civilization. (Anand 1979: 11-2)

Communist movements always 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, when travel to new contexts. 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 ideological and cultural registers, like art, literature and aesthetics. As far as literary productions are concerned, it has been observed that communist movements, for instance in Kerala, have tried to transform the existing literary traditions and create spaces in order for new imaginations and representations of its ideas to be played out. This process not only throws up new questions and dilemmas about the human being, modernity, society and progress, but also provides a new language and repertoire to the contemporary writer, to think about these questions.

It has been argued by many and quite rightly so that the political and ideological success of communist politics in Kerala has much to do with the wide-spread processes of politicization the early communist movement was able to carry out at various levels, like the social, as well as cultural, in an unprecedented manner. As far as the literary field is concerned, the ‘function’ of literature and the role of the writer were fundamentally reconfigured and this in turn contributed to the development of the *purogamana kala saahitya prasthanam* [the progressive art and literature movement] in Kerala. Here it is important to recall that the social reform movements of the early twentieth century had already decisively influenced creative writing, especially poetry, in Kerala, which came to speak in a new language of communities – or *samudayams* – itself a creation of these movements. Many contemporary thinkers argue that the communist movement transformed this scene by both popularizing and ‘secularizing’ the content as well as the form of literature. The progressive writers urged literature to be more universal in spirit and adhere more closely to realism in approach. They also differed considerably from the nationalist writers of the period, in being more critical of social relations based on *class* differences and issues like poverty, hunger and exploitation. (Kunjahammad 2009, Panikker 2012)

However, this does not mean that the progressive literature movement in Kerala, that spanned the two decades from the late 1930s to the late 1950s and engaged closely with the ideological and material matrix of the early communist movement, was a homogeneous entity. It was rather a stream of artists, thinkers and writers, who discussed, debated and often disagreed on many issues, taking part in and giving rise to a larger politics of language that was shared by all.

Some of these writers were disciplined communist party members and mass leaders while some others were intellectual co-travelers of the movement, who maintained a certain conscious distance from the party organization. The former section included cultural activists of the party who also wrote songs and plays to be used for the mobilization of the masses. The latter section included individual figures primarily devoted to cultural practice as ‘progressive realists’, who nevertheless critically engaged with Marxist philosophy. Even as they agreed about the alienation suffered by creative writers, there were differences on the specific kind of politico-cultural activity through which it could be ended. Thus, for instance, Kesari Balakrishna Pillai,

the central figure in the latter group of writers, recommended uncompromising criticism of decaying feudal and bourgeois mores. On the other hand, the leader of the former section, E. M. S. Namboodiripad recommended writers' unflinching alliance with the communist party. A less dominant third stream of critics also emerged in the process like M. Govindan, who recommended radical civil, social and cultural activism as the alternative way out of alienation. Since the first and second groups had dominated the actual debates and processes of progressive cultural movement they will be given maximum space and attention compared to the third stream that remained relatively distant from the more popular milieu of literature and criticism.

It is important to note that the communist party also consciously tried to bring about a new method of artistic and literary criticism which was central to the agenda of transforming the 'consciousness of the masses'. The most important works of Malayalam literature were thoroughly analyzed and critiqued in order to position them in the larger class analysis of the society. Thus, a clear distinction was created between progressive and committed writing and traditional, conservative and reactionary writings. The communist movement thus developed rather strong yet nuanced linkages with the literary and cultural practices, which one must study for a deeper understanding of the movement and its socio-political genealogy. This would involve a study of both the approach of the party towards literature and the figure of the writer as well as the particular imaginations and representations of the undercurrents of modernity and important Marxist tropes, in the specific context.

Reading the Relation between the Political and the Literary

A primary engagement with the available material in the field opens up many questions with regard to the peculiar ways in which the emergence of modernity in the social and literary contexts of Malayalam are portrayed in the progressive writing. The emergence of modernity in Kerala and its varied ramifications on the present of the region has been central to many recent scholarships.¹ As K. T. Rammohan argues

¹ See Arunima (1997, 2003), Devika (2007, 2010), Elayidom (2009), Kodoth (2001), Kumar (1997, 2002), Kunjahammad (2003, 2009), Menon (1994, 2006), Panikker (1990, 1997, 2003), Rammohan (2000), Vijayan (2008).

the ‘democratization of modernity’ in Kerala was possible only because of the lower-caste social reform movements and the early missionary activities in the field of education. (Rammohan 2000: 1234) The successful mass literacy initiatives, a vibrant library movement that established ‘a reading room in every village’ and the expansion of print media and the print public sphere it created, accelerated the expansion of the ‘democratized’, modern, ‘secular’ public and the private. The first generation of social realist novels that undertook a kind of ‘literary ethnography’ according had already began imagining these spatial and conceptual divisions in the social unleashed by modernity. Progressive literature that chronologically followed these novels encountered a number of dilemmas in devising their approach to modernity. The disintegration of the *tharavad* system and the accompanying economic, cultural and moral structure was posing many a serious questions before these writers, most of who belonged precisely to this background.

The dissertation is in dialogue with primarily three sets of secondary scholarships; firstly, the academic discourse on the specific period in Kerala history that is under consideration, mainly the middle of the twentieth century and its socio-political peculiarities and transitions, secondly, studies tracing the trajectories of the progressive cultural movements in Malayalam and to a lesser extent in other linguistic regions like the Hindi-Urdu one, and thirdly certain philosophical writings, radically re-conceptualizing the relation between literature and politics at the methodological level. In this section we will try and construct a conceptual framework that would situate the primary materials of this work along these axes as to point towards the relevance and scope of this dissertation. We will focus more on the possibility of identifying an area around the second set of scholarships, especially the ones relating to the Malayalam progressive movement that necessitates an intervention in an orientation adopted by this study. Our identification of the problems in this existing scholarship will further lead to a reading of the second set of works that try to deal with the question of the aesthetic and the political. The first set of works form a historical and sociological backdrop to the entire work and hence, one feels, do not need to be elaborated here.

Let us begin by following some of the recent scholarship regarding the historical and cultural fields of the communist movement vis-à-vis the progressive movement of the

mid-twentieth century particularly in Malayalam and its ideological and political consequences for the present. Our major focus will be to contextualize our discussion in the existing secondary sources both in Malayalam and English.

The majority of the studies about the progressive movement in Kerala deal with tracing the historical events associated with the movement during the two decades from 1937 when the Jeeval Sahitya Sangham was established till the last formal conference of the Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana in 1956. This is the period that this study also focuses upon mostly. However, the dominant orientation of these works have been in terms of establishing certain given division within the progressive discourse and lending support to one of those without paying much attention to the actual literary pieces produced as part of this movement. The involvement of the communist ideologues in the discourse is largely portrayed as a dogmatic and partisan attempt at establishing the party dominance over the 'writers of good taste' who tried to 'rise beyond' all partisanship.

For instance, M. R. Chandrashekhara in his detailed study on the history of the progressive literature movement in Malayalam tries to assert that all those writers who were criticized by the communist party became great writers and the ones hailed by the party turned out to be mere 'party-authors'. This observation may carry some truth if one takes into account the manner in which a poet like K. P. G. Namboodiri was sidelined in the later trajectory of Malayalam poetry. He also criticizes the communist critics like E. M. S. Namboodiripad and M. S. Devadas for being ignorant about the necessity of creative freedom for the writer and for trying to unilaterally evoke divisive tendencies within the movement. (Chandrashekhara 1999)

In another interesting volume on the progressive movement written by P. K. Gopalakrishnan, the predominant fault committed by the communist critics was adhering to a 'mechanical materialist philosophy' while evaluating literature. The relation between art and class-relations was mechanically interpreted by the communists in the debate and hailed socialist realism as the only technique of writing progressively. He argued that communists argued for politics being the core of progressive literature and refused to accept the multi-dimensional character of

literature. According to Gopalakrishnan the core of any writing should be the eternal value of dignity and freedom of the human being. (Gopalakrishnan 1987)

We will go into a detailed reading of this discourse in our study in Chapter One. Nevertheless, the obvious problem with both these approaches is that their effort is largely focused on certain logic of *evaluating* the ‘relevance’ of progressive literature for the present rather than studying the nuances of the discourse in its original context in understanding the engagement this discourse had with the actual literature produced on the one hand and with the larger cultural sphere of Kerala on the other. Apart from reinforcing the familiar dichotomies like dogmatic and Stalinist communists vs. humanist and freedom-loving ‘great’ writers most of these studies do not undertake a serious investigation into the manners in which the relation between the political and the aesthetic was reconfigured in Malayalam through this discourse.

Moreover, even when some studies explicitly proclaim to be dealing with the relation between communists and progressive literature in Malayalam, the result is the reproduction of the above-mentioned theses as is the case with Andalat’s work. Andalat attempted to ‘erase’ some of the false accusations against the communist involvement in the movement by establishing the validity of this intervention as a true Marxist perspective on art and literature. He inverts the dichotomy set by the above writers in order to portray the ‘non-communist’ writers as reactionary and formalistic. (Andalat 1993)

One of the most interesting studies in this regard is written by S. S. Sreekumar. He assesses the contributions of the progressive movement to Malayalam literature by carefully reading some of the heated debates of the period. He has argued that the most important drawback of the communist writers and critics in the movement was the adoption of the Soviet perspectives on art and literature unconditionally without considering the particularities of the vernacular context. Even when E. M. S. changed his earlier position substantively in 1990 he did not acknowledge this mistake properly and confessed instead from an idealist perspective that annulled the intellectual legacy of the progressive movement. He suggested that the crude translation of the base-superstructure imagery into the field of literature by Lenin as in the theory of reflection was adopted by communists across the globe without

understanding the dialectical nature of this relation between the material sphere and the politico-ideological sphere of society. (Sreekumar 2006)

However, here we will undertake a study that will try and analyze the different points of contention in the progressive discourse in Malayalam through a reading of the major writings of the important participants in the debate. We will also read a set of selected progressive literary products of the period in the light of a number of questions that are explicated later in the Introduction. This discussion about a few works on the progressive literature movement in Malayalam opens up a number of areas that will be taken up in the study.

Now we will read three thinkers who tried to intervene in the realm of criticism and aesthetics from a radical perspective that has complex engagement with Marxist philosophy. We will try to delineate certain themes relevant to our present study of the progressive literature movement in Malayalam and the engagement of the communist party in it. This discussion on radical literary criticism as dealt with in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, Raymond Williams, and Jacques Rancière will enable us to frame our larger project of tracing the conceptual translation of Marxist categories into the vernacular around the question of the relation between politics and literature, making sharp departures from many other thinkers who used Marxist philosophical framework in analyzing the sphere of literary production in a rather conventional manner.

Even though all three of them worked in very different contexts and faced dissimilar challenges as Marxist scholars, the dominant concern about the relationship between the political, and the aesthetic and the problem of democratizing the high-discourse of literature, opens up the possibility of undertaking a dialogic reading of these three in relation to our study about the communist politics and progressive cultural movement in Kerala. Now let us discuss the major ideas in their works briefly.

Raymond Williams 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. 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. 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, humor 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, 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 Lucien Goldman, reconceptualizes it as the ‘trans-individual’ to avoid the crude approaches of reducing the politics of literature into the class interest of the author. 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 ‘social itself’, not ‘above’ or ‘below’ it. (Williams 1958, 1976, 1977)

Mikhail Bakhtin’s discussion of the ‘carnavalesque’ brings in a completely new manner of imagining and analyzing 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. As Bakhtin describes, the carnival or unofficial feast is a “temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers”. (Morris, 2003: 203) Their laughter, according to Bakhtin, destabilized 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 destabilize 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 humor and laughter that becomes critical to analyzing 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 politicize the hitherto mundane, so-called apolitical spheres - of laughter, of fearless bodies of men and women in the carnival, and of the undisciplined drunkard, as the closest expressions of being free. (Bakhtin 1984)

Jacques Rancière, in his path-breaking essay "The Politics of Literature" published in 2004, argues for a thorough reconfiguration of the two categories, politics and literature. Significantly, for him, the politics of literature does not mean the politics of writers. It is neither about the personal commitment of the writers to particular issues and struggles of their times, nor about the ways in which they represent the contemporary social situation and prominent issues in their works. For Rancière, the radical and subversive potential of any literature is achieved through the redistribution and re-partitioning of the sensible – a re-arrangement of the social, by changing the configurations of the seeable, the speakable and the readable. It is a particular link between a 'system of meaning of words' and a 'system of visibility of things', in a 'historical mode of visibility of writing'. This is where, Ranciere suggests, that the politics of a particular literature is played out, in terms of its effect upon the existing matrix of the partitioning of the sensible.

Whether it is workers' creativity in the nineteenth century France, discussed in his phenomenal work *The Nights of Labour*, or the writings of Balzac or Flaubert, according to Rancière, a literature is literature when it intervenes into the realm of knowledge and power *as literature*. The repartitioning of the sensible needs to be done by collapsing the binary between 'noble action' and 'base life', where some people are destined to create the history while some others are only living their lives. This reconfiguration punctures the existing divisions between those who can read, and those who should not. Rancière understands 'literariness as democracy'. The word, which is a 'mute pebble' does not designate itself to a fixed reader who is supposed to read but is available to everybody. It also does not acknowledge any hierarchy between different subjects of literature. The excess of such words does not allow for such a designation within the text, for its 'proper function' to be carried out. He also draws our attention to the different contextual readings possible as far as literature is concerned by discussing the novels by Flaubert and the mutually contradictory criticisms against his writing in different periods. (Rancière 1989, 2004)

These writers provide many insights into the spheres of creativity and criticism as acts of imagining politics and its relation to literature, the central thrust being the impulse of democratization in the field of literature. For instance, the idea of analyzing 'literature as literature' that goes beyond the individual orientations of the writers and the activities they engaged in.

Priyamvada Gopal, in her pioneering work on the progressive literary movement, emphasizes the necessity to read the vernacular writers and their works beyond the idea of 'national literatures'. She argues that it is unrewarding to confine these writers and the discourse their writings produced in terms of a contestation between the 'politicals' who were deterministic based on the 'party line' and the 'men of taste' who stood for artistic or creative freedom. It would be necessary to undertake a detailed and separate study of each of these writers in relation to the larger discourse in order to understand the particular issues they engaged with and idioms they 'invented' to engage with these issues. The question of representation was complex for each of them in different ways and entwined with questions of gender, class, caste and religion. (Gopal 2005)

Hence, here the attempt of this work will be to contextualize the progressive movement in relation to the early communist movement and to lay out a primary mapping of complex the conceptual terrain of that period. The specific ways in which these engagements produced diverse radical imaginations of the social, the political and the literary in modern Malayalam will remain central to the work as a whole. Now let us identify the specific research problem of this dissertation as emanates from the above discussion.

Research Problem

There is a basic difficulty in looking at the history of the communist movement in a particular regional context like Kerala that arises out of the usual approach to both Marxism and communist politics i.e. to look at them with a homogeneous lens. At the most, we see a variation in national terms, like Chinese Marxism, Soviet Marxism, etc. This is not only insufficient but also deeply problematic for understanding the actual history of communist movements and their discourses in different contexts, as for example in Kerala. It will be pointless to frame such inquiry with an *a priori* notion of Indian Marxism. At any rate, such notions cannot be deployed without a detailed political sociology of the communist movement. It requires a fresh investigation at the local levels and the particular linguistic registers of the movement – a work seldom undertaken apart from a few notable exceptions. This is what I plan to take up in my research, but of course in a limited manner and with a carefully restricted scope, in the case of the interventions of the communist movement in the cultural sphere of Kerala around the middle of the twentieth century. Keeping in mind the limited scope of the proposed dissertation, it will be useful to track the articulation of a specific theoretical issue or problem in the communist discourse of Kerala, which is common to Marxist philosophy and politics as such, thereby allowing a comparative framework to be accessed.

The specific concept that would be used as the central analytical category in this work would be that of ‘labour’ as deployed in the early communist cultural and literary discourse in Malayalam. I want to discuss the centrality of the labourer as a revolutionary subject and the conceptualization of labour as fundamental material

activity. Hence, following the distinct fashions in which these categories as imagined by the progressive writers will be central to the larger project of understanding the processes of conceptual translation of Marxism in the vernacular context. I would like to read through the primary materials I have chosen in order to inquire into this problematique as played out in the early communist movement in Kerala, especially in its cultural engagements.

The engagements of the communist party ideologues with the notions of literature and aesthetics and their debate with the non-party intellectuals, throw open a number of interesting problems regarding the conceptual translations of Marxist idioms into the vernacular. Apart from this, the larger thematic of modernity has to be laid out in the context of Kerala in relation to the communist engagements with the progressive cultural movement in Malayalam. A set of progressive literary works are chosen, which would be read in order to trace the significant aspects in the production of the discourse of modernity in Malayalam. The complicated relationship between Marxist ideology and bourgeois modernity in the vernacular context needs to be delineated through this reading as to identify the central concerns of the communist movement as far as the question of modernity is concerned.

Structure of the Thesis: Chapterization and Questions

This dissertation has been organized into three chapters, apart from the Introduction and the Conclusion and seeks to pose three inter-related sets of questions in the three chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter One traces the intellectual history of the progressive literary movement in Malayalam in detail. This history is divided into two phases whereby the different questions and concerns of each phase could be discussed separately but in relation with each other. The debate within the progressive movement between the communist party ideologues and the non-party leftist intellectuals had been a determining influence in the actual cultural production of not only that period, but also of the later currents in the field. In tracing this debate, with its nuanced attempts at classifying the categories of the Malayalam aesthetic discourse, we would like to identify the

peculiar mechanisms that adapted and modified the Marxist idioms and concepts into the vernacular. The following questions would be raised during the discussion:

- How did the debates between the communist critics and non-party leftist writers in the progressive literature movement revise the concepts of social progress and literature in relation with each other? What was the approach of the communist party ideologues towards art and literature as part of the larger political practice? How did this engagement give rise to a particular discourse on radical literary/ aesthetic practices and radical political practices in the Malayalam context?

In Chapter Two, we will closely read some of the selected literary works of the progressive period in the light of their specific engagements with the question of modernity as experienced at that moment in Kerala's history. The central attempt will be to recognize the manners in which the social relations were re-imagined and re-presented by these writers in the context of the actual transitions taking place in these relations. The issues of love and camaraderie, family and morality, and that of the communist, caste-ridden and gendered selves and of the problem of progress and science will be traced through these writings as to discover the apparatuses produced by the progressive writings of the period to mark the contours of the modern social of Kerala.

- How did the ideological setting produced by the progressive movement debates affect the actual practice of writing in discussing the transitional Kerala society? How the specific modernity of Kerala was 'written' by these progressive writers while imagining the social relations of the society anew?

Finally in Chapter Three we will read these texts so as to identify the major tendencies that were present in imagining and representing the newly emerged concepts of labour, labourer, labouring class and political economy. We will analyze the dominant devices invented by different writers in order to progressively incorporate these terms in contrast to the hierarchic and undemocratic aspects of the earlier modes of representation. Here, we will also look at the particularities of these representations in terms of the actual historical processes that the communist movement was part of and the ways in which these conceptualizations influenced the

re-writing of the ideological terrains associated with the movement. The questions to be addressed in Chapter Two are as follows:

- What were the specific mechanisms through which the progressive writers represented the concepts of labour, labourer and labouring class in their writing? How did the progressive writers tackle the gulf between the intellectual and the worker and the problem of alienation in their practice of writing? How is the tension between the leader-cum-intellectual and worker-cum-cadre, and that between political activity and intellectual practice reconfigured in this context?

Now we will briefly lay out a methodological approach that will enable us to carry out these analyses.

Research Methodology

This dissertation mainly attempts to address these questions by reviewing primary and secondary literature available in this field. All the primary materials cited in the text as well as mentioned in the bibliography have been read in original.

Apart from providing English translations of specific words and phrases in vernacular, extracts from poems, short stories, novels, dramas and political and academic documents in Malayalam are translated wherever it seemed essential to present the argument effectively. Moreover, transliterated versions of these extracts are also added as footnotes. An extensive reading of Malayalam literature, beyond the pieces directly used in the work has been the single most significant factor in shaping the larger framework that took shape during the process of writing.

The secondary literature reviewed has been predominantly from three distinct areas: Marxist philosophy in general and literary studies in particular, history of the progressive cultural movements in various parts of the subcontinent and the socio-political, cultural and literary histories of Kerala.

Chapter One

The Politics of Literature: E. M. S. Namboodiripad and the Progressive Literature Movement in Kerala

The mean and contemptible capitalist and his despicable life on the one hand and those human lives that are destroyed by his [the capitalist's] loot and tyranny on the other, formed the ideal structure within which the writer was free to creatively flesh out details. [T]he labourer who is fighting against his [the capitalist] domination; his family relations and emotions; those numerous issues and events those surface out of these struggles etc. should become the basis on which the progressive writer can show the emergence of a new human community. (Namboodiripad, 1974: 76)

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 2004: 10, emphasis added)

Introduction

The ways of marking the beginning and the end of any political or ideological movement or discourse have always been open to debates. Consequently, one cannot really claim to have mapped it in an indisputable fashion. Nevertheless, this chapter is an attempt at marking the conceptual contours of the progressive literature discourse in Malayalam as emerged by the mid 1930s and remained active till the late 1950s.

In the international scenario, the Great Depression of the inter-war years, and the grave food-shortages and famines were manifested as the crises of capitalism. The emergence of fascism in Europe and intensification of the anti-colonial movements in the colonies also mark the significance of this era. 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 in the trajectory of socialist transformatory efforts. Creative literature and its political significance had been addressed in a serious manner by the Soviet Union. In 1946 Stalin appointed Andrei Zhdanov as the director of Soviet Union's cultural policy which in turn became a milestone in the trajectory of communist aesthetics.

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. As Priyamvada Gopal points out, the unique partnerships between aesthetics and politics were experimented with and its different modalities thoroughly debated upon throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. (Gopal 2005: 2) The question of representation and its relationship to political consciousness of the masses was to be framed in a number of distinct ways by different writers and artists. The activistic potential of the writer, to go beyond the reformist questions of nineteenth century literature, was to be emphasized. 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).

Some might argue that the progressive tendencies in Malayalam literature need to be traced since the publication of the phenomenal novel *Indulekha* by O. Chandu Menon in 1889. It indeed appeared as a blow on the decaying feudal relations and the complex matrilineal systems of marriage and family. Similarly, Vallathol Narayanamenon sympathized with the ideal of socialism in the Nehruvian nationalist spirit and ideals of freedom and progress in *Sahityamanjari* published in 1917. More importantly, a poem called *Duravastha* by Kumaran Asan came out in 1922, dealing directly with the issues of caste-based discrimination and exploitation in an unprecedented manner. S. S. Sreekumar argues that the history of progressive literary

criticism in Malayalam begins much before the emergence of an organised attempt at producing progressive literature in 1937 with the establishment of *Jeeval Sahitya Sangham*.

However, what makes the 1930s an important marker in modern Malayalam literature is that the writers of this era perceived themselves as a collective that needs to unleash its creative energies to bring about transformatory changes at the socio-political levels. These progressivists were committed in a sense that could not be applied to the earlier generations of nationalist or reformist writers. Writers like Chandu Menon, Kumaran Asan and Vallathol Narayanamenon brought about significant democratization in formal as well as conceptual aspects of poetry through the employment of more Dravidian and folk meters and writing about social issues. But, the progressive writers considered their intervention in the cultural sphere of the society as a movement that needed to be planned and organized if it was to achieve its goals of aiding social progress. They also clearly laid out the mottos and functions of the progressive art and literature movement whereupon they tried to strike a new relationship between aesthetics and politics.

The progressive literature movement in Kerala facilitated a transformation of not just the literary institution and aesthetics but also undertook a radical reviewing of the literary canon, norms and the very foundations of hitherto existing Malayalam literature. According to K. Satchidanandan, it was the first avant-garde literary movement in Kerala. (Satchidanandan 2011) It questioned the underlying conservative tendencies of the existing literature and introduced the newly discovered potential of realism (later more specifically, socialist realism) to Malayalam.

We have to trace the trajectory of the Malayalam progressive literature movement as independent of, yet inspired by the significant events in the national and international scene. The peculiar relationship the movement had with the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the role played by the writers associated with the party in the movement, the manner in which the debates in the movement defined and re-defined literature and related concepts, the ways by which writing literature was to become a political activity as per the communist imagination, the unique process of translation of

Marxism at work in this debate carried out mainly by E. M. S. Namboodiripad, are some of the pertinent questions to be asked about this discourse.

This chapter intends to trace the central debate that took place in the progressive movement and chalk out the complex and tense relationship that existed between the communist and ‘non-communist’ writers during the early stage of the movement (with some occasional references and forays into later debates).² There were many a significant moments in this debate, in terms of the modality of practice, the major themes of contention, and the manner in which the participants expressed their position in relation to other extraneous factors. In the end, we will talk about the larger picture emerging out of these points regarding the epistemological apparatus constructed through this discourse.

Since the central focus of this work is on the politico-ideological particularities of the communist movement in Kerala, especially in the sphere of cultural and literary production, we shall try and emphasize upon the ways in which the communist party ideologues talked about art, literature and culture and their relation to politics, as well as how they initiated and deepened this into a highly polarized polemic.

In this phase of the debate as we shall see through his powerful arguments, EMS contributed to the significant development of a unique yet informed way of ‘applying’ Marxist methodology to the sphere of literary criticism. Before dismissing or hailing it as part of this or that tradition of Marxist literary theory depending on overall inclination and explicit usage of certain concepts, we shall need to read through this debate carefully. In doing so, we will engage with EMS’ arguments, as portrayed in his essays, pamphlets and speech-texts, that will help to delineate a set of important features about the key issues in Marxist criticism of arts and aesthetics in Kerala. It is not difficult to relate these discussions to a familiar account of Stalinist/ authoritarian/ reductionist vs. humanist/ democratic/ freedom-loving/ aesthetic approaches and we shall indicate the connection where necessary. However, the main effort will be to try and assess the real valency and specific contextual resonance these issues assumed in

² Even though throughout his writings EMS describes the debate as it had taken place between two groups of communist and non-communist writers, many of the latter faction proclaimed themselves to be followers of communist ideas. The issue pertained more to the level of adherence these writers had to the party decisions vis-à-vis art, politics and their relation to the process of social transformation.

this debate and the sophisticated and subtle ways in which the debate came to be articulated. In broad terms, therefore our aim is to trace a clear trajectory of the cultural history of the communist movement in Kerala during these early years.

Searching for primary sources dealing with this period, (which basically includes the writings of those involved in the debate) one may find it astonishing that unlike in other languages no comprehensive publication is available in which the entire corpus of the works related to this debate are to be found. Even when one could find a few books where the writings of some of these authors were collected individually, they contain articles written on many issues rather than being a focused and complete collection of contribution on the theme of progressive literature. Most old titles are rarely subjected to reprint and this stands in odd and sharp contradiction with the recent revival of interest in the cultural history of twentieth century Kerala. For instance, the poetry collection of K. P. G. Namboodiri and the writings in literary by M. S. Devadas are out of stock for long in the Chintha Publishing House.

On the one hand we can see a number of important studies published in the recent past around the broad periods of 'Kerala Renaissance', social reform movements and under the themes of socio-political transformations related to family, public sphere, caste configurations, formation of the modern Malayali identity, development and redistribution of resources, education and literacy.³ Thus one is justified in asking whether the lack of proper archiving and systematic publication in this regard is reflective of a general lack of enthusiasm toward approaching the material, which should be analysed and subjected to a thorough reading, highlighting the particularities and studying them using the historical and theoretical resources available to us today.

Apart from a few notable exceptions, most works talking about the socio-cultural and literary histories of Kerala do not undertake the necessary historical interrogation vis-à-vis cultural and literary texts, at most confining to their stated content and explicit political underpinnings. I would like to contend that it is absolutely crucial to give due intellectual respect and time to each of these pieces (essays, pamphlets and speech-

³ See the works by Dilip Menon (2006), J. Devika (2007, 2010), G. Arunima (2003), Udaya Kumar (1997, 1999 et al), Sunil P. Elayidom (2004) etc. for detailed discussions about the socio-cultural, economic and political peculiarities of this period of transition.

texts included here and other creative literature in other sections), in order to understand their particularities not just in terms of individual and explicit political stand, historical roots and sociological positioning understood from a position external to the texts. But it is also important to view them as moments of unique encounter and engagement between many factors all of which, including the Malayalam language, its literary forms, and the range of philosophical proclivities as well as exposure to other literary traditions were undergoing constant changes throughout these decades.

These factors become all the more important if we are to study this literary and cultural history in a connected manner with respect to the emerging communist movement. Indeed the contextualization, adaptation and nuanced translation of communist idioms at work in both these sets of writings (creative as well as analytical) would be overlooked, if one regards for instance, the Soviet literary tradition as the prototype around which all other communist writings may be assessed and evaluated. Our intention is, however, is to exercise against such homogenization and standardization, and keep an eye open for the rooted uniqueness.

In this perspective, when one begins to read, for instance, EMS' essays that initiated the debate within the *PSS* and ruthlessly crushed the opponents that reveals an exciting and multi-layered process of translation beginning to unfold. This translation of Marx and Marxist texts, concepts and repertoire, involves not only the question of language but also of a number of deeper and wider concerns. Our effort is thus to develop a sophisticated Marxist perspective on the literary practice and cultural production in the communist movement with a careful eye on the relation between political-economy and literature. It should help us to grasp the way in which EMS manages to introduce a whole new set of aesthetic 'yardsticks' in Malayalam literary criticism and establish them with considerable success.

Literary Canons in Malayalam: Exploring the Era Preceding the Progressive Moment

Let us begin by tracing some of the traditional canons of Malayalam literature precede the progressive movement. The term ‘traditional’ is used not to homogenize these works as conservative, juxtaposed to the progressive ones, but simply to place them in a chronological order. 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*. In fact they worked on the formation of the modern Malayalam language through their vernacular adaptations and translations of epic *kavyas* like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharatha* and *Bhagavatha*. 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 brought performing arts out of the sacralized and caste-ridden temple spaces. (Sachidanandan 2007)

By the late nineteenth century a sudden and radical upheaval took place in Malayalam literature. The *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 *sandeshya 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. (Krishnapilla 1958)

O. Chandu Menon published *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. Dilip Menon has undertaken a detailed study of Potheri

Kunjambu's novel *Saraswativijayam* that came out in 1893 dealing with the centrality of education in the lower caste concerns. Vengayil Kunjiraman Nayanar, Moorkkoth Kumaran, Oduvil Kunjkrishna Menon, Ambadi Narayana Poduval, K. Sukumaran and the likes were the first generation short story writers in Malayalam. (Menon 2006: 110-44)

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. Reforms in the intimate spheres regarding family structure, marriage and inheritance etc. were central to these movements. (Kunjahammad 2009: 204)

This period produced the first politically motivated and propagandist writings including plays stories and poetry in Malayalam. 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* (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*⁴. 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.

⁴ *Sambandham* literally means a 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.

Historical Setting of Malayalam Progressive Movement: Major Events

Let us begin by contextualizing the intellectual debates of the progressive discourse within the historical events that occurred. On April 20, 1937, the *Jeeval Sahitya Sangham* (henceforth *JSS*) was established in a meeting held at Thrissur. This was envisioned as the Malayalam counterpart of the All India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA) which was formed a year ago in Lucknow. The meeting was attended by around one hundred representatives from Travancore, Kochi and Malabar⁵. 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.

The *Jeeval Sahitya Sangham* expanded the purview of Malayalam literature in an unprecedented scale by incorporating a range of new genres including short story, prose drama and novel to its fold. In 1939, at the third meeting of the *JSS*, the Congress-Socialist Party refused to participate as a result of a recent divide in that party which led to the formation of the Kerala branch of the Communist Party of India (CPI). When the World War II broke out, the British Government banned the CPI and arrested most of its activists. This restricted the workings of the *JSS* and it could not work effectively until 1944 when it was renamed and expanded into the *Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana* (henceforth *PSS*).

The Shornur Conference of 1944 saw many more writers and critics joining the movement, even as some of them were skeptical of the *JSS* initiative in the earlier phase. Well known critics Joseph Mundassery and M. P. Paul, reputed poets like G. Sankarakurup and Changampuzha Krishnapilla, and well-known masters of prose, Takazhi Sivasankarapilla and Ponkunnam Varkey became part of the *PSS*, to name a few. However, soon after this rejuvenation a severe ideological debate began in the alliance 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

⁵ Before the linguistic state formation in 1956, Kerala existed as three distinct parts; two princely states of Travancore and Kochi and the erstwhile district of the Madras Presidency of British India called Malabar.

movement as a whole in Kerala. This was the last *PSS* conference where writers belonging to both sections had come together and shared the platform until 1954. By then the movement had begun to lose its earlier strength. (Sreekumari 2007: 105)

In the meantime, in 1949 the *PSS* conducted its meeting without the non-party writers, whereupon which the latter group formed a new group called *Purogamana Sahitya Samiti*. All efforts towards a re-union culminated in the 1954 Conference in Kottayam, and the 1956 Conference in Edappally, which marked the end of this phase in the history of Malayalam progressive literature movement. K. E. N. Kunjahammad 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.⁶

Later, through the communist party daily *Deshabhimani*, a Study Circle was formed in 1971, which tried to resume some of the earlier debates around progressive arts and literature, although this was exclusively inside the CPI (M). In 1981, the *Purogamana Kala-Sahitya Sangham* (Progressive Art-Literature Association) was formed which is working to-date.

Having discussed the various historical, ideological and other contextual factors that set the backdrop for the Malayalam progressive literature movement, let us now come to the central part of the chapter i.e. the specific points around which the discourse took place. As already mentioned, the progressive literature was called the *jeeval sahyam* in Malayalam and the collective that was formed in 1937 was called *Jeeval Sahitya Sangham (JSS)*. Later, in 1944, the organization was renamed and expanded as the *Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana (PSS)*. The movement remained active till the late 1950s even though brief periods of lull occurred due to the repeated banning of the communist party by the central government.

The peculiar trajectory of the ideological debates within the movement allows us to locate two moments of intense argumentation among the participants; first around the

⁶ The *Vimochana Samaram* was led by the landed interests, church and the anti-Stalinist intelligentsia against the first communist ministry that came into power in 1957. It became a reason for the Central government to expel the ministry came after a brief tenure, 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.

moment of inception in 1937 and the second during 1947-1949. We will organize our discussion around these moments as to delineate the different contexts and questions involved.

In the first instance of the debate the members of the *JSS* vociferously rejected the aesthetic criteria of the traditional literature and exposed its nexus with the feudal social structure. Hence, the major debate was taking place between the advocates of the traditional ways of writing and the young activists of *JSS* who were on the one hand influenced by the advanced interventions by Kesari in the field of literature and criticism and on the other involved in the activities of the Congress-Socialist Party.

As far as the second moment is concerned the literary, political and social conditions had been substantially changed. The event of national independence became a watershed in the trajectory of the debate. The organization became the room for serious internal debates that led to deep schism within the movement between the communist party ideologues part of the movement and non-party writers and critics. We need to look at these moments individually and analyze the manners in which the differentiated but inter-related discourse that both these produced together that in hindsight we identify as the progressive literature movement of Malayalam. Now we will analyze the first moment of intense debate and discussion initiated by the activists of *JSS* countering the attacks of the established critics of the traditional canon.

***Jeeval Sahityam*⁷: Classifying Life and Defining Literature**

The dominant voices in the '*jeeval sahitya*' phase of the progressive movement, E. M. S. Namboodiripad⁸ and Kesari Balakrishnapilla primarily attempted to define *jeeval*

⁷ This was translated as 'Living Literature' in an article published under the name of Deshabhimani Study Circle, a group that was initiated by the CPI (M) under the guidance of E.M.S. in order to resume the ideological and philosophical debates about literature, arts and Marxism. Through their discussions the earlier debate in the progressive literary movement came to resurface and played itself out in a different manner. (Deshabhimani 1974: 65) Another term is 'Committee for Life-oriented Literature' (Jussy 2005: 37)

⁸ E. M. S. Namboodiripad (1909-1998) was born into a wealthy land-owning Namboodiri household in south Malabar, currently part of the Malappuram district. He began his political life as an active member of the social-reformist initiative among the Namboodiris called the *Yogakshema Sabha* after

sahityam by reviewing the nature and purpose of literature and aesthetics. It drew heavily from the wider ‘art for art vs. art for life’ 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 *jeeval sahitya* works do not comply with existing aesthetic standards.

EMS argued that as the fuel for artistic production had to be drawn from the dynamics of the society the writer cannot be expected to function on the basis of certain eternal aesthetic principles. If anyone claims that his art belongs to him completely without any other purpose or relation to anything it means, according to EMS that he does not realize the way in which his works are dialectically active. As 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. 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)⁹

In other words, 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. It is

which he went to the Indian National Congress and later to the Kerala Congress-Socialist Party. EMS’ differences with the Congress sharpened more and more during the 1930s and his engagement with CPI leaders like S.V. Ghatge, S.A. Dange and P. Sundarayya became the initial motivation for him to build a wing of CPI in Kerala. But even before the official formation of the party, EMS along with some others had already started mobilizational works as leaders of the Congress-Socialist Party.

EMS was one of the most important ideologues of the CPI and later of the CPI (M) whose writings presented one of the finest and sophisticated articulations of Marxist theory regarding many themes ranging from contemporary politics, sociology, and history to culture, language and literature. He wrote a series of essays on Malayalam literature, undertaking a Marxist analysis of the traditional as well as emergent aesthetics during the period of progressive literature debates. Most of his works were published in *Mathrubhumi* (a nationalist newspaper founded in 1923), *Prabhatham* (the short-lived socialist newspaper established in 1938), and later in *Deshabhimani* (the organ of Kerala CPI, began in 1942 as a weekly and converted to daily in 1946). He served as the Chief Minister of Kerala for many years and became the General Secretary of CPI (M) in 1977, a designation he held until 1992. His complete works published by Chintha Publishing House run by the CPI (M) in one hundred volumes, which itself speaks of the extensive scope of his scholarship.

⁹ All translations from Malayalam in this work are mine.

the very nature of art to be socially oriented in some way or the other. Even the most subjective aspects of writing ought to reflect the social conditions from which it emerges.

Kesari Balakrishnapilla¹⁰ in a related manner argued that *jeeval sahyam* 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’ (i.e. it should be *aanandadayakam*)¹¹. (Balakrishnapilla 1984: 307)

However, Kesari skillfully makes a distinction between the meanings of *jeeval sahyam* and its English counterpart progressive literature. According to him, the category of *jeeval sahyam* is much broader than the ambit of progressive literature and Kesari held that a piece could be either progressive or reactionary but still be *jeeval sahyam*. All *jeeval sahyam* need not be progressive in the present sense of the term but all progressive writing could be incorporated under *jeeval sahyam*.

EMS argued that some part of this confusion has to do with the name *jeeval sahyam* which he believed was an inadequate translation of the term progressive literature and EMS used it in the sense of ‘progressive’ with a certain degree of caution. The name of ‘living literature’ did not effectively convey the sense of progress that is central to the discourse of progressive literature. This suggestion made in 1937 was materialized only much later in 1944, when the *Jeeval Sahitya Sangham* was reorganized as *Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana*.

¹⁰ Kesari A. Balakrishna Pillai (1889-1960) (henceforth Kesari) was a renowned critic of his times. He has written extensively on literary and aesthetic theory and is admired for his pioneering discussion in Malayalam of many eminent Western scholars belonging to an array of disciplines for the first time. He translated many works of fiction and non-fiction from a number of European languages to Malayalam. Balakrishnapilla first worked as an editor of *Samadarshi* and later started his own journal *Prabodhakan* by collecting funds from in and out of India. When *Prabodhakan* was banned, A. Balakrishna Pillai founded and published *Kesari* which was an important weekly discussing politics and literature. Through the columns of *Kesari*, he fought against the formidable autocracy of the Divan of the erstwhile princely State of Travancore. *Kesari* also was banned by government because of his unrelenting criticisms against the misdeeds of Government. (George 1990) He wrote extensively on movements in contemporary European literature and advocated the use of other disciplines like sociology and psychology in literary criticism. He was an intellectual source of inspiration to an entire generation of modern Malayali writers like Takazhi Sivasankarapilla, P. Kesava Dev, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, and S. K. Pottekkad.

¹¹ 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 colorful and gay.

But, as far as Kesari was concerned the notion of 'living literature' had a particular resonance. For Kesari, until then most of the writers dealt only with "dead and sterile" themes which had a mythical orientation. If the historical and mythical question involved in a particular work was not related to the contemporary crises it cannot be *jeeval sahyam*. It needed to face social problems, beyond individual anxieties that might pertain to some eternal/trans-historical dimensions; yet if these 'eternal' queries did not reflect a social issue of the times then also it could not be called *jeeval sahyam*. Both Kesari and EMS argued that the function of literature even when it is *jeeval* is not to be mere tools of propaganda, even though ultimately both of them aim at the propagation of certain values and logics through *jeeval sahyam*. The statement by Kesari that urges the writers to "coat the bitter taste of propaganda with the sugar of art" sums up the way the relation between art and 'reality' as imagined by the progressives in this phase. (Balakrishnapilla 1984: 309)

Once the characteristics and purposes of *jeeval sahyam* were spelt out clearly both Kesari and EMS took up various aspects of progressive writing in order to elucidate the specific duties of the progressive writers at the face of unprecedented mass mobilization against the feudal and colonial powers. There are a number of themes that need to be discussed briefly as part of this moment of formative debates of *jeeval sahyam*. This section is further divided into five sub-sections that deal with the questions of form, technique and content of *jeeval sahyam*, the status of the figure of writer within the purview *jeeval sahyam* and short histories of the 'writers' co-operative' and the 'library movement'.

➤ **Preference for Drama: The Question of Different Forms of Narration**

Both Kesari and EMS emphasized the import of prose in general and drama in particular in creating *jeeval sahyam*. As we already know, the development of genres including short story, novels and prose plays and the emergence of modernity is intrinsically not only in Malayalam but also in other languages. Many thinkers have shown how the grand canvass that became available to the modern writer from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, plagued with experiences of war, famine, large-scale destruction, migration and related feelings of decadence, pessimism, defeat and loss enabled her to write novels or short stories rather than lyrical poetry. For Kesari, prose was the most accessible form of literature for the

masses that were just learning to read at that point. The language construction had to be simple like the spoken one and common parlance had to be assimilated into literature.

To some extent, this propagandist work was taken to be the practical work of *jeeval sahityam* and the most suitable form for this work was seen to be that of prose-drama. The most important merit of drama in this regard was that it was considered to be one of the most direct forms of addressing the people like public speech/oration where one faces a large number of people at a single time and space.

As far as the content of the play is concerned, it could choose themes of more general nature which could eventually lead the viewers to deeply reflect about the questions raised, and thus undergo an ideological transformation. Whereas through poems, stories or novels one could at most aim to influence one or two disparate ideas of the receivers, without affecting their larger framework at all.

In his discussions on *jeeval sahityam*, Kesari closely examines a number of French and English writers belonging to both Classical and Romantic traditions. For instance, the plays of Brieux and Galsworthy were mentioned while talking about how their works could not bring about a sweeping change in the ideology of the audience as different from the works of, say, a contemporary realist playwright like Henrik Ibsen. As a corollary, however, Kesari adds that even though Ibsen's form of writing was realist and his plays could influence the ideological predilections of a large number of people, they were basically centered on the theme of individual freedom and hence could not be seen as part of *jeeval sahitya* tradition. (Balakrishnapilla 1984: 315)

Here it is interesting to see the analysis of the modern Malayalam drama by EMS in an article written in 1954 titled “*Paattabaakki Muthal Ningalenne Communistakki Vare*” [From *Paattabaakki* till *Ningalenne Communistakki*]¹². The major progressive transformation these plays brought about to the cultural scenario was that EMS argues

¹²Both of these plays are written by communist activists themselves and explicitly engaging with the emerging communist movement and its impact over various social groups. The term ‘*paattabaakki*’ means rent arrears and it is written by K. Damodaran, one of the founding leaders of communist party in Kerala. The phrase ‘*ningalenne communistakki*’ can be translated to mean ‘you all made me communist’ and is written by Thoppil Bhasi which later became the cultural symbol par excellence of communist movement in Malayalam.

they set their stories against the backdrop of the changing social classes of Kerala and their inter-relations. They described how these class relations influence personal relations between individuals and vice versa. They also picture the contradictions in the emerging production relations and reflect the mass movement in its real spirit. This opinion, though raised in a different period, falls neatly within the current discussion.

To briefly recapture this discussion it could be said that prose form of literature was seen more appropriate to produce *jeeval sahyam* compared to poetry and prose-dramas in comparison to all other genres. Even when verses were to be written they ought not to be in the lyrical tradition or in the *sandeha kavyam* style as it has the limitation of confining to the problems of the individual. Instead of using complex Sanskrit metres to construct poetry the progressive writer, according to Kesari, was to adopt Dravidian metres as much as possible and the poems were preferably to be composed along the lines of folk tunes/indigenous ballad rhymes so that people could easily identify with and sing them in a group. Now we will deal with the issue of technique in the production of progressive literature.

➤ Questions of 'Technique' and 'Spirit' in Jeeval Sahityam

Some of the prominent traditional literary canons in Malayalam are briefly introduced in an earlier section in the chapter. For the advocates of *jeeval sahyam* it was crucial to distinguish these works from the earlier works belonging to the traditional canon. They tried to demarcate *jeeval sahyam* as different from, if not opposed to, ordinary/traditional literature. The difference between progressive literature and orthodox literature is not about technical aesthetic parameters but the realization of the social nature and the message of progress contained in aesthetic practices. Progressive literature should inspire progressive forces and reflect the spirit of progress.

Here, it would be interesting to note the nuanced classification of the various 'movements' in literature (*Sahitya Prasthanangal*) and arts by Kesari. Literary movements, according to Kesari denote the revolutionary transformations in the field of literature. He argued that the changes that are accompanied by the changes in the

‘expression’ (*bhaavam*) constitute the major movements and the changes in other factors like ‘subject and materials’, ‘medium’, ‘technique’ and ‘form’ constitute sub-movements. Here we will see the complex classification of the major movements in the field of Modern Malayalam literature as theorized by Kesari arranged in a table.

| Malayalam Terms by Kesari and Their Translations | General Referents in Other Contexts | Characteristics | Writers Belonging to Them | Works by These Writers |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| <i>Thevar Vaazhthi</i> (God-Praising) | Bhakti Movement | Showing infinite love and devotion to the deity of choice | Thunjath Ezhuthachan, Cherussery Namboodiri | <i>Adhyatma Ramayanam, Krishnagatha</i> |
| <i>Thevar Veezhthi</i> (God-Rejecting) | Secularizing Movement | Criticizing the dominant belief system as superstition by dark humor | Kunchan Nambiar | Various Thullal songs he composed like <i>Kalyana Saugandhikam</i> |
| <i>Manam Nokki</i> (Mind-Looking) | Romantic Movement | Individualistic and optimistic in universal humanity | Kumaran Asan, Vallathol Narayanamenon | <i>Karuna, Nalini, Magdalana Mariyam</i> |
| <i>Jathi Kolli</i> (Caste-Killer) | Anti-Caste Movement | Opposing the caste-based discrimination as against the universal human spirit | Kumaran Asan | <i>Duravastha, Chandala Bhikshuki</i> |
| <i>Parajaya Prasthanam</i> (Defeatist Movement) | Realist Movement | Universal in spirit but pessimistic about the realities | Changampuzha Krishnapilla, Edappally Raghavanpilla | <i>Ramanan, Bashpanjali, Maninaadam</i> |
| <i>Pinnil Nokki</i> (Backward-Looking) | Historical Novel Movement | Glorifying the past and living in its legacy | C. V. Raman Pilla | <i>Martandavarma Dharmaraja</i> |
| <i>Chuttum Nokki</i> (Circumstance-Looking) | Social-Oriented Novel Movement | Focus on transitions in social relations | O. Chandu Menon | <i>Indulekha, Sarada</i> |

| | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|--|--|---|
| <i>Ezha Nokki</i> (Poor- Looking) | Progressive Movement | Focus on the class struggle in human life and optimistic about the future | Kedamangala m Pappukkutty, Thakazhi Sivasankarapilla | <i>Kadathuvanchi</i> , <i>Randidangazhi</i> |
|---|-------------------------|--|--|---|

Literary movements can be called so, only when they emerge as a challenge to the hitherto existing canons in a progressive direction so as to provide joy and enjoyment to the contemporary society. Hence, the nature of the present progressive movement could be assessed thoroughly when one took into account all these previous movements and their particular progressiveness in relation to their contexts. Thus, Kesari argues for a historicization of the notion of progress as well as various aspects of literature such as techniques and orientations. Hence, Kesari believed that the techniques of writing literature did not determine the nature of the work as all techniques had been put to different uses by various writers. *Jeeval sahityam* could adopt naturalist, realist or expressionist techniques. But Kesari advocates the use of realist technique as it could enable one to write about the subtle but significant differences between distinct individual characters. The most important factor is the spirit of the writing i.e. the core of progress around which the rest of the factors to be aligned. (Balakrishnapilla 1984: 394)

EMS also attempted to clarify certain stereotypical confusions then common-place, about the aesthetic aspects of *jeeval sahityam*. *Jeeval sahityam* was at this point being held responsible for adopting rough and ugly modes of writing where it compromised with the beauty of literature for incorporating the 'harsh realities of harsh life'. EMS argues that there is no unalterable relation between the harshness of the themes of *jeeval sahityam* and the roughness of its form. In all kinds of literary productions, there could be great artistic and aesthetic appeal and the presence of this factor cannot be the moot point of departure for *jeeval sahityam* from other types of literature. "It's not the harsh manner [of writing]; the inspiring message of progress is the spirit of *jeeval sahityam*". (Namboodiripad 1974: 23)

➤ **Content of Jeeval Sahityam: Writing and Social Progress**

One important characteristic is that in *jeeval sahyam*, the writer was expected to focus much more on the specific concrete human being rather than on certain ideal or given generic types like those of man, woman, labourer etc. When represented, the concrete human beings will have to bear the sensibility of a mixed characterization, with good and evil embodied in different proportions. This would reduce the risk of making absolute forces of history out of individual men and women, incidentally which Marx criticized in Lassalle's play. However, in terms of the subject of literature, *jeeval sahyam* was committed to talk about those who hitherto remained outside the aesthetic domain. There was a clearly spelt out class dimension in its approach. Thus, Kesari argued wrote both Classical and contemporary Romantic literature focus more or less exclusively on the adulation of the capitalist class¹³ and depiction of their life. Whereas, *jeeval sahyam* emphasis upon the portrayal of the biography of working class. (Balakrishnapilla 1984: 313)

The social relations between individuals themselves, between individuals and groups and between individual and society are the major themes which *jeeval sahyam* needed to address.¹⁴ The peculiar kind of inequalities that prevailed between different groups or classes thus became the important focal points for it. Even though Kesari observed that the understanding of class in the Malayalam context could not be purely economic in nature, it was economic issues that remained most crucial *ultimately*. When religious and communal issues assumed the centre stage, it was seen as the duty of *jeeval sahyam* to eradicate these obstacles and unite the people to fight for them.

¹³ The term used commonly in Malayalam for capitalist is '*muthalali*' which in fact literally means asset-owner, as the term '*muthal*' means not capital as such but any asset one posses. Hence capitalism becomes '*muthalalitham*' and so on. Since the term used for capital is '*mooladhanam*', the more accurate translation for capitalist would be *mooladhanam-udama* or the owner of capital. This kind of a translation what J Devika calls 'grounded' made possible that "all sorts of property owners to be bundled together into that category so that anti-capitalist indignation could potentially also be unleashed upon the small entrepreneurs, being a de facto employer. This was strategically advantageous in the context of the left activism in Kerala of those times". (Devika 2006: 7)

¹⁴ Kesari deploys the term '*samudayam*' to denote society even though today that term is used to denote community and '*samooham*' is the term to refer to society. One must assume that in the time when he is writing community did not have the specific and restrictive connotations in terms of a natural given or formed out of sheer coincidence, based on some particular identity that is part of the larger society (which has a more secular signification) along with other such communities. He must have used them in an interchangeable manner.

Kesari argued that the two major streams in most existing literature displayed “either a selfish sense of complacency with the status-quo or a disappointed sense of complete defeat”. (Balakrishnapilla 1984: 324-5) Neither of these, according to Kesari, could be the proper idea underlying progressive literature. The strong feeling of frustration vis-à-vis the unequal, unjust social order should be conjoined with the determination to fight back. However, in terms of techniques and skills of writing one needed a thorough understanding of the works of ‘art for art’s sake’ proponents. Thus, an aesthetically uncompromising style and knowledge of technique could be combined with the irresistible urge for radical social transformation.

➤ **Writing without ‘Author’ity: Reconfiguring the Writer-Function**

Another significant aspect of the discussion about *jeeval sahyam* was the figure of the progressive writer as different from the individual author of the earlier period. Kesari argued that it was illogical to conceive of artistic production being carried out away from the society as the same social surroundings had been represented as either status-quoist or progressive by different great writers. Both kinds of works might be aesthetically appealing though the former would ‘encourage stagnation’ whereas the latter ‘progress’. (Balakrishnapilla 1984: 309)

In a related mode of reasoning, EMS argued that no writer can escape the task of representing his social surroundings and he can only choose to represent this or that aspect depending upon his ideological inclinations. So a progressive writer must be acutely conscious of the social determination on his work and use it for the propagation of progressive ideals of equality, justice, democracy and independence. (Namboodiripad 1974: 21-2)

It is argued by some as if these new writers [*jeeval writers*] are against any aesthetic pursuit through art as against the ‘art for art’ people who understand aesthetic philosophy and live it. *Jeeval* writers are not saying that these writers [those arguing for pure art] are meditating upon pure art away from the circumstances of life. They are in fact saying that these writers, by claiming to create art for art, end up reflecting and reinforcing the orthodox and regressive structures. Neutrality, like in politics, is the most deceiving thing in art also. (Namboodiripad 1974: 22)

He further said that the progressive writer is different from the earlier authors 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 cannot pretend to be neutral about the unequal and exploitative social relations unlike the traditional writers who considered them to be isolated individuals creating something metaphysical.

Kesari dealt with the 'figure of the author' by dissociating it from the deserving admiration and awe of the reader who stood at a distance. 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 sahityam*, 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. (Balakrishnapilla 1984: 313, 326 emphasis added)¹⁵

¹⁵ This argument reminds one of the 'peeling away' of aura in Walter Benjamin's essay where he talks of the 'author as producer' of works of art that are now 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'. (Benjamin 1934). 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 is an academic method of trying to fit literary relations undialectically into compartments". The technique of 'New Objectivity' enables the spectator/reader to begin to produce such works of art and to use this technique for the production i.e. 'making co-workers' out of consumers. Hence it coincides with the political tendency of the writer. He explains this technique that needs to be explored by the progressive writer to strengthen the struggle towards socialism with his discussion of Brecht's Epic theatre.

Here the individual creative potential of the author, which is fetishized so much in the bourgeois aesthetic discourse is undone and a material process of production that involves material means of production such as capital and labour and its anticipation of a market where it would be 'valued' and exchanged is unfolded. But at the same time the potential of this argument towards an anti-humanist case is not extended in Kesari to the point where the author ceases to exist as the sole authority behind her work. As a result, in similar debates in the continental scholarship, the work came to be seen as heteroglotic.

With Kesari the author needs to come closer to 'ordinary reality' and engage with it and hence become more human. There takes place another process of standardization of human nature and the figure of the human subject is consolidated once again and founded upon a more 'real' basis of 'commonness'. Here the reader/common man still remains out of the process of literary production w can at best be the real object and/or subject of this process and have to wait patiently to get encouraged by these catalytic

EMS also talked about writing as part of the larger production process that undergoes changes according to the change of mode of production. 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. Then what one needed to enquire further was the nature of the contradictory forces involved in this emergence of human creativity and the process of the synthesis that gave rise to the new epoch and its peculiar forms of production. EMS translates the language of dialectics to the intelligibility of his audience i.e. the newly emerging literate classes, completely unfamiliar with this schemes of knowing.

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. 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*.¹⁶

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 one that could be easily overcome. 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’ as Kesari named it. Thus the progressives should overcome

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.

¹⁶ It is a much deeper problem in the Marxist philosophical discourse and we will try and explore this question further later in the work when we will specifically engage with the categories of labour, labourer and laboring class as represented in the creative literary pieces in Malayalam progressive literature of the mid twentieth century.

these dilemmas by identifying with the poor and the ordinary masses. 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 laboring activity. However, the “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. This was seen as a necessary step towards the building of a revolutionary consciousness among the working class and in turn creating a resistant cultural hegemony by the working class as against the dominant mode.

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 materialize 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 ‘outside’ milieu need to be traced with utmost sensitivity in different cases, rather than approaching it with some already established principles.

➤ **The Writers’ Co-operative and Library Movement**

There is an interesting side-story to be mentioned here while talking about the manner in which the communist movement and the progressive literature movement approached the issue of writing as laboring. On the one hand, the labour of literature is acknowledged and theorized by them and the unique discussion is presented above. But the progressive literature movement also took up the issue of a writer being a labourer, hence deserving a certain wages in the form of royalty. This was the period of the extensive expansion of the co-operative sector all over the state of Kerala in almost all kinds of manufacturing or production industries and financial spheres. Yet the establishment of *Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham* No. 2458 (henceforth

SPSS) in 1945 marked the first of its kind of initiatives in Asia.¹⁷ This society was formed and registered under the Co-operative Societies Act with the avowed objective of providing fair and reasonable returns to the writers of literary works. All factors were unfavorable to the initiative of *SPSS* in that period in Malayalam in terms of the printing, publishing and marketing of the books by the writers themselves. Very few considered writing as an occupation that can fetch income. Most of the writers till then had to publish their works under the private publishers who exploited these writers to no end. The publishing house decided the rate of royalty and all other conditions involved in publishing. The initial investment of the enterprise was 120 rupees collected by twelve 'literary workers' of that period by putting in 10 rupees each. These founding group included M. P. Paul and P. Kesava Dev along with other eminent figures in the field.¹⁸

The first book published by the Society was *Takazhiyude Kathakal* [Takazhi's Stories] written by Takazhi Sivasankara Pilla on 15th December, 1945. The publishers paid close attention to not just the content of the book. The quality of its form, its layout and other technical aspects were also perfect in an unprecedented manner in Malayalam literature. From then onwards for more than a few decades *SPSS* was the sole publisher of all sorts of quality literature in Malayalam until some private players began to establish their business.

This was also the period in which the *Granthashala Prasthanam* (The Library Movement) was emerging and spreading in all parts of the state. These two movements worked complementarily with each other and helped each other's growth. Both these movements gained strength and inspiration from the communist movement and in turn nourished the intellectual development and spread of the latter, especially at the grass-root levels across the villages in Kerala. Dilip Menon mentions that the establishment of redoing rooms in villages and towns were done in a caste-based manner i.e. every caste association built reading rooms associated with their temples

¹⁷ The literal translation of the phrase means the Literary Workers' Co-operative Society or the Literary Activists' Co-operative Society).

¹⁸ Other ten members were P Sreedharan Pilla, Pandit Narayana Dev, K N Neelakanda Pilla, N S Krishna Pilla, K N Gopalan Nair, P Damodaran Pilla, K P Sivanandan Nair, D C Kizhakkemuri, N C Issac and M N Govindan Nair. Most of them were important figures in the progressive literature movement and writers of some sort.

‘to allow their caste fellows to access to both knowledge and god’. By 1932, there were fifty reading rooms in Malabar alone, with 6,635 members.

The *Granthashala Prasthanam* spearheaded not only the establishment of small and free libraries and reading rooms in every village but also to enhance the sphere of literacy in Kerala. So the phenomenal increase in literacy, the expansion of the library networks and the publication of a wide range of works in a much less expensive manner contributed to the democratization of the availability of the fruits of the counter-cultural awakening that was led by the communist movement in the 1940s and 1950s in Kerala. In 1949, SPCS began its distribution network called the National Book Stall (NBS) in almost all district head quarters of the state.¹⁹

The Second Moment of Debate: Rupture from Within

Here we will look at the brief period of 1947-1949 closely when the polarization sharpened amidst the two camps of writers in the *Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana*. In the Thrissur Conference in 1947, Joseph Mundassery and his colleagues presented a new concern in terms of the formal qualities of progressive literary works which later came to be called as the *Roopabhadrata Vadam* (approximately translated as Compact Formalism). Some of the communist party activists and sympathizers and their works were indirectly described as lacking in formal literary quality and consistency. M. P. Paul, G. Sankarakurup, Kedamangalam Pappukkutty (a poet who received much acclaim from Kesari), Ponkunnam Varkey (short story writer) and N.V. Krishna Warriar (poet) came to support this line of argument. They contended

¹⁹ The functioning of the *SPSS* was effectively transparent whereby the audits were submitted bi-annually and royalties distributed accordingly. In the initial years, the office of the *SPSS* functioned in rented premises and the matters were printed in other private presses. In the 1961 they acquired a plot of land, buildings and other machineries and set up its own printing press. Apart from the publication of books and the management of its distribution, marketing and distribution of royalties, the *SPSS* also undertook some academic initiatives like organizing conferences, symposia, publish literary periodicals etc. It had also set up some awards for writers. The Society was also involved in providing certain social security measures to the writers and their families as and when required.

However, like most of the public sector and co-operative initiatives, the *SPSS* also faced many setbacks during the decades of 1980s and especially 1990s and 2000s. Many factors including the lack of efficient and visionary leadership, negligence from the government, decline in the quality of their published works and ineffective financial management led to the dwindling of its position as the most important publisher in the Malayalam literary scene. However, there are some initiatives being taken now as part of the larger project of rescuing the co-operative sector from ruin. This enterprise of the *SPSS* occupies a unique position among the initiatives by the progressive literature movement and reflects its understanding of the writer as a labourer who needed to be remunerated justly.

that some writers were trying to “blow politics into literature”. This was evidently targeted against the communist party writers and subtly meant that they were trying to exaggerate the political aspect of every other human activity in literature and hence using literature as part of the party’s effort to capture political power whereas the writer needs to focus only on the process of internal transformation at the level of the individual.

EMS responded to this accusation with a neatly arranged picture of the world politics as divided into two sets of opposing forces and argued that the progressive association would have to take positions vis-à-vis these conflicts in favour of the progressive forces, against the reactionary ones. It has to be noted that Kesari is no longer present in the public discourse in the second moment. But, Joseph Mundassery and M. P. Paul who were intellectual followers of Kesari were actively involved in the PSS since 1944 when the JSS was transformed into the PSS.

Here we will closely read a set of articles written by EMS and M. P. Paul²⁰ constructing a series of arguments on the questions of politics, ethics and aesthetics as this debate vividly captures the crux of the overall debate of the moment. However, there are others like M. S. Devadas and Joseph Mundassery writing various articles, either of a general nature dealing with similar questions or those dealing with the criticisms of particular literary works. This section is further divided into four sub sections that deal with questions of creative freedom and communist party, the role of politics in literature, democracy and planning in literature and moral progress and socialist realism.

➤ Creative Freedom and the Communist Party

²⁰ M. P. Paul’s (1904-1952) career as a teacher, scholar and literary critic is marked by a number of unique practical interventions he undertook, going against the grain of his circumstances. One of his life-long efforts had been to thoroughly criticize the Catholic Church in Kerala and its religious orthodoxy and when he died in 1952, the clergy refused to bury his body in the Church cemetery. At a time when many writers were struggling to get adequate remuneration for their published works, he along with some others initiated the establishment of the Writers’ Co-operative Society (*Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham*) in 1945, and was its first president. Paul also brought out a weekly *Navakeralam* and a monthly *Cherupushpam* and also wrote many books on literary criticism and on individual writers and works in Malayalam. Paul was actively part of the progressive literary movement from mid 1940s onwards and held important organizational positions in the Progressive Literary Association.

It is well known that the question regarding the tussle between the communist party and the artist's freedom for creative expression was central to these debates. Characteristically, the answer EMS gave to the question of whether he agreed with the argument that one needs individual freedom to create artistic literature and this cannot be done in accordance with suggestions provided by the communist party, can be seen to epitomize his interest in channelizing the debates into more complex layers as opposed to searching for an easy way out. Also, it is interesting how 'literature' is becoming widened and convergent with science and scholarship as such. By collapsing the divide between art and science he answered that any kind of activity including all genres of writing need complete individual freedom.

E.M.S. argued 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. For a progressive literature movement to be effective and transformatory, it has to include every form of writing ranging from the scientific to journalistic, EMS argued. In EMS' own words:

If these texts of academic nature could be seen as literature, then other academic writings including political ones also needed to be included. 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. When a writer engaged with and influenced the ideological growth of the people there ought to emerge a new kind of artistic literature. Here, EMS reminded his fellow-PSS members of the earlier moment of debate where the so-called '*pandits*' did not consider the communist thinkers and journalists as literary figures. But, now they have created a place of their own in the field of Malayalam literature. He argued that it was meaningless to say "all the progressive writers should write only when they get 'certification from the '*sahitya shiromanis*' or professors based on the rules formulated by the old-fashioned writers". The recent *Roopabhadrata Vadam*, EMS argued, was only a reformulation of the old slogan 'art for art's sake' whereupon

these scholars tried to blunt the sharp edges of progressive literature by bringing in the compactness and solidity of the form as the central concern for literature.

There was indeed a simple and 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 organization, the communist party needed more and 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 Takazhi and Dev that limited the membership of the *PSS* to creative writers. The resolution was passed by the majority of a single vote.

EMS argued that the concern of the advocates of *Roopabhadra Vadam* was neither about improving the aesthetic qualities of the writings nor about intensifying the artistic spirit in the progressive literature. The underlying assumption of this approach was the apparent dichotomy between content of literature and literature itself. EMS asserted that the criticism levelled against the progressive writers that they compromise with the formal solidity of literature by refusing to confine themselves to the traditional techniques is basically flawed. Since the thematic and problematic of literature have been changing drastically along with the configuration of social forces that gave them a context, it is not possible to conceptualize a set of formal and normative aesthetic principles about the stability of the form of literature that would remain eternal.

Since all these factors of literary production are constantly informing each other's nature and function, changes in every other aspect ought to have serious ramifications for form as well. For instance, the form of poetry had undergone massive changes in a few decades from *chambus*, *aattakkathas* and single *shlokas* to modern Malayalam poetry. These changes also mirrored the social revolution that Kerala society had experienced. Like all aspects of life, aesthetics also changes with societal changes. So if the content has to change in the progressive literature, so should the form. At different levels of human existence, there are different laws and norms. So the consciousness emerging out of these levels vary in their form and effect. This has to

be studied in detail and to be seen as influencing the artistic and literary consciousnesses.

➤ **Politics in Literature: Activist and Writer as Synonyms**

Another point of contention at this moment was regarding the appropriate and correct way of assessing the impact of the recent political and social events on the future course of the literature movement. EMS and other communists in the *PSS* prepared a resolution draft regarding the changes that need to be brought about in the movement vis-à-vis the changes happening all around, specially the newly-gained independence. When the report was tabled the non-party section argued that the report was focused disproportionately on political oppression and the means to resist it compared to other great social changes like independence and the resolution was defeated by them. While EMS emphasized the need to fight imperialist forces his opponents found it objectionable as they thought it an attempt to unilaterally impose the communist party program on the organization.

EMS argued that there was no need for anyone to exaggerate the importance of politics in the current context as all these fights were happening right before our eyes. EMS provocatively added: “The coward can evade it; the traitor can help the oppressive forces in the disguise of being neutral. But anyone with open eyes and realistic mind cannot say that these are exaggerated facts”. (Nambudiripad 1974: 49-50) It is striking to see how EMS comes to compare the figure of the writer with an analogous figure of the great political activist. 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 way in which he configured his works and their aesthetics. He stated:

[T]here is in fact a big similarity between a great artist and a great political activist: both work due to internal inspiration; both ought to have their own personalities. 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 ideal that fills her heart. To make art great and political activity effective public

service, both (the artist and activist) need utmost individual freedom...The communist party is the party of such political activists who possess full-fledged personalities. (Namboodiripad 1974: 31)

P. Kesava Dev on the other hand argued 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.

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 depoliticization of literature and writing and jumping into some mysterious and abstract theme called 'life'.

EMS indicated that the real task of the writer was to understand the intricate relations between all these aspects of human life and portray it in the most inspiring manner possible. Hence it cannot be said that the progressive writer had a wider and more holistic lens than the progressive political activist. In fact both should portray the same content within the same perspective and with the same aim in mind, merely the form being different. He further said that at times these two forms could overlap 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 Keshavadev.²¹

²¹ 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

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 the ordinary masses. 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 which was more specific and concrete. The communist agenda had to include the theory of class struggle and in the practical and theoretical fight to destroy the ist system one has to side with the most revolutionary class among the oppressed the proletariat. A communist was expected to work in accordance with the advises and suggestions from the proletariat thinkers and leaders like Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and accept the leadership of the Soviet rule as built by Lenin and Stalin and the international communist movement. Above all, a communist was supposed to work under the discipline of the party unit that has both the right and duty to criticize and control one’s life and actions. However, 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.

He later argued that in the earlier debate communists’ arguments 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 emphasized upon the aesthetic beauty as something that lies above and independent from the political-economic struggles of the working class. In 1972, he reviews their 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.

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.

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 ideological reality in which the writer lived that made him feel so independent of the class antagonisms. The apparent subjective pleasure in writing itself was the product of this ideological world around him.

Even in the later re-articulation of EMS, the arguments did not change substantively. They were in fact spoken with much more sophistication and subtlety. The 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. (Nambudiripad 1974: 310-1) But on the other hand in order to demystify creativity and materialize 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 (dealing with ideas) on the other.

Rancière argues that when we think of the relationship between literature and politics what we mean to do is looking at the reciprocal process between ‘politics as a definite way of doing and literature as a definite practice of writing’. Drawing upon the Marxist discourse at one level, Rancière thought of both these activities as human practices taking place in a concrete social context. However, Rancière also marks a departure from most existing Marxist scholarship on literature by placing this relationship within a more specific sense of the ‘social’ where the ultimate determinant could not be something external to these spheres. When he says ‘the politics of the literature [thus] means that literature as literature is involved in this partition’ of the sensible that forms the shared discourse, he traces the connection between these two practical activities in their mutual interplay not as the interaction between the social agents involved in these activities. Rather, the political task that literature does i.e. disrupting/stabilizing the existing partition of the sensible is the particular coming together of those words, sentences and other parts of the literary text by their sheer presence in a particular configuration.

Here he restructures the debate between art for art's sake and art for political commitment by elaborating upon why it is undesirable if not impossible to look at the commitment of the literature outside of it. By discussing the two contradictory readings of nineteenth century French novelist Gustav Flaubert, one as the epitome of 'bourgeois anti-democratic strategy' and the other as 'the symptom democracy' in its pejorative sense as used by the aristocratic writers of his own time, Rancière explicates the immanent politics that a literary text is able to unfold in different time and space. The politics of the art can be understood or comprehended only by looking at the specific ways in which it interweaves a 'system of meanings and a system of visibility of things' in any particular historical conjuncture. Then the art for art vs. art for society debate regarding progressive literary production gets shifted to a whole new ground, that of understanding literature as a particular way of doing things that moulds and re-moulds the political configurations of the visible and the sayable, 'enabling words with the power of framing a common world'.

➤ **Democratization of Reader-Writer Relation: Planning Literature**

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 masses 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.

In response, when the question of "artistic freedom being choked under the apparently democratic platforms of discussion and decision-making where even ordinary people devoid of any writerly-aptitude would be able to influence one's literary pursuit on a majority-opinion basis" was raised, EMS reinforced his claim, especially about the communist writer. If he 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 clamors 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. Indeed, such an exercise could create 'an ideal forum' where one can think of

producing a collective work of art by engaging in collective labour.²² This would help to overcome the bourgeois sphere of fetishized and mystified ‘author-function’.

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: 37emphasis 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 the substantial sense of the term. However, he restricts his talk to a superficial 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. The more fundamental question lies at the radical restructuring of content, form and their mutual involvement along with a reviewing of the figure of author and her relation to the reader (for instance the subject/object dichotomy) whereby a truly democratic dialogue will be possible both within and without the text.

EMS’ approach – a collectivization of literature, one might say, – 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. Even in literature we can see both these tendencies expressed by different writers. For instance, Venmani Namboodiri²³

²² It should be noted that, by 1944, the term *jeeval sahityam* had been supplanted by *purogamana sahityam* and the association was restructured as *Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana*.

²³ *Venmani Kavikal* (Venmani poets) is a name given to a father and son, both poets, who could be loosely categorized as belonging to Neo-classical era of Malayalam poetry which is markedly different

produced aesthetically solid works that are comparable to that of Kumaran Asan in terms of artistic techniques. But Venmani's poems were regressive and reactionary in that they gave solace to the decaying feudal order whereas Asan wrote poems that helped Kerala to step into modernity leaving feudalism behind. Understood in this way, according to EMS, the greatness is dependent on the correct analysis of concrete material situation and a scientific world view. Hence, the genius of bourgeois intellectual 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, 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. Since their pen was not a gift from reactionary forces there was no need for giving up hope. 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 critique has to *translate* his aesthetic senses onto another object of art. (As quoted in Natarajan 2004: 55 emphasis added)

EMS did not extol the so-called Stalinist 'iron-discipline' as the appropriate and inevitable means to achieve efficiency or productivity within the strictures of the Party. Like most of his writings, even here he displayed subtle abilities in differentiating between different arguments and logics on the basis of assessing their

from both the Classic and later Progressive eras. Here E.M.S talks about the son, Venmani Mahan Namboodiri (1844-1893) whose style of writing was closer to the Classicists but themes were less grand like describing places and lower caste women of Nair and other communities in an eroticized manner. He wrote mainly in Sanskrit using Sanskrit metres but for dance forms and dance-dramas used simple Malayalam language as well as Dravidian metres. Most of the critics of the progressive era including E.M.S. have confined these writings as the epitome of feudal decadence, moral deterioration and decay. But one feels that this closure and rejection of an entire range of poetry, written during a crucial period of social transformation (the period of missionary and early reform movements), need to be studied with more care and fineness. Especially in the *namboodiri* community, reform initiatives were already taking place regarding women's education, widow re-marriage, child marriage etc.

implications. He defined and substantiated party discipline in a very different way when asked about the relation between such discipline and the creative freedom of the artist. EMS asserted:

It is absolutely evident that there is nothing the Party has to promise its cadre other than insecurity, pain and torture from the state and other opponents. Even if somebody violates the discipline there is nothing that the Party could do effectively against the person other than expelling that person. Still, if people are with the party, under their own discipline (self-discipline) then it is because they consider it as the only way for a better future where nobody will be exploited and oppressed... The discipline of the communist party is the grand total of the individual freedoms of all its activists. (Namboodiripad 1974: 32-7)

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.

[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 concept of discipline was problematized 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. "When you talk about '*roopabhadrata*' it is a particular disciplining of your activity of writing in terms of artistic creation. If one can write under the rules of ancient Sanskrit aesthetic norms as well as Western literary genres and their rules, then what kind of abstract freedom of artist that they argue for?" (Namboodiripad 1974: 55-6) 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. He went on to say that in the case of the '*roopabhadrata*' proponents this illusion was loathsome as it was cowardice and regressive mentality behind it. If these writers 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. Their refusal to acknowledge the fact that it is not communist party that creates restrictions in the creative endeavors of artists, but the undemocratic government makes it clear that they are cowards and contented with the anti-democratic rule, he added.

There are many important issues being discussed here in a related fashion. Let us first of all try and place them vividly as to understand these issues in their theoretical relevance. On the one hand, the issues raised in this article was the outcome of a heated polemic that took place in the tumultuous *Purogamana Sahitya Sammelanam* (Progressive Literary Conference) held at Thrissur in 1947, where the writer-members of the movement got polarized into two antagonistic blocs on questions about the nature and scope of literature and the function of writer. In this essay as we discussed already EMS revisited some of the issues that were discussed in the *JSS* in the late 1930s and early 1940s. It would seem that India's independence marked certain important shifts in the communist movement and EMS' position. The figure of the individual was now being given much more sensitive attention – a more differentiated and nuanced treatment – rather than the earlier one of 'demystifying the great artist'.

We can see here the curious manner in which the question of democratizing the activities of writing and reading is skillfully connected to the disciplining the communist party could have on these writers. Moreover, writing as a collective activity was imagined by EMS in a manner where the party leaders will 'represent' the people's opinions. It is shown that the discipline that is expected of a communist writer was an integral part of the mechanism to connect this writer with the people in a more substantial sense.

EMS reasoned that there was no need for any writer to join any political party in order to write politically charged material. Moreover, even if a writer was a member of any

party he would still possess all the freedom to express himself. He claimed that even in the communist party, which had the strictest disciplinary rules no one dictated the terms and conditions for a writer to write nor censored his works. Nevertheless, the party tries to make their members aware of the current political scene and to create a comradeship between members belonging to all sections.

In another essay written later in 1956, 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 a 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 emphasis on 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)

EMS' attempt to talk about a new way of writing literature, which is collective and produced through discussions, are to be read along with some other political impulses of the period. As we know the CPI had undergone drastic ideological diversions and shifts in leadership in the decade of 1940s. The date of his essay converges with the brief radical militant phase of the CPI under the leadership of B. T. Ranadive and C. R. Rao. 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, the party was also trying to regiment the various levels of cadre in an unprecedented fashion. Newer and more effective modes of disciplining were needed in order to implement the organized activities of the party in such a perilous situation. 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 people’ legitimize 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.

➤ **Literature and Moral Progress: The Question of (Socialist) Realism**

The question of communist culture as progressive culture and its differentiation from the bourgeois culture was a complex one, indeed. This becomes especially true for a society that is so peculiarly configured at that juncture with the traditional systems of marriage and family was 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. Devadas²⁴ 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 Takazhi, Dev, Varkey and Basheer were in fact degraded literature (*adhama sahityam*).

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 realist approach 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.

²⁴ M. S. Devadas (1912-1987) was the first editor of the CPI organ in Malayalam, *Deshabhimani* when it was established as a weekly. He was actively involved in the discussions and study classes that culminated in the transformation of the Congress Socialist Party into the CPI in 1939. He was mainly involved in ‘the ideological mobilization of the masses’, as EMS wrote, through translating and publishing CPSU publications on Marxism and Soviet politics extensively and conducting study classes for the cadre throughout Kerala. He was energetically involved in the debates in the progressive movement and published several pieces of criticisms about the dominant writers of the time. He has published a number of books and articles on progressive literature, Marxist philosophy, international communist movement etc.

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 hard to envision the bourgeois romantic love, monogamous conjugality and patrilineal nuclear family as the ideals of the progressive society as against the signs of decadence 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. Their strong belief in the one-dimensional and inevitably progressive trajectory of history 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, (which will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter).

However, M. P. Paul came up against this narrow understanding of literature that can merely 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 nature of art was *aanandadayakatvam* (the ability to deliver joy) and it had no other purpose or function. 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 with 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. Hence, it seemed to Paul that artistic life was an integral part of human existence.

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.

The discussion of the communist criticism of the literature of 'bourgeois decadence' is an advocacy for 'socialist realism' in literature as against 'bourgeois realism of the non-communist progressives like Changampuzha Krishnapilla and the others discussed above. Changampuzha was the most popular poet Malayalam has ever produced and his poems embody the spirit of the 'melancholic present and dark future'.

For EMS Changampuzha was thoroughly critiqued by the traditional critics for his despondent approach and disbelief in traditional social setup. However within a decade after his death the critics flooded the literary scene with praises for him. EMS argued that this change in the appreciation pattern was a result of the drastic social and politico-economic changes that shook Kerala society in the decade of 1930s. His poems symbolized the spirit of decadence of the bourgeois society after a brief period of its victory and prosperity. Here EMS traced the parallel between Changampuzha and the European poets of 'decadence' as mentioned by Kesari already. EMS argued that since the kind of complex social changes that occurred in Europe through a century and a half had taken place in Kerala within a decade as a result of the colonial legacy. The growth and decadence of capitalism took place side by side in the native context.

Hence, these poems belonged to that short phase of capitalist decadence before the moment of the upsurge of the working masses into the scene. They were fighting

against the unjust and exploitative system for which they need sheer hope and optimism. Thus, EMS concluded 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’.

Now let us come to the last section of this chapter preceding conclusion that talks about the most dominant mechanism that is employed by the communist critics, especially EMS in constructing a peculiar epistemological apparatus for the communist movement in the local context. J. Devika’s idea of the ‘grounded translation’ is at work throughout these moments as the major mode of translating Marxist idioms into Malayalam.

The Epistemology of Literature: Writing Dialectics in Malayalam

Through these discussions on the relation between politics and aesthetics in the context of Malayalam progressive literature, EMS develops a new epistemological framework for the modern Malayali readership (*‘Onnekaalkodi Malayalikal’* [twelve and a half million *Malayalis*] as he calls them). 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 comprised 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.

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. The idea is not to view progressive literature as emanating from the genius of great individual writers. Rather the effort is to establish the emergence of such literature as part of the realization of a larger progressive philosophy/world-view vis-à-vis the

politico-economic working alignments, at all levels, from the local to the international. Thus, 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.

EMS' description and analysis of the dialectical relation between global political context and the local one sought to forge and converge the larger understanding of progressive cultural activists and writers across the world during the difficult times of mid-twentieth century. The global context of 1940s was seen as sharply polarized between two warring forces: that of regress, exploitation, authoritarianism etc. and the other of progress, socialism, liberation etc. 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 *Jeeval Sahitya Prasthanam* 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.

At every level of social life, the conservative and progressive forces are at a tug of war. This has an impact on all paths of knowledge. Even in 'sciences' those have irrevocable laws, the content could be either progressive or backward-looking depending on the perspective of the writer. This is much clearer in cases of political science, economics and history... All these differences emanate from a world view (*prapancha tatwa jnanam*) that could either be progressive or backward looking. (Namboodiripad 1974: 22-3)

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 of 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 lays out the larger thematic within which the writer should develop the specific contours of the work of art.

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 extremely interesting here. 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.

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 the narrative industrial and technological development next to social progress and abundance 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 or rather the dominated 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.

This dilemma began to haunt the communists in the colonies as they could access more information about the world scenario. On the one hand, they urge people to stand against the forces of imperialism and in solidarity with those of national liberation like in China, Greece, Burma, and Indonesia. But as M. P. Paul correctly

pointed out EMS could not mention such similar movements of national liberation taking place against the imperial excesses of the Soviet Union. Then, imperialism and socialism even though belonging to two different camps in EMS' order, seemed to share a rather complicated relationship.

However, it is interesting to see how this simple narrative was used to translate the Hegelian dialectics and its Marxist reformulation to the local context of anti-colonial and anti-feudal resistance here, by EMS. This simplification is undertaken on the one hand to make the idea of dialectical and historical materialism pedagogically useful while dealing with the 'ordinary masses'. The dominant way of communist ideologues, of understanding the epistemological and the ideological transformation of the larger society has been in pedagogic terms and pedagogy invariably carries the risk of simplification with it. More importantly, on the other hand, it is also for EMS' own understanding of the relationship between the past, present and future, he charted out the current situation in such a manner. It is clear that the situation was much more complex. But the picture is very cleverly drawn and a new epistemology is introduced.

The '*Prapancha tatwa jnanam*' [universal philosophical knowledge or simply world view] introduced by EMS in this manner unfolds the materialist epistemology that he wants his readers to know and imbibe as the most important Marxist principle. Its major purpose is the structuring of the myriad things that were happening around the globe so as to relate one's struggle to the larger trajectory of progress. As a communist, he had to justify his inclusion and/or exclusion of certain issues by marking its relevance (or irrelevance) in the international map. On the other hand, he had to render his assessment intelligible to the people at large whom he wished to bring into the folds of his ideology. This new world-view had to involve the questions of the 'progressive' communist culture (and aesthetics) also for which the politicization of arts/literature in this manner was essential. Then, the real question for a communist writer/artist was to figure out how art/literature would engage this reality.

Conclusion

A reading of the history of literature alongside that of politics in Kerala reveals the interesting manner in which literature engaged politics. There is a radical transformation where one is rejecting any claim of literature being a product of some individual genius or talent that has to be seen above or beyond the social and political churning. As we can see, the most important aspect involved here is the attempt to demystify and materialize the work of literature and arts within the larger production process. This new understanding is what seeks to displace an older aesthetic philosophy.

EMS resets here the dichotomy between pure art and committed art in an interesting manner. When understood in its material character, there can be no question as to whether art should be for society/life or for its own sake. EMS does not leave it to a matter of choice that every artistic production should be for the society. The fact is that it is invariably so in one way or the other. The only choice left with the writer is to consciously intervene and make the work progressively charged to help the forward motion of the society. The writer must learn to identify the social nature of human existence and its contemporary crisis and align the activity of artistic production along with the process of social transformation. This is the first step towards what we can see as a strategic politicization of art/literature.

The efforts at democratizing literature by EMS, as we argued, were equally aimed at acquiring certain controlling over the actual process writing in the particular precarious situation of the communist party not only in Kerala but all over the country. Creating ideological hegemony through the interventions into the cultural realm was essential to the project of communist politics.

In this chapter we traced two major moments in the early phases of the progressive literature movement in Kerala; particularly the ways in which the communist and non-communist critics participated in re-drawing the political, epistemological and philosophical axes of Malayalam literature and aesthetics translating Marxist concepts and idioms into the local linguistic and ideological contexts. We argued that the epistemological terrain constructed by EMS and other communist ideologues through their interventions into the progressive literature debates was in fact the product of an

attempt at coming up with a creative/ grounded translation of the philosophy of dialectical materialism the way they understood it. EMS tried to produce a narrative that located the regional context in the larger 'world' with the help of a dialectical apparatus he 'invented' out of this discourse.

Now we will proceed to read a set of selected texts in the progressive canon so as to trace their engagements with the emerging modern in Kerala in the following chapter in the light of this discussion. Let us analyze how these writers in their actual practice dealt with the rapid social transformation they witnessed to and the implications these negotiations had for the production of the modern social of Kerala in the middle of the twentieth century.

Chapter Two

Progressive Aesthetics and the Age of Transition: Writing the Modern-Social in Malayalam

The desire to tell the truth is therefore only *one* condition for being an intellectual. The other is courage, the readiness to carry one rational inquiry to wherever it may lead, to undertake “ruthless criticism of everything that exists...” (Marx). An intellectual is thus in essence a *social critic*, a person whose concern is to identify, to analyze, and in this way to help overcome the obstacles barring the way to the attainment of a better, more humane and more rational social order. (Baran 1961: 17)

The new social consciousness has brought in a revolution to our art. But, the revolutionary consciousness in art need not be the social revolutionary consciousness always. If there is no enjoyment (*rasa*) of experience, beauty and strength in the work, even if one writes according to the theories of sages or Marx, pretending to be the guardians of either ancient culture or new progress, literature will not benefit out of it... It is only the *artistic revolutionary seed* that gives heartbeats and pulse to any work of art. (Sreedharamenon 1984: 733-4 emphasis added)

Introduction

One of the unique characteristics of the progressive literature movement in contrast to all earlier movements in Malayalam literature as discussed in the earlier chapter²⁵ was that it was a conscious and organized effort at imagining social transformation and helping it. *Jeewal sahityam* was about life in its entirety. It tried to deal with a number of issues ranging from the most intimate ones including love and sexuality to the more socio-historical ones like disintegration of the matrilineal joint family and emergence of modern institutions. Since the proclaimed aim of the movement was to aid social progress the movement had to engage in transforming the traditional idioms and existing linguistic order of Malayalam language. This in turn meant an engagement with the dominant themes in the existing canon so as to progressively redefine them.

²⁵ See the figure in page no 40.

The discussion in the first chapter about the debate in the progressive literature movement has already mapped the ideological terrain produced by the debate. A set of new yardsticks were built and new apparatuses were assembled that would re-configure the field of Malayalam writing. All the major themes in the traditional canon were revisited by the progressive writers in order to induce new meaning and fresh spirit to them. This re-configuration of the literary sphere in the light of their engagements with modernity is the central theme of this chapter. Following this in the third chapter we will discuss how these writers in many peculiar ways introduced the new trope of the labourer (and other associated ones) in the backdrop of their specifically built social modern.

In this chapter we will see for instance that almost all progressive writers discussed extensively about love and sexuality in their works by transforming the sense in which these were plotted in the traditional literature. On the one hand, they introduced diverse characters like the lower caste labourer or the street dwelling prostitute who never seemed to possess the quality to love or to be loved in the traditional literature. These characters were either completely absent from the field of literature or confined to insignificant corners of the text. On the other hand, love as a concept was re-structured by these writers to include many more dimensions or attributes than those dealt within the earlier modes of writing.

In other words, a poor and starving Pulaya labourer was seen as a lover in Thakazhi's *Randidangazhi* whose romantic, conjugal love with his Pulayi (the female counterpart of Pulaya) became worth describing in a novel for the first time. Moreover, the 'traditional lovers' (as seen in the early *sandeshas*) or the romantic lovers (as seen in the Romantic style) were also re-molded to fit the progressive notions of love as a concept.

Many other themes like morality, family relations, social status and hierarchy, friendship and freedom were similarly re-viewed and re-defined by Malayalam progressive writing in the middle decades of twentieth century. This chapter intends to lay out some of the significant engagements with such themes by progressive writers so as to figure out the detailed influence communist aesthetics exerted over the progressive imagination.

Some of the central questions in the chapter that runs across all these different themes are as follows: what were the specific mechanisms through which progressive writers

tried to transform the dominant themes in the traditional canon, how did the debate in the *PSS* (and other progressive initiatives in other parts of the country as well as at the international level) influenced their efforts, how did these writers engaged with the available concepts of communist aesthetics in carrying out this transformatory task and how did these writers mark that age of transition and different ideological orientations in their works.

As discussed in the earlier chapter the question of blocs becomes central to the debates of progressive literature movement at this juncture. E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the most significant presence in these debates, had identified as early as in 1938, two large poles of forces in the world scenario; fascism, imperialism, capitalism, landlordism vs. liberation, nationalism, democracy and socialism. He asserted that a writer is left with no option but to support and strengthen either of these camps through his writings even if one intends to remain neutral. Hence a progressive writer is the one who aligns with the latter set of forces as against the former ones. In this back drop, all writers and their works were analysed and bundled tighter into either of these blocs and the new writers were forced to proclaim their allegiance to the progressive camp. However, one is tempted to argue that this approach to literature and its apparent progressiveness managed to avoid a serious engagement with many writers and their works as against the uncritical applause received by some others.

Here we will look at some of the creative literary pieces written during the period under consideration i.e. from the late 1930s to the late 1950s by prominent writers of the era. The attempt is to choose a few pieces from each genre of creative literature including poetry, short story, novel and drama. The selection would be based on many things including the import (both appreciation and criticism) with which these works were read and discussed by the Malayali readership, (both the popular and the intellectual ones) at the time of their publication, the scope and radical potential with which the issue of labour is dealt in these works, the position of these works vis-à-vis the overall oeuvre of the respective writers, the ability of these pieces to comprehensively represent all the dominant methods of writing within the progressive movement etc.

The most outstanding prose writers of this phase include Thakazhi Sivasankara Pilla, P. Keshavadev, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, Ponkunnam Varkey, Lalitambika Antharjanam and Cherukad Govinda Pisharody. The most read and debated poets in the progressive period include K. P. G. Namboodiri, Kadamangalam Pappukkutty, Changampuzha Krishna Pilla, Edasseri Govindan Nair and Vailloppilli Sreedhara Menon. Due to the limited scope of this dissertation, we had to choose writers from the long list. Even when the writers are chosen, a few works of each of them had to be chosen with utmost care as to pick those ones that represent the oeuvre of the writer in the most comprehensive manner. For most of these writers the progressive period was the initial stage in their writing careers and hence the pieces chosen here are mostly from their early works. We would try to focus on the selected texts while referring to other works when needed. Let us begin with a discussion on the themes of love and desire as imagined in the progressive writing field in modern Malayalam literature.

Making Love Progressive: Various Efforts at Representing Desire

Here we will discuss a number of instances in various progressive literary works where the notion of love is imagined in different ways by rejecting the earlier modes of writing about the theme that seemed as the vestige of the feudal past.

First of all we will briefly discuss the pre-progressive literary scenario of the concept of love in Malayalam. Unlike in Tamil Nadu or North Indian regions, Bhakti Movement was not present in Kerala in a similarly influencing manner. So the concepts of love and *bhakti* were not merged in Malayalam as much as it was done in these literatures. In the pre-modern period of Malayalam i.e. before Thunjath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan's entry, temple courtesans and mistresses of the kings composed and performed verses full of passionate desire and bodily love. *Sandeshakavyas* were written by imitating Kalidasa's *Meghadootam* and they described the pain of separation in a very sensuous manner. Explicitly erotic descriptions of women in public places, for instance in a temple festival was central to the *Pachamalayala Prasthanam* initiated by the Venmani poets.

A different approach to the idea of love was evolving in the reformist literature preceded the progressive period. For instance, O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha*,

Kumaran Asan's phenomenal works like *Nalini* and *Leela* and later the poems of Edappally Kavikal²⁶ re-wrote the meaning and scope of love in Malayalam. Romantic, monogamous love modeled on the English and continental literature increasingly became the norm and the changing notions of modernization and morality complimented these ideas. The critique of the matrilineal family structure of the Nairs that was nourished by the institution of *sambandham* with the Namboodiris, as seen in *Indulekha* was being criticized from the vantage of 'pure' love between a man and a woman that was seemingly the superior and natural choice. The general critique of the social structure presented by the reform movements as curtailing the *free development of the individual* came to be applied to the field of love easily. The natural ability of the human beings to love another person was impeded by the divisions created in terms of caste, class and religion.

Kumaran Asan in 1922 wrote a poem called *Duravastha* about the Malabar Rebellion²⁷ of 1921 in which he provocatively portrayed a Namboodiri woman taking refuge at a Pulaya hut and the Pulaya man and the Namboodiri woman decide to live together in 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.²⁸ (Asan 2004: 521)

²⁶ Changampuzha Krishnapilla and Edappally Raghavanpilla are known as the 'Edappally Kavikal' [Edappally Poets]. They were friends and fellow-poets who lived in nearby villages in Kochi. Raghavanpilla committed suicide at an early age after a failed love and Changampuzha wrote a poem in the memory of his friend. The poem shall be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

²⁷ Malabar Rebellion, also known as Mappila Rebellion was a peasant rebellion against the oppressive land lord system in a few taluks in South Malabar, now part of the Malappuram district in Kerala. The Mappila community (Malabar Muslim) in South Malabar were largely poor agricultural tenants under Hindu upper caste landlords. Apart from the political economic issue of landlordism, the fear of their religion being in danger also became a cause for the revolt. There are a number of diverse studies on the event. For more details see Hardgrave Jr. (1977), Kurup (1988), K. N. Panikkar's *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921* (1990), M. Gangadharan's *Malabar Kalapam 1921-'22* (2009) etc.

²⁸ "Tungathayerumaakashathinai giri-

Shrungangalil bhoomi kaineettunnu...

Ennallayuppelumabdhieppulkunnu

Nannadi melichazhimukhathil.

Mandamartya, nee thadukkaykayeeshechha-

Now we will discuss a number of dominant trends in progressive writing regarding the portrayal of love and desire, all of which departed from the traditional ways substantially. Whether it is in terms of the nature of love, the characters or the tendencies of depiction these writings focussed on re-conceptualizing love in the context of the emerging modernity and questions of caste, class and gender.

➤ **The Phenomenon Called *Ramanan*: Imagining ‘Impossible’ Love**

Changampuzha Krishnapilla²⁹ wrote a long poem in 1938 when his close companion, neighbor and fellow poet, Edappally Raghavanpilla had committed suicide after a failed love. This work, called *Ramanan* became the emblematic work of a love story between two unequal persons, a poor, rural shepherd boy and a rich, sophisticated urban-bred girl. Changampuzha, being a pessimistic realist poet who belonged to the ‘Defeatist Movement’ as classified by Kesari, could have ended the poem only with the suicide of Ramanan, the shepherd boy, after being deceived by Chandrika, his beloved for a rich suitor. Changampuzha’s love was always taunted by betrayal, compassion was cruelty in disguise and smile was the epitome of artifice.

When schools imparting modern education to a large section of Malayali population were opened up literacy reached the majority irrespective of their caste-class backgrounds in a never-before pace and scope. By the late 1930s, an unprecedentedly vast number of people began to read more and more publications like news papers, magazines and literary texts. Changes in the socio-economic realm also aided the ordinary masses to spend more 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

Sundaramaamissamagamangal”.

²⁹ Changampuzha Krishnapilla (October 10, 1911 – June 17, 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 said Changampuzha poetry’s tremendous popularity was the result of both the musicality and ‘rootlessness’ of his poems. He became part of the editorial board of *Mangalodayam* magazine. His alcoholism and disordered life made him severely ill by 1947 and Changampuzha died in 1948.

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.

Ramanan became the one of the first literary texts in Malayalam that tapped the maximum potential of all these changes in the cultural sphere of Kerala society. It was published in 1938 and became the most popular work of literature that modern Malayalam had ever witnessed and comparable only to *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippaatt* written by Ezhuthachan. 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. (Krishnapilla 1944: 268)

It was an unprecedented event not only with regard to the Malayalam context but to most of the Indian languages as far as a literary work was concerned. Mundassery observed that *Ramanan* exhibited the direct influence of the 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. The deep sense of betrayal by the hierarchical social structure, the decadence prevalent in the society, the strong distrust and suspicion about the civilized world as a whole, the inward-looking and narcissistic tendencies and the dreadful loneliness and helplessness define the dominant contours of Changampuzha's poetry.

The *natural* need of a man to love and be loved is curtailed and suffocated by the ruthless traditional society and its capitalist utilitarian rationality. 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 on which Changampuzha configured his imagination. Kesari wrote extensively about Changampuzha and his 'Defeatist Movement' in his articles of 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. "In Freud's language, their [the advocates of the failure movement] ego surrender 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 surrender more to their super ego and id more than the reality around." (Balakrishnapilla 1984: 431)

As we know 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 nineteenth century to the early ones of twentieth century. It is only by the 1960s and 1970s Malayalam witnessed the emergence of modernist idioms and tropes commonly in poetry. But as K. Satchidanandan argues the works of many poets in the era of modernity and later showed many aspects of this modernist turn. Changampuzha occupies a unique position in this history as he for the first time produced the 'poetry of utter emptiness (*shoonyatha*), hallucinations and sheer artifice of this changing society'. (Vijayan 2008: 95) Let us read the most celebrated couplets by Changampuzha that embodies the spirit of the 'Defeatist Movement'.

I owe my failure in this sham world

To my sincere heart.³⁰ (Krishnapilla 1990: 123)

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 an impossibility.

➤ **Love for Revolution: An Attempt at Transcending Bodies**

Now we will come to a more ‘authentic’ communist imagination of love in K. P. G. Namboodiri’s³¹ poems that was considered in that period to be the perfect works of the progressive movement. Here we will discuss two of his poems in detail namely *Premam* and *Premagaanam*.

Our love is not a dream
 That relishes the *koel*, spring, moon and wine.
 With a soul that is soaked in the dust
 And burning with blistering sweat of this world
 With a body that is soiled with blood and sweat
 Of oppression and daily drudge
 With an instinct of revenge of the oppressed

³⁰ *Kapata lokathil aatmarthamayoru*

Hrudayamundaayataanen parajayam.

These lines are taken from Changampuzha’s poem called ‘Irulil’ [In the Darkness] and published in *Bashpanjali* in 1934.

³¹ K. P. G. Namboodiri’s (1917 – January 10, 1973) name became synonymous to being a communist poet in the progressive movement and EMS considered him as the most committed poet Malayalam had ever read. He was acclaimed by the communist critics like M. S. Devadas in such a fashion that any criticism against him or his poems was considered to be an attack on the communist party and even the cause of revolutionary social change in the larger sense and its living example i.e. Soviet Union. However, KPG’s poems fetch little attention in the regular discussions of modern Malayalam poetry, neither as part of poetry compendiums nor as a subject of serious literary criticism. As children, our generation never heard of him; never studied his poems in school compared to a vast number of poets we read from all periods. His name is hardly uttered in the ‘*kavi sammelanams*’ (poetry meets); his poems rarely discussed even by major Marxist critics. His poetry collections are not available in major book shops, including that of *Chintha*, the publishing house run by the CPI (M) and *Prabhath*, run by the CPI. The extent of import gained by a poet, especially in an era when literature literally became a site of war both politically and ideologically, seems all the more interesting today due to the total absence of his name and works from the current Malayalam literary world.

Branded as filthy

With a desire that gets to everything on earth

As everything is denied to it

Our love grabs the world

And a rising storm is there in it. (Namboodiri 1974: 99)³²

As EMS rightly pointed out, KPG's attempt here is to bring love to 'the materialist perspective of life'. Till then love is used as a symbol for many purposes in various literary movements for instance, the mystics in the Bhakti movement used it to talk about the devotion to God and the Romanticists to describe the individualistic conjugal love. Here KPG uses love as a symbol that enables the poet to do an *inversion* of the way in which life was understood and represented in poetry hitherto.

There is a certain way in which he not only mocks at the traditional methods of dealing with love in literature. His major target is the Romanticist genre where love remained the major theme more or less in the conventional way. In the first two lines of the poem *Premem* itself he explicitly dissociates himself from certain trope like the song of koel that is generally used to signify the sweetness of one's beloved's voice. Similarly, the season of spring, the moonlit night and wine represent the conventional requirements of describing love in a particular way. This romantic love has to be set

³²*Njangal than premam hanta kuyilum vasanthavum*

Thinkalum madirayum nunayum kinaavalla.

Poozhium podiyumaandimmannin chuduverppaal

Poorithoshmaavay kathiyeriyumathmavodum

Mardanamettum nithyamadhwanabharathalum

Rakthavum verppum chalikkettiyorudalodum

Vrithikettavarennu chooduvekkappettulla

Marditharute pratikaara vaasanayodum

Sarvavum nishedhikkapetukayale mannil

Sarvathilekkum paanju chelumagrahathodum

Ulakam grasicheetum premamaanasmal premem

Uyarum kodunkaatonmundathil kudikolvoo.

in a beautiful and comfortable ambience in the most exquisite aesthetic state. Along with the perfect passion and desire of the couple in love, these tropes make love an extra-ordinary affair that is not attainable by most of us in real lives.

This transcendental understanding of love has alienated the ordinary toiling masses from its fold who cannot afford to even dream of such an experience. So the need of our times is to pull the concept of love down to our daily experience of hard work, oppression and exploitation. Here love is not a pristine and delicate thing to be handled with utmost care but part and parcel of the ‘tough and dirty’ existence of the laboring classes. By displacing these symbols the poet tries to displace a long aesthetic tradition which is elitist in its approach. In different periods its objects and subjects of love changed according to the then dominant class and its nature.

Since love has been one of the most dominant themes in literature cutting across eras and genres, it becomes important to reformulate it when it comes to the proletariat literature. There is an effort to conceptualize an idea of love that is progressive by making it a collective feeling and experience. The word used for love is *premam* which is clearly romantic love as different from *ishtam* or *sneham*. *Premam* is the term most often used in Malayalam to connote romantic and conjugal love whereas *ishtam* denotes the liking of a lesser order for someone or something. *Sneham* has a more universal flavor to it which could be the love for the world or humanity, as well as for one’s child or even beloved. Hence by calling ‘*premam*’ ‘our love’ in plural KPG attempts to give it certain class-bias that enables one to imagine a future community based on it. The rising storm inside this love has the potential to sweep away the existing set of affairs founded on exploitation and oppression and also to usher in a bright tomorrow when today’s oppressed will grab the entire world in its hands. The last couple of lines of the poem render the most popular tenet of Marxist ideology: ‘[T]he proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.’ Since the workers are denied everything their desire has the potential to gain it all.

In EMS’ words, “even though one could find many shortcomings in the formalistic qualities of his work the way in which he internalizes the working class bias that gives life to his works and the exquisite manner in which the poet represents the symbols,

events and people is enviable". (Namboodiripad 1974: 342) KPG's role in this particular historical juncture as seen by himself as well as the communist party is simply not that of a poet or a writer, but that of a *prophet* who announces the herald of a new future. This prophecy will in turn inspire the masses to engage in the struggle to make it possible.

On the one hand, the effort is to de-mystify love by explicitly taking it away from its soothing and comfortable ambience and setting it against the 'ugliness' of working class life. Here love is dispersed all over one's existence, body and soul; even hatred or an instinct of revenge is part of love. Both the body and the soul are soaked in sweat as a result of the backbreaking labour and body is offended and covered with blood. Nevertheless, the materiality of love—that is re-rooted in the daily lives of masses through these registers of sweat and blood, of manual labour and physical exploitation—has to become *transcendental* again in KPG in a peculiar fashion. Here the real love must *transcend the ordinary* love of individuals and *become the universal* love for revolutionary transformation. It must go beyond its intimate, sensuous and particular realms to a realm that is accessible only through the attainment of a collective revolutionary consciousness that has to be mediated through thought, reflection and even knowledge.

The effort of KPG is not to talk about any peculiarities pertaining to the working class love and companionship neither in the sociological sense as it exists, nor in the normative sense as it ought to be. To elaborate this one could read a poem by Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon³³ called '*Padayalikal*' [Soldiers] where he talks about a labourer couple working in a paddy field in early dawn, irrigating it with the manual wheel. Here the poet tries to imagine a deep companionship between the couple when they carry out their work in a shared and complementary manner. The woman is

³³ Vailoppilli Sreedharamenon (11 May, 1911 – 22 December, 1985) is considered as one of the most serious voices of modern Malayalam poetry who started writing in the mid 1930s and published his works till the early 1980s. During the decades of 1940s and 1950s most of his major works were written. He remained sympathetic to the communist ideology and maintained cordial relationship with the leaders throughout his life, even though his works were never comfortably acknowledged by them as revolutionary or progressive enough. Vailoppilli was never a popular poet like Changampuzha or a party poet like KPG. Even though we mention many images from a range of poems by Vailoppilli *Kudiyozhikkal* would remain in the centre of our discussion on Vailoppilli. This piece is chosen despite it being long and complicated, not just because it is considered as the master work by the author but also because it deals with a range of concerns central to my undertaking here and correlates with the works of other writers under consideration.

singing a song to alleviate the hardship and pain of her partner who is turning the wheel and their bodies work in tandem reminding one, of the process of making love. They are soldiers fighting the wrath of the nature in building a brave new world. Here the imagination is new and unique to the working class where their shared labour becomes the metaphor for their love and togetherness.

The question of body and its relation to labour is used by KPG in many of his writings especially in contrast to the conventional relation made between love and the beautiful bodies of women. The bodies in his poetry are hard and firm, hands rough and covered with sweat and dirt. The dirt is clogged all over the body mixed with the sweat. These bodies were hardly visible in Malayalam poetry (as well as prose) till then with a few notable exceptions before the progressive writers.³⁴

Now let us read the second poem called *Premagaanam* by KPG that deals with the same theme of love in a related manner. The poet begins his poem by complaining about the lack of a perfect woman who deserves his song of love i.e. a token of his love.

To whom shall I submit my song of love?

No one seems perfect in the whole world.

One woman's body was exquisite

Like a thousand flowers in bloom

As I sought her heart

Each of those petals wilted away.³⁵ (Namboodiri 1974: 100)

³⁴ Kumaran Asan in his *Duravastha* describes an unconventional love story between a Namboodiri woman called Savithri who was orphaned and abandoned in the middle of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 takes shelter at the hut of a Pulayan named Chathan and eventually falls in love with him. This created uproar at the time of its publication (1922) from many quarters for its subversive potential.

³⁵ *Aarkku njan samarpikkum malpremaanam mannil*

Nokkukil oruvalilluthamayennaayennan.

Aayiram kusumangal onnichu viriyum po-

Laayatakshi than meyyil saundayam kilarunnu.

Hrudayam tedithedi chennu njanathilella-

Mithalokkeyum, vaati veenupoy kaanekkane.

Once the starving labourer woman reveals the truth to him, he is ashamed of his narrow and exclusive conception of love. He realized that he had no place for the majority of toiling masses in his poetry and love. The rough and strong hands and starving bodies were never represented in poetry. Love, again is used as a symbol by KPG to talk about the superficial and biased aesthetics of the earlier canons of literature whether it belongs to the feudal period or the bourgeois one.

In *Premagaanam* the poet who is also the lover is apologising to the labour woman not just for his initial inability to accept her rough body. The poet is ashamed and apologetic for keeping her (the entire working class men and women) out of the purview of poetry/literature till then. It is a point of realization for the poet, not just about the social reality but also about the reality of his self as a poet and poetry as a whole.

Finally in the night

She came to me and uttered,

“My dear poet, see my hands,

Those hands cherished by you as tender and soft

Are roughened like a stone

Strengthened by hard work

Will your tender heart be disturbed by my touch?

Will your dreams be shattered by it?”

For the first time, my love was ashamed

For the first time, the poet apologised to the woman.³⁶ (Namboodiri 1974: 100)

³⁶ “*Allayo kave bhavaan nokkukikkaram*’ aval

Cholliyen chaarathethiyavasaanamaam raavil.

Pallavamennangethra paatiyillithine ha,

Kallupolalle thottaal, velayaanithin shakthi.

Angayethottaalo njan lolamaanasan ange-

kallalaaavumo? Thakaneedumo thava swapnam?

Maamakapremam lajjichannadyam thalathaazhthi

The dominant romantic conceptions of the female beauty and love based on this beauty are shattered here. The poet was already clear about beauty being not just a bodily aspect but an aspect related to the heart (soul). That is why he is saying that the woman who seemed perfectly beautiful ceased to be so in his gaze when he discovered her essence. But, he was still searching for a beautiful woman in accordance with the traditional parameters who is also good in essence. So his realization is about the bodily beauty that cannot be understood or accommodated in the traditional aesthetics.

In another poem *Velayum Kavithayum* [Work and Poetry] KPG introduced another dimension of love and marriage. Kavitha, the formal term for poem in Malayalam is also a popular female name. Here, poetry is a beautiful young girl waiting for a suitor. The men who come to see her are poets of the older schools who suffocate the essence of poetry with cosmetic-level decorations (*varnanam*). Their aesthetic approaches are ridiculed by our poet who acts as the matchmaker. Finally the real aesthetic approach arrives on the scene when the strong and hard working Labour comes to court her. There were other suitors who were richer, more powerful and with nobler origins than Labour. But they could not have offered the *real freedom* to Kavitha.

But tell me my darling
 What is love?
 Is it tethering one to bondage? ...
 Some Cupid-like worshippers
 Came to you to caress and cajole
 The words they termed as love
 Lies there as mere sweet nothings now!
 That magnanimous word 'love'
 Became synonymous to slavery.³⁷ (Namboodiri 1974: 169)

Kaaminivotannadyam maapuchodichoo kavi.

³⁷ *Enthu paksho, pranayamennomale*

Bandhitayakki ninne nirthunnatho...

Kaama komalanmaarum chilar nine-

When the poet makes both Kavitha and Labour meet in marriage, the pandits and other noble men find it ugly, adventurous and devoid of love. But immediately we realize that the class difference between poetry and labour becomes the impediment and source of repulsion from the nobles and learned men. As discussed earlier, the poet *visibilizes* the ‘real nature of love’ in the romantic genres that generally passes off as natural and a matter of choice.

The idea of marriage is central to this poem as the achievement of the real union between poetry and labour. The emergence of proletarian literature and the progressive literature that is dealing with the proletariat required a marriage between the form of art and the content informed by the communist ideology. At a peripheral level, it seems as if the gendered stereotype of the woman/poetry being dependent on the man/labour is reproduced here. But KPG’s effort goes beyond the metaphors. Here, the poetry/arts have to be protected and taken care of by labour and labouring class. Here, the labour is a man simply in order to make the story easily intelligible, as Kavitha (poetry) has always been addressed as a female.

However, here the style is too weak to sustain one’s interest in it. One may feel tempted to argue that the apparent lack of conviction in his own skills as a poet and the reluctance to give attention to the sophisticated aspects of the specific ‘activity of writing’ undermine the confidence and optimism he has in the ideology and present time that he wants to share with the readership. Poet’s engagement with the peculiarities of the medium of poetry seems minimal as to arrange words in some metre of verse.

Even though it is difficult to argue that ‘originality’ is a great virtue one could say that KPG could not introduce new or innovative measures at the level of the form of poetry or to experiment with communist aesthetics. Little attention is given to the sophisticated aspects of writing including complex reflection and compact

Yomanikkuvaantethi ninnanthike

Premamennavar aadiyathokkeyum

Ha madhura swapnangaly sheshippu.

Paaramunnathamamappadavume

Paaratantryathin paryayamayithe!

(re)presentation. Hence, after the immediate period where his poems were used as propaganda material by the party, they were pushed to oblivion as the questions and concerns changed. Both these poems (this is applicable to his other works also some of which will be discussed in other sections) try to present a universal crisis in aesthetics as being hegemonized by the dominant classes. The crisis is identified by the absence of certain people/groups from the writings and it is addressed by adding them to the scene. The effort was to (re)present the universal aspirations of a universal revolutionary class i.e. working class by polarizing the presences (and absences) in the literary piece as if in a chess board. The great dialectics of modern history is furnished with the poetic currency here that needs to be studied along with the discussion of EMS' engagement with literature in the previous chapter.

At once, this may seem as if he failed to articulate certain universal, eternal concerns of humanity and hence he was faded out of the scene once his era was over. But if we follow the history of modern Malayalam poetry in particular and literature in general, only those works tend to remain alive both as popularly read and recited and as studied and critiqued, which could construct an interesting relationship with itself as a text. It is only when the text is able to perform well in front of the readership it produces its own reader and critic.

➤ **Reading Societal Transition through Literature: The Age of Novel and of Love**

The socio-cultural changes in Kerala and its relation to the increasing literacy and widening readership for modern genres like novel and short story had been dealt by many writers since Chandu Menon³⁸. Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the 'dialogic self' that was produced by the modern literary genre of novel where the polyphonic character of the novel allows an internal dialogue within, by which more than one meaning

³⁸ Chandu Menon's *Indulekha*, published in 1889 was one of the earliest attempts to depict a romantic-conjugal love relationship in which the upper class, English educated Nair heroine (Indulekha) falls in love with a modern man (western educated and handsome Madhavan) and shows the courage to discard the proposal of a *sambandham* from a rich Namboodiri man. Here, she is rejecting the existing social structure itself while doing so. See G. Arunima's "Writing Culture: Of Modernity and the Malayalam Novel", *Studies in History*, 13 (2), 1997, for a discussion on the complex problems involved in negotiating tradition and modernity in *Indulekha* in relation to love, sexuality and morality.

could be produced intelligibly. This possibility of a novel enables it to have a self that is developed through a constant dialogue with the 'other'. (Bakhtin 2002) Thus the scope of a self that is relational and changing was established by novel and this was of considerable significance in a society where one's self was always already fixed and gendered within the strict hierarchies of castes, sub-castes and religion that may be called '*janmabhedam*' (or difference given by birth).³⁹ This had serious impact on the ways in which the concept of love (along with other issues like sexuality and morality) was re-invented by the later writers.

It is interesting to see how the protagonist Kunjukutta Kurup in Cherukad's⁴⁰ novel *Shanidasha* expresses his wish to talk to the bride Thankamma before fixing their marriage in order to find out whether she likes him or not. Kurup says: "We should ask her also. As you say, this is the age of novel. Also of love. What if that girl has the malady of love? We should ask it directly beforehand." (Pisharody 2010:17) Thus the age of novel became the 'age of love' as the concept of romantic love described in the modern novels, mainly following the western pattern, began to be read by many people who were not supposed to read them in the earlier system.

In his well-known novel *Randidangazhi* Thakazhi Sivasankarapilla⁴¹ extended the scope of love as to include the Dalit agricultural labourers like Koran, Chirutha, and

³⁹ See J. Devika's *En-Gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-forming in Early 20th Century Keralam*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2007, for a detailed discussion about the construction of the modern Malayali individual as a caste-ridden and gendered self.

⁴⁰ Cherukad Govinda Pisharody (August 26, 1914 – 28 October 1976) (henceforth Cherukad) was born in an upper caste household in Perunthalmanna taluk in Malabar now part of the Malappuram district 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 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 *Jeevithapatha* (The Path of Life) is hailed as an outstanding piece in the entire genre in Malayalam literature. K. N. Panikkar 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.

⁴¹ Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (17 April 1912 - 10 April 1999) (henceforth Thakazhi) began his writing career in the mid 1940s and became the one of the strongest voices in the progressive literary scene in Malayalam. He was a lawyer by profession and continued in the profession for over 20 years. He had an extensively large number of short stories and novels to his credit by the time he died in 1999. He was an active part in the PSS since 1944 and an office-bearer of the *Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham* since its inception. The first book published by the SPSS was a collection of his short stories titled '*Thakazhiyude Kathakal*'.

Chathan. Koran falls in love with Chirutha and works hard to pay for the bride-price to Chirutha's father. After marriage, Chirutha and Koran express their love for each other as portrayed by Thakazhi through many intimate moments contrary to the existing ways of living a married life. They roamed around the lake in a boat throughout the night and spent hours together in their hut. When some natural mishap occurred in the paddy fields that led to the damage of the crops, both Koran and Chirutha were blamed by the rest of the community for causing this as the kind of conjugal relationship based on romance was considered to be impure and polluting the 'honour' of the 'noble' task of cultivation.

Chathan was another person who desired to marry Chirutha but could not do it. His unconditional affection and support plays a crucial role in Chirutha's life when Koran had to leave her for dangerous trade union activism. Even though Chirutha tries to define her relationship with Chathan as a sister-brother bond, Chathan always remained loyal to his feelings for her without forcing her to accept them. Such an undefined relationship between a man and a woman was also not imaginable before this era of novels.

This can be read along the lines of Jacques Rancière's discussion of Gustav Flaubert's novels where a woman from a traditional background reads a romantic novel and experiences a life that was unimaginable in the earlier order of senses and things. She 'did something' that a woman like her was not supposed to do. Reading Rancière's argument about the democratic temperament of Flaubert's writing in the context of progressive Malayalam literature has its limitations in terms of the specific time and space under consideration and its specificity in Rancière's work. Nevertheless, one believes that such an attempt will not be totally meaningless if one can partially borrow from a theorist without the risk of simplistic comparison.

P. Narayana Kurup pointed out in one of his essays on Thakazhi Sivasankara Pilla's novels, that more than any other writer of the progressive era, Thakazhi had assimilated the social-analytical project of Marxism in his writings though 'he did not allow Marxist aesthetics to limit his imagination'. The idea that society should be the protagonist of every work was introduced in Malayalam by Kesari's writings on literature that came out in his publications since early 1930s. (Kurup in Sharma ed. 1996: 13-5) The progressive writers of this era were all inspired by Kesari and his discussions about world literature in his publications. Many of their stories were initially published in Kesari's magazines like *Prabodhakan*, *Samadarshi* and *Kesari*. Later, other established weeklies like *Mathrubhumi* also began to publish these progressive works.

The progressive novels (also short stories to some extent) shared an important feature with the works of Flaubert as Rancière understands them. Rancière argues that with his complete neglect for existing hierarchical systems of representation that ‘went along with the reversal of the old hierarchy between noble action and base life’ he democratized the regime of representation in European literature. (Rancière 2004: 14) The most significant reason for this was that Flaubert addressed a new set of readers, totally different from the old aristocratic connoisseurs, who were just a bunch of ‘young ladies and young gentlemen’. (ibid.) For Rancière, thus the politics of literature is this specific ‘partitioning of the sensible’ produced by it that ensures that the reader and writer could be anybody. ((ibid.)

➤ Confessions of Love: Limits of Romantic Masculinities

Let us now read a ‘love story’ in Vailoppilli Sreedharamenon’s *Kudiyozhikkal*.⁴² Here, the protagonist who is a poet belonging to a landed aristocratic family, falls in love with a lower caste, labourer girl in the village. Vailoppilli borrows the traditional parlance to describe the poet’s love for the girl, as different from the language of dark irony and self-doubt in the rest of the text. P. N. Gopikrishnan comments that the imagination of love in this section of *Kudiyozhikkal* goes back to the ‘pre-Asan’ era of Malayalam poetry. As mentioned earlier Asan introduced ‘romantic love’ or ‘*premam*’ in Malayalam whereas the earlier poetry dealt with ‘*bhramam*’ or ‘lust’ (or uncontrollable passion). “The hero stands in the continuity of ‘*bhramam*’ or history of this *bhramam*. But, let us remember that he stands after Asan chronologically... But the heroine comes after Asan, culturally. She speaks deeper ‘literature’ than the hero who is a writer.” (Gopikrishnan 2011: 40-1)

She sings and dances with her friends and asks him the next day: “Did you hear my voice individually?” The love of the hero is cowardly, inelegant and ‘ticklish’. (ibid.) Here, the labourer, who is a *kudiyaan* (agricultural tenant) of the poet witnesses to an intimate moment between the poet and the girl and mocks the girl for trusting the hero who is a landlord. This mockery unsettles the poet and he reflects upon the reality

⁴² The poem will be introduced in detail in Chapter Three.

immediately. He feels that the girl loves him, not because of ‘real love’ but due to her poverty and that girls in general do not commit themselves to any relationship strongly. “Love for girls, nothing more than a set of beautiful, glass bangles. If one breaks, they just wear another.”⁴³ (Sreedharamenon 1984: 696) Nevertheless, he soon realizes that all these are mere excuses he tries to raise and it is him, who is not committed to the love. If he could not withstand a little insult from the labourer how will he face the troublesome trajectory of this inter-class/caste love, if he has to ‘take her to the heaven of his love’? (ibid: 695)

A unique account of love and desire is portrayed in Vaikom Muhammad Basheer’s⁴⁴ early controversial novel called *Shabdangal* [Voices]. The narrative portrays a discharged soldier describing his myriad experiences – of war, hunger, loneliness, love and desire – to the writer who copies them down in order to write a story on it. The narrative has a number of instances from soldier’s life described in a random manner. In one of the sections the soldier talks about his love when he saw a woman on the street and fell in passionate love with her. Every day he waited for the woman to pass through the same spot without having the courage to face her and reveal his love. One day he gets a scented hand-kerchief that fell down from her hand. That then became the object for him to visualize all his desire and love towards her. Finally he goes and meets her and somehow accompanies her to her room. He was in an inebriated state of mind and body and spends a night with her there. Next morning he

⁴³ “*Kanyamaarkku navaanuraagangal*

Kamra shona sphatika valakal;

Onnu pottiyal matto’nnivanna-

Munnayippu njan tatwanirakal.”

⁴⁴ Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (21 January 1908 – 5 July 1994) (henceforth Basheer) is one of the most celebrated writers of Malayalam. While studying in an English medium school in his early teenage he was attracted by Gandhi’s leadership and Congress and ran away from home. He participated in the Salt Satyagraha Movement that took place in Malabar and got arrested and sent to a jail where he met a number of socialists. He was inspired by the legacy of Bhagat Singh and his comrades and once freed from prison, he organised an anti-British movement and edited a revolutionary journal, *Ujjivanam* (Uprising). A warrant was issued for his arrest and he left Kerala. He went to jail many times, which became an important space for his later literary works to evolve. In his early years of writing he used to publish his own stories and sell them on his own. He ran two book shops in Ernakulam. During this period he also had to suffer from mental illness and was twice admitted to mental sanatoriums. The second spell of paranoia occurred after his marriage when he had settled down at Bepore. He recovered both times, and continued his writings till his death.

wakes up to a terrible realization that the woman around whom he had constructed a complex imagination of love, desire and belonging was not in fact a woman, but a 'male prostitute'. The man was thoroughly shattered for some time and despised and regretted the whole experience.

I got up and held those breasts; they were bags filled with cotton! ... Cotton-filled bags! I sat there like that... Hours might have passed. May be some moments only. I removed those breasts along with the bodice. A man's hairy chest!

I kept those breasts on the bed. Beautiful breasts...! I don't know what I felt then, whether anger, wonder, pain or aversion. I lit a cigarette and blew the smoke. Smoke...! Life that has become smoke....

I asked: Being born a man...? (Basheer 1994: 442)

The man is confused afterwards in mentioning about the male prostitute whether to use 'he' or 'she' or 'it'. Basheer captures the complexity of love and desire in relation to one's sexuality by using the typical tropes of a romantic love in the beginning that suddenly shifts to perplexity and disgust. This was a blow not only at the Romantic heroic love but also at the more conventional techniques of its expansion or inversion provided by writers like KPG by opening up a more radical sphere of denaturalized bodies and their desire. It is a radical questioning of what we now call as heteronormativity in conjugal relationships, raised by Basheer as early as in the late 1930s.

During this era a new readership for the Malayalam progressive literature was just beginning to emerge *along with* the writers. This new group of readers (who were significantly larger than the size of the readership ever existed in the language) was the first generation recipients of modern education that at least theoretically did not prescribe any given qualities for the students unlike all earlier systems that were severely exclusive. This readership required not the traditional regimes of writing (and representation, in general) that spoke with a fixed hierarchy in terms of its listeners.

The style of the progressive writers was critiqued too much for their roughness, lack of reverence for traditional forms of writing and low moral standards. This criticism can be viewed as the eagerness from the part of the traditional scholars (whom EMS mockingly calls pandits) to protect the sanctity of the word that had to be handled with

reverence and discipline. Authors like Thakazhi Sivasankara Pilla, Kesava Dev, Ponkunnam Varkey and most importantly Vaikom Muhammad Basheer wrote precisely for, and in turn produced a readership that needed words like ‘mute pebbles’ in Rancière’s terms. This ‘neutralized’ language of progressive writers, devoid of traditional norms of respect and obedience (hence formalistic qualities of the older kind) intervened into the caste/class/status-ridden and gendered hierarchies existed in Malayalam hitherto. This was the first moment of ‘literariness’ in modern Malayalam though this moment should not be seen as cut off from the long history of subversive and transgressive attempts to talk in newer and more democratic languages by many earlier writers⁴⁵.

However, in an interesting manner, these very same writers and their writing style were later vehemently critiqued by the communist critics including EMS and M.S. Devadas for being reactionary and resulting from petty-bourgeois deviation. This question is discussed in detail in the following section where the moralistic assumptions of the communist critics failed to understand the subversive potential of the writings of people like Basheer. In this section we dealt with a number of diverse re-workings of the notions of love, desire and sexuality in the progressive literary texts. Now we will proceed to an exploration of the questions of family and morality in some of these texts produces around the same period.

The New Family and New Morality in the Progressive Fiction and Criticism

Progressive movement in arts and literature occupies an important moment of modernity in Kerala. Modernity and its various aspects including the making of the modern individual subjectivities has been a pertinent theme in many recent historical

⁴⁵ There were a number of counter-hegemonic cultural awakenings in the history of Malayalam language and literature that needs to be mentioned along with the argument about the progressive literature writing being the first self-conscious moment of literariness. Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan who is considered as the ‘father of modern Malayalam language’ wrote *Adhyathma Ramayanam* making the epic available in Malayalam for the first time. More importantly, Kunchan Nambiar who developed ‘*Thullal*’ (a solo dance-drama performance) challenged the traditional interpretations of the divine literature. He effected subversion and transgression of literature not just at the level of the content becoming grotesque and much less divine but also at the level of the form by making it comic and heretic. K Satchidanandan argues that Nambiar is like a combination of continental writers like Rabelais, Goethe and Chaucer as there is a celebration of the carnivalesque in Nambiar’s verses as well as performance.

studies.⁴⁶ Literature had been an important space for negotiating different experiences and implications of this modernity since late nineteenth century. Sexuality and morality were the two most important themes around which this negotiation happened in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Malayalam literature of which a best example could be the famous novel *Indulekha* by O. Chandu Menon that was published in 1889. The realist ‘ethnographic novels’⁴⁷ like *Indulekha* paved the initial steps in this negotiation, which was further complicated by the progressive writers of the mid-twentieth century. Questions of matrilineal family and forms of sexual practices peculiar to it and issues of education and freedom formed the corner stone of this engagement that had reached a particular point by the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, the progressive writers had to respond to an entire set of transformations that had already taken place both at the material and ideological level regarding this problematic.

The all encompassing social backdrop for the progressive movement and the works that came out of the movement was the complex phase Kerala society was transiting through in the early decades of twentieth century marked by the shift from the feudal/matrilineal *tharavad* giving way to urban, wage-earning individuals and their nuclear families that had already began in the late nineteenth century itself. There is an aphorism in Malayalam that captures the essence of this aspect of the social change i.e. “*tharavad kudumbabamayi*” which literally means that the *tharavad* (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.

Even though this question of the disintegration of the *tharavad* 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 of this period belonged to these disintegrating Nair *tharavads* (like early the communist activists pointed out by Dilip Menon), the new economic

⁴⁶See for instance, the works of Devika (2007), Arunima (2003), Menon (2006) etc.

⁴⁷ See G. Arunima’s “Writing Culture: Of Modernity and the Malayalam Novel”, *Studies in History*, 13 (2), 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’.

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 kind in the form of paddy, coconuts and vegetables from the fields, these families were relatively stable. But this period witnessed far-reaching changes in all walks of life from law to education and from economy to caste and community relations. With the coming up of nuclear families the commonly owned *tharavad* 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. Clerks and primary school teachers became the figures *par excellence* of this moment.⁴⁸ They were the new educated middle class came out mainly of the moderately wealthy Nair families and increasingly settled into nuclear families in towns. But, their wages were too little to sustain their earlier lifestyles and privileges.

Kesava Dev's⁴⁹ short story '*Avan Valiya Udyogasthana*' [He is a Big Officer] can be seen as an attempt to talk about the newly emerging middle classes and its problems. In this story, the lower middle class to which the clerks and school teachers belong is recognized as part of the wage labouring section that fails to make ends meet just like the working classes even after hard work. The ultimate reality that both these classes are exploited by the capitalist class is a prominent theme in the literature of that period that aims at a larger unity between working classes, small peasants and lower middle class wage labourers, against the big capitalists. Moreover this deals with a number of issues in his immediate context as an educated member of a Nair *tharavad*. The story could be briefly summed up as follows. The head of a declining Nair *tharavad* spends his entire life's savings and income to make his grandson a graduate and this worsens his financial position. The young man gets a government clerk's job

⁴⁸ Remember Sumit Sarkar's discussion about the transition experienced by the colonial Bengali middle class as a result of new administrative jobs, in Chapter 8 "Kalyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramakrishna and His Times" in *Writing Social History*. New Delhi: OUP, 1997.

⁴⁹ P. Keshavadev (20 July 1904 – 1 July 1983) grew up and started writing during those so-called years of Renaissance in Kerala which was characterized by a number of sweeping changes all across the society. He has written a large corpus of prose in all possible forms, ranging from short stories, novels, plays, essays and memoirs. From 1930s to late 1970s, he remains a canonical figure not only as a writer but also as a political activist and trade unionist. He came to know about Russian revolution and proclaimed himself as a communist very early in his life. He was one of the earliest trade unionists in Kerala and among the coir workers of Alappuzha. Later, with the emergence of Stalinism and the changing directions of Soviet socialism distanced himself away from the party and its organizations. He has written a famous autobiography called *Ethirppu* which means opposition or disagreement.

in the emerging city of Thiruvananthapuram. The overestimation of the old man about the value of a B.A. degree and the post of the clerk and its power and income was shattered towards the end of the narrative when the old man goes to visit the grandson in Thiruvananthapuram and experiences the reality firsthand.

The context of world war, economic depression and famine along with the socio-economic transitions that Kerala was undergoing re-configured the social geography and cultural economy of the region. There are many aspects to this plot such as the social pressure on the clerk to live like a middle class person, ambition for social mobility and baggage from the feudal upper caste legacy. This forced these groups of people to shed their 'halos' of traditional dominance and accept the reality that's introduced by capital and state. The possibility of being anonymous in the city as against the fixed membership in the village community enabled this transformation. In the city spaces, no one needed to prove one's caste or live up to some traditional standards.

Many writers of that period had dealt with similar themes, for instance a well-known prose writer Karoor Neelakanda Pilla had written an extraordinary story called '*Pothichoru*' [Packed Tiffin] about a poor and hungry school head master stealing a child's tiffin. The trope of the primary school teacher is a constant and compelling presence in the progressive literature. Most of the writers of this period have written powerful stories about the lives of school masters and mistresses and some of the writers were themselves school teachers. There are some peculiarities of the figure of the master (school teachers were commonly referred to as masters and mistresses in that period) that to be mentioned here. They comprised the majority of the first generation middle class/lower middle class persons to be educated in the modern system and to have been employed in vast number of newly emerging schools.

Before 1957, majority of the schools were run by private players in an authoritarian manner without any accountability. Hence, these teachers were forced to work for lesser wages than the legally sanctioned amount and the managers of the schools profited out of this enormously. The communist party initiated a trade union among these teachers in order to fight regulate this corruption and profiteering in the educational sector. After independence, once the Congress government was in power, the communist party was banned many times consecutively and like many other trade union movements, the activities of the teachers' union were also curtailed by the

government. In that period, the easiest method of breaking any struggle was to label its leaders as communists.

Like clerks, these teachers were members of *tharavads* until recently and now settled down as nuclear families in the towns without much material privileges of the old order and they had to adjust themselves to the money-based economy as income in terms of kind (paddy, vegetables, coconut etc.) ceased to be available as rent. They had to manage their families (consisting of wife and 3-4 children) with the meager wages from the school a portion of which was taken away by the managers. On the one hand, they were educated and was hopeful of a better future in the modernizing society and on the other, they had certain expectations to be fulfilled that lingered on from their decaying feudal past. Their sociological location was ambiguous in terms of class analysis but these writers were trying to develop a larger solidarity between these middle class figures and the working class.

An important point of comparison between a worker and a middle class clerk was that both had a household to sustain in the new context. Invariably, most of the literary works of the period had a central trope of a household in sheer poverty and its women, forced to carry out undignified and 'immoral' occupations outside their houses. In some of the progressive writings and most importantly in the communist party writings and criticism, the worker was identified with this middle class image in terms of its moral underpinnings. This idea is will be discussed in the next chapter, when the 'other' of this respectable figure of the worker who was portrayed as the ideal representative of bourgeois morality is constructed as the 'lumpen' or the 'beggar' on the street.

Another related theme is the issue of marital discord and separation. Gradually the idea of voluntary entry and exit into and out of marriage was becoming intelligible to the growing middle classes. With the collapse of the matrilineal family and inheritance pattern, Nair women suffered a decrease in their control in family affairs. The idea of romantic love and togetherness based on mutual agreement was widely discussed in literature. Earlier, women in the matrilineal households had the power to decide whether to entertain a *sambandham* or not as these relationships were basically instrumental in nature (to have children for the *tharavad*). With the emergence of nuclear families consisting of the bread-winner husband and his wife and children these women could hardly exercise any rights that they earlier possessed. They were

neither given the freedom to choose their partners through romantic love nor to enter into and out of marriages basing on their instrumental calculations which was the case earlier. Some of the common figures in this regard in the progressive writing are the figure of the husband who is suspicious of his wife's chastity, wife who tries hard to manage a family on her own contrary to the joint family system of *tharavad*, parents trying hard to get their children educated so as to achieve upward social mobility etc.

In one of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's early stories, *Vishappu*, we come across an important instance of encountering modernity; when the village-born college peon Kochukrishnan meets 'modern' women of the city. One of the manners in which Kochukrishnan experiences this new woman is through her attire that is different from that of the women whom he has seen in his village. The unnamed wife of the Principal, a prostitute called Elizabeth, whom he falls in love with and all the young women he meets in the college, on the street and in the park wear sari along with a tight blouse and brassiere⁵⁰. This was a symbol of new fashion as well as dignity. This represented a significant shift in the way women were seen in public places. Many of Basheer's stories talk about this new addition to women's dress code that became an important aspect of the modern educated womanhood. This had played a significant part in increasing the confidence of this generation of women by challenging the caste based dress code to appear in public places to study, work and live independently⁵¹.

The relationship Basheer invokes here, between a man and woman is more substantial and hence different from the feudal model of husband and wife. Elizabeth could not even remember Kochukrishnan when he meets her after a long time even though he always thought about her with intense emotions. As against both the traditional as well as reformist approaches here Kochukrishnan is not given an opportunity to 'uplift

⁵⁰ Colloquially it was called '*bodi*' or '*bodice*' in Malayalam and Basheer uses the term *bodice*. Now it has become an old-fashioned usage.

⁵¹ The argument about the relation between the modern attire and the confidence of women should not be read as a complete argument as it is meant to be understood in the specific context of the story under consideration. This should be read along with the pervasive missionary efforts of the period to 'civilize' the colonial subjects. The 'Breast-cloth disturbance' by the converted *Channar* women for the right to cover the upper part of their bodies was successfully carried out in the first-half of the nineteenth century. See J. Devika's *En-Gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-forming in Early 20th Century Kerala*. Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2007, for a discussion about the complex relation between the production of the engendered modern Malayali selfhood and the issues of missionary and community reforms focussing on 'women's issues'.

the prostitute' through his genuine love and compassion from her 'filthy' existence. Even in the greatly controversial *Shabdangal* by Basheer the prostitute is not shown as someone to be rescued or treated with sympathy. She leaves her baby on the road next to where the soldier is sleeping and goes to her customer behind a broken wall. The soldier wakes up when the baby cries and sees that it was bitten by ants. When he lifts the baby and begins to remove ants from its body the mother gets back and kicks him down thinking that he was planning to snatch her baby away. Later, when she realizes his real intention she feels remorseful and gives him a quarter rupee. This man-woman relation can be contrasted to the predominant model that was cherished by the communist activists in political discourse and critics in literature.

In this section we discussed the changing imaginations of family and its relation to morality in progressive literature and criticism and will now proceed to a discussion on a more particular question regarding the production of specific subjects, in this case that of the communist activist.

Whelming Temptations and Sacrificing Desires: The Ascetic Moralist as the Communist Activist

The processes of 'subjectivation' through which certain figures are produced in particular socio-historical setting, are complex and layered. Literature is one such site where this process can be traced and here we will carry out a modest attempt at analyzing one of the dominant issues of subjectivation in the progressive period in Kerala; the marking of the contours of the production of the communist self. We will read some of the progressive works that deal with this theme either explicitly or implicitly. For instance, let us begin by looking at the works of Kadamangalam Pappukkutty⁵², a major progressive poet.

⁵² Kadamangalam Pappukkutty (March 21, 1909 – September 20, 1974) (henceforth Kadamangalam) was born in northern Paravoor now part of Ernakulam district in central Kerala. He was lawyer by profession and actively participated in the national movement in Kochi and Travancore. He also engaged in political and trade union activities and wrote poetry and short stories regularly since his student times. He also wrote about the poems and stories published in weeklies like *Thozhilali*, *Sahodaran*, *Navajeevan*, *Kaumudi* etc. He was awarded a golden tag as "the poet of the labourer" by Travancore Labour Association. He was hailed as the real poet of progress by Kesari Balakrishnapilla in a foreword written by Kesari for Kadamangalam's poetry collection *Kadathuvanchi* [Ferryboat] in

A recurring theme in Kadamangalam Pappukkutty's poems is the various temptations that are present in a *soldier's* way towards the warfront. The soldier is a communist who has started his journey through the hard path of revolution. In his poem *Yuvabhata* [The Young Soldier] he mentions a number of such obstacles that try to stop the communist from his passage: the attraction of enjoying one's youth with his friends, advice from the conservative elders about the dangers of the trip, preaching of the religious philosopher (*vedanti*) about the futility of material transformation and the need to focus on the spiritual plain, the opinion from the great poet (*mahakavi*) about the eternal nature of these complexities and the need to accept the complementariness of sorrow and joy, the beauty of the nature and finally the seductive plea by his beloved to stay back. (Pappukkutty 2001: 106-9)

The presentation of each of these 'obstacles' as obstacles has a clear reason by which we can understand the manner in which an idea of the communist self is fashioned by the poet. His enemies are the old generation and its values, the *vedanti* who tries to seduce him using the 'opium' of religion and the romantic poet who tries to justify the system by naturalizing the inequality and hierarchy. One communist has to overcome these reactionary impulses from his familiar surroundings to embark upon a journey of revolution.

Most importantly, the poet sings that a communist activist has to base his revolutionary activities on a set of sacrifices. His friends invite him to an exciting life full of joy and his beloved complains about her unfulfilled desire to be with him and love him. It is only when one can transcend beyond all these bodily desires offered by his friends and beloved he becomes the true communist activist. In another poem titled *Thadayalle Thankam* [Don't Stop Me Darling] the poet requests his beloved not to stop him from joining the struggle against all social evils. Interestingly, the young woman is always addressed in the conventional manners like *thankam* (gold), *kamani* (beauty), *matimukhi* and *panimatimukhi* (moon-faced), *tharuni* (young woman), *arumapenkodi* (dearest pretty girl), *pidamankanni* (deer-eyed), *arumapreyasi* (dear beloved) and *tharalakshi* (tender-eyed). On the one hand, the style of writing and

1945. Kesari argued that in the history of modern Malayalam verse Kadamangalam's works epitomize all the qualities of progressive literature. However, Kadamangalam is hardly known in today's context and just like KPG almost has vanished from all venues of Malayalam poetry.

vocabulary suggest that the poet wants to sustain a clear-cut distinction between the roles and functions of a man and woman whereby he will go to fight for a brave, new world while she will patiently wait for her. In the beginning the girl is weeping when she is told that her lover has to leave now for the cause of revolution. She does not come to the scene at any point in the poem and her feelings are put across through the responses of her lover.

In every stanza he tries to tell her about the severity of the situation out there and the inevitability of him joining the war-like situation. He tells her:

I am leaving you, my beauty.
Not that I don't have the wealth,
The fondness, the sympathy
Or the unvarying desire
About your gorgeous body.⁵³ (Pappukkutty 2001: 116)

In fact he feels so weak when he sees the tears flowing from her beautiful eyes that he is even unable to console her. However, none of these 'attractive' attributes of the girl can any longer stop him from going for the historic struggle. The reasons for the greatness of this struggle are also mentioned in detail in the thirteen-stanza long poem. The pressure of the external reality about which the girl somehow seems completely ignorant and distant, forces him to leave her. Seeing the drastic changes in the society and the rays of hope 'how can we, the able youth sit idle in the darkness', he asks. (ibid: 117) This 'we' is not inclusive of the girl as there are two totally different words for both the 'we' that includes the listener (*nammal*) and the 'we' that excludes her (*njangal*). So the young men in world are supposed to unite now for a long list of reasons such as: gun-shots are heard from the war-front, a river of blood is flowing, treachery and loot is rampant, 'religion' and 'caste' is boisterous, humans falling with faded talent, poor burning in the fire of misery, the government is cruel

⁵³ *Dhanamillanjalla, manamillanjalla*

Kanivillanjalla kamanee nin

Kanakamohana thanuvanudinam

Ninavillanja – vediyunnen.

and the ignorant, greedy rulers are killing the people, the grief-stricken people are on their way, the hard-working and hungry workers are crying, the humiliated slaves are trying to break their chains and the fellow-people born in ignorance and difficulty are opening their eyes. (ibid. 116-8)

A large set of reasons are included here that compel the man/ poet to leave his easy life and join the war for a just and prosperous world. He must leave behind all other comforts in his life like his wealth and profession as a poet before confronting the hardest part in the sacrifice – his woman. It cannot be said that the woman does not have a place in the war-front as the poet in his concluding lines tell his beloved that she will have place in the battlefield once he is dead. Finally, he wants her to smile for him to show her courage and kiss him once for the last time so that he will be energized to fight till death.

The figure of the beloved is set in the backdrop to show the readers to the extent to which a communist activist has to sacrifice in order to become one. She has no moral agency to stop him and ask him to stay back nor does she have the right to join him in the battle. He stands on the moral high-ground to tell her that she is in fact a seductive obstacle to overcome just like all other comforts in the petty-bourgeois life. The (petty) bourgeois woman is a source of pleasure and comfort at best that can be afforded only in the peaceful times. Her tears are a spot of weakness for the man and her kiss is a re-energizing capsule.

Kedamangalam's description of the man-woman relation as far as the communist activist is concerned cannot be simply attributed to the dominant ideological currents of the period. In fact, this was the time when for the first time many women characters especially the ones in Thakazhi's, Lalitambika Antharjanam's and Basheer's works shook Malayalam with their unprecedented and unconventional existences. In their own spaces, whether urban or rural, and their own social locations whether petty bourgeois or working class, these women disturbed all the existing notions of femininity and morality. These authors produced such subversive writing only to be blamed by the communist critiques like M. S. Devadas. On the contrary, Kedamangalam's writing fell neatly within the boundaries of the progressive literature as configured by these critiques. One may argue that the only reason why the

communist critiques did not give as much praise to Kadamangalam as given to KPG was that Kadamangalam was hailed by Kesari Balakrishnapilla who belonged to the non-communist camp in the debate about progressive literature in that period.

Moreover, the manner in which Kadamangalam construes the figure of the communist activist resembles that of an ascetic personality than a political activist of a materialist ideology. The communist activist is seen as an extraordinary *man* with all his energies directed towards the single task of organization building. Our effort is not to evaluate the importance of organization building and selfless activism that was emphasized upon but to point towards the mechanisms that went into the making of a communist selfhood in the communist movement in Kerala, perhaps in India as well.

Cherukad in his *Shanidasha*, briefly though strongly puts his idea of being a communist in a situation of torture and repression, in Kunjukkutta Kurup's words.

If one has to live as a man, there is no other way in this world now, but to become a communist. My *shanidasha* will not end until the communist party has a good fortune. Otherwise, I should become a Congress person who is neither man nor woman. That will be my moment of death. (Pisharody 2010: 208)

The figure of the communist activist is presented as the most courageous and faithful man who cannot be defeated by threats or torture. They are extremely strong and determined. This figure is pitted against the figure of the petty landlord and cunning politician or corrupt police officer. There is a moral high ground erected for the communist as the manliest of men and heroic in character.

Thoppil Bhasi⁵⁴ in his well-known, hilarious memoirs *Olivile Ormakal* [Memories in Hiding] narrates a conversation and his thoughts around it that would illustrate this discussion further.

⁵⁴ Thoppil Bhasi (8 April, 1924 – 8 December, 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 most of the time from 1943 to 1953 and continued to carry out his political activities. Later he became part of Kerala People's Arts Club and wrote a large number of plays for the troupe. His autobiographical work *Olivile Ormakal* [Memories in Hiding] captures the turmoil through which the communist party was built in the Central Travancore region in these early years and many intimate aspects of being a communist in those days.

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. Puthuppalli⁵⁵ and I entered into an argument. In order to prove his point, Puthuppalli asked me: 'If a very beautiful woman comes to you when you are totally alone. All circumstances are in your 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 think of] '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 by 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 argues that the production of a self-styling 'ascetic masculinity' was central to the discourse of communist politics in West Bengal (also in India) since its inception and the figures of the communist activist were closer to those of the 'surveyor and sufferer', the 'heretic and priestly' and the 'confessor and performer'.⁵⁶

The 'excessive' interest in women meant a dissipation of the *seminal energy* that could be ideally used for the productive purposes of party organization. Moreover, these kinds of 'obsessions' are thought to be the reason for the degeneration of a man who is stuck at the base level of carnal pleasures. The revolutionary communist is someone who sacrifices these pleasures for the universal pleasure of being a revolutionary by overcoming one's body and instinctual desires. Besides, a communist need to be concerned about his public image as the model of exemplary moral characters only which gives him the power to maintain a hierarchical relationship with the ordinary masses.

⁵⁵ Puthuppalli Raghavan (1910-2000) was among the first generation communists in Kerala and founders of the communist movement in Travancore.

⁵⁶ See Rajarshi Dasgupta (2010) for a detailed discussion about the particular discourses and practices that went into the making of what he calls the 'ascetic masculine self' of the communist activist in the communist movement in colonial Bengal.

Bhasi's is an interesting example as he was alienated from the party circles when he became an established writer. As he began to publish more and more works and earning remuneration (many of his plays, written for the Kerala People's Arts Club (henceforth KPAC) were later made into films) he was branded by many of his comrades as indulging in petty bourgeois comforts and making money. When he started building a house of his own he was severely criticized (mostly unofficially but also officially in local level committees etc.) by many communists as giving in to petty bourgeois deviation. Towards the end of his memoirs Bhasi writes a touching response about such criticisms:

I yearn to live in this world with maximum comforts. I wish all human beings could live with all comforts. Even if I could not witness it, I believe that at some point the entire humanity will live with maximum amenities... I want to finish the roof of my new house before monsoon... If I can I want to build a bungalow at some point. I want to buy a television set also... You might ask why I am describing these insignificant things. It is because I feel hurt. I am not getting into its details now. But, I wonder – a communist cannot build a house in the whole world? (Bhasi 2010:291-2)

This is a unique case in the early communist movement as such candid expressions are rarely written by communist leaders. In the contemporary scene of communist politics in Kerala, the most heated debates take place around these themes of the moral integrity of the communist self like simple living, selfless dedication, lack of 'private affairs' as different from their public lives etc. and the 'degeneration' of the communist politics is easily correlated with the erosion of these values.

More often than not, the vigorous criticisms against such 'individualist' and 'careerist' tendencies shown by the communist activist comes from a similar petty-bourgeois moralist tendencies of the activists for instance, in the case of communist literary critics who were shocked at the frank and raw manner of writing of the progressivists.

➤ **‘Making a Communist’: Story of an Impossible Embrace**

This section tries to elaborate another aspect of the question of the making of the communist self, now in the context of an old, conservative upper caste person as against the young, educated communist activist in the earlier section. Here we will discuss a particular piece of drama written by Thoppil Bhasi called *Ningalenne Communistakki* [You Made Me Communist] regarding the idea of transformation undergone by a poor upper caste person in becoming a communist. *Ningalenne Communistakki* (henceforth *NC*) written by Thoppil Bhasi was written in 1952 when Bhasi was imprisoned and published under the pseudonym Soman. This play was staged by the newly formed theatre group called Kerala People’s Art Club (KPAC) and later became the hallmark of the communist cultural initiatives in Kerala. We will briefly discuss the history of Malayalam drama in the next chapter along with the discussion of another communist play called *Paattabaakki*.

NC was appraised by the critics for its realistic representation of the peasant and working class life in the central Travancore region to where Bhasi belonged and worked with the party. The profit from the publication of *NC* was to be used in defending the prisoners of the ‘Shooranad case’⁵⁷ including Thoppil Bhasi. Vallikkavu Mohandas in his comprehensive history of the KPAC argues that *NC* was the foremost play in Malayalam that carried a red flag in it and was submitted to the memory of the martyrs of any political struggle. (Mohandas 2009:63)

Before reading the drama, let us briefly introduce the drama group that staged *NC*. KPAC was formed in 1950 from the initiatives of a group of student activists of the communist party, but its formation did not take place directly under the guidance of the party. Their first play was *Ente Makananu Sheri* [My Son is Right] that dealt with the theme of the democratic struggle in Travancore against the autocratic rule of the

⁵⁷ Shooranad 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 an inspector were killed and a large number of communist activists were savagely thrashed and killed. Thoppil Bhasi was one of the accused in this murder of the policemen and was absconding since the incident. He was later arrested and imprisoned. The case came to be known as the Shooranad case.

Divan Sir C P Ramaswamy Iyer. The father in the story (the head of a Nair household) disowns his son for taking part in the student movement against Divan initially. But later once he realized the cruel and oppressive nature of the rule he proclaims that his son was right. The first performance took place in Chavara in Kollam district on 6th August, 1952. The performance was inaugurated by a then well-known progressive writer D.M. Pottakkad. *NC* transformed KPAC from an amateur cultural initiative to a busy professional movement as argued by Mohandas. Although within a couple of months the play was banned by the Congress government the audience provided the security to the performers throughout the performances defying the ban. The text that is now available as *NC* was produced as a result of the serious engagement between the writer, the performers and technical persons and the audience.

This is a narrative of a transformation, of becoming a communist of a person through his experiences as the *karanavar* (patriarch of the Nair *tharavad*) of a decayed and impoverished Nair household in Central Travancore in the middle of the twentieth century. Paramupilla belongs to an erstwhile powerful Nair *tharavad* whose *karanavar* used to be the landlords of the entire region. He is portrayed as clinging on to the legacy of his great uncle and his *tharavad* as sites of past richness and power. Paramupilla's *tharavad* has become a small nuclear family by then, comprising of his wife, Kalyaniamma, educated son, Gopalan and a school-going daughter Meenakshi. They own a small tract of paddy field and a house plot with some coconut palms. This family epitomizes a major section of the upper caste households in Kerala that was substantially impoverished and destroyed at the turn of this century as a result of new land legislations, commercialized agriculture, reformed family and inheritance laws etc. that rendered the matrilineal *tharavad* systems unviable.

As Dilip Menon argues, a considerable section of the leaders of the socialist and later communist party came from this social group who were economically weak but gained the benefits of modern English education and culture. (Menon 1994: 130) Even though Menon is discussing this in the backdrop of the emergence of the communist party in Malabar, Paramupilla's son Gopalan belongs to the same group in Travancore who hailed from upper caste middle class families with a certain level of cultural capital. Paramupilla vehemently opposes Gopalan's involvement in the

Karshaka Sangham (Peasants' Union) of the communist party and urges him not to enter into fights with the local *janmi* Kesavan Nair. There are hardly any long-stretched dialogues on the ideology of Marxism or the importance of organized struggle through Marxism in contrast to *Paattabaakki*. The Pulaya agricultural labourers in the play are already mobilized into the folds of the *Karshaka Sangham*. Karamban Pulayan and his daughter Mala are already aware of the issues of exploitation and oppression they suffer as 'untouchable' labourers.

It is Paramupilla who needs to be transformed and be made a communist through the progress of the play. Paramupilla realizes the relevance and truth in the ideology of class conflict and leaves his caste and community solidarity aside to become a communist. He used to feel close to Kesavan Nair as they are both Nairs. But once he was cheated by Kesavan Nair by forging a fake document against him in order to confiscate his house and plot Paramupilla rethinks about this caste-based association. Kesavan Nair also beats up Gopalan brutally for falling in love with his daughter Sumam. On the other hand, Pulaya labourers including Mala and Karamban safeguarded his son and supported them through these difficult times. These incidents made Paramupilla realize the hollowness of the community sentiment and caste discrimination. In the end, probably what touches the reader more than Paramupilla holding the red flag is Paramupilla embracing Karamban, a Pulayan who used to be an untouchable for Paramupilla till then. Even though this part of Paramupilla's transformation is subsumed under his 'becoming of a communist' in the particular caste/power configuration of the region in the 1950s (and even today) the former aspect needs to be emphasized more, it seems.

Paramupilla had refused to enter into Karamban's hut when he went to visit injured Gopalan and his principles of untouchability kept on upsetting him. But when he was convinced about the commitment showed by Karamban, Mala and other labourers in safeguarding Gopalan, their anger against Kesavan Nair and the attempt to take revenge, made Paramupilla rethink about the notion of community he had identified with. He disowns (at least seemingly) his caste-based notion of community and his belongingness in the upper caste Nair community and begins to share the socialist imagination of a class-based community where he is located with the 'have-nots'. One could argue that the idea of becoming of a communist necessarily involves this

transformation as well in terms of identifying oneself with the labouring class. However, in Paramupilla's case, this becoming was not a result of any transcendental realization about the truth of dialectical or historical materialism or any theory for that matter. He became a communist *because of*, not despite his experiences unlike the intellectual vanguard who has to transcend their middle-class affiliations and petty bourgeois baggage and declass themselves. For them, taking shelter in *pulamadam* (Pulaya hut) and sharing the food (or hunger) would be easier as it involves an entire process of theoretical and practical engagements.

Nevertheless, the more difficult part for Paramupilla in this process was to throw away his privileged caste-position and deep-rooted ideology of caste-hierarchy and untouchability. As the *karanavar* of the degenerated and poverty-stricken household, a victim of the cunningness of a rich landlord and moneylender and the father of Gopalan who was brutally hurt by the same landlord, Paramupilla could have understood the need to join the *Karshaka Sangham* and fight for the rights of the poor peasants. In real instances, the communist transformation of the upper caste households ended precisely there without requiring themselves to review their caste-based ideology. This is clear from the recent Dalit critiques of the communist party that allowed the majority of the Kerala society to vote for the communist party and take party membership without radically transforming the language of caste in the society. The 'language of class' provided an easy way out in regions like Kerala and West Bengal to subsume the varied traditional languages of caste, religion, community that remained active and powerful underneath the superficial parlance of class.

In this context, Paramupilla's becoming (*aakal*) of a communist not just by joining the *Karshaka Sangham* with fellow-peasants but by embracing Karamban breaking the generation-old norms of shaping caste-ridden bodies, remains a dream even today. The caste-based matrimonial advertisements and strengthening of reactionary community policing along with the dalit assertions for 'cultivable land' that never reached the 'actual tiller' testify the 'unrealistic' nature of Paramupilla's times and 'becoming'.

‘Fall as Rise’ in Progressive Aesthetics: The Question of Real Freedom

Now let us look at a peculiar imagination of the idea of social-intellectual freedom of the human beings as seen in some of the progressive works of the period. Here, we would focus on the question of artistic freedom in relation to the concept of art as labour. The Biblical imagination of the fall from paradise as a result of the exposure to carnal knowledge has been an important point of inversion for communist aesthetics of earlier times. In the theological perspective, it is a fall from grace and divinity whereupon the pure, divine existence of the first man and woman is dirtied by impure matter i.e. their bodies. The materiality of the flesh and blood intervenes into and disturbs their pure and perfect existence in the paradise. The question of *embodiment* is crucial in any re-reading of the Biblical story as the decisive step towards the fall was the realization of the man and woman about their bodies; this embodied existence was a sin in itself to be thrown out of the heaven.

As far as the communist aesthetics is concerned, this idealist conceptualization of the human origin as induced by a fall is reversed by portraying the man and his development as beginning from the soil. The trajectory of the Hegelian spirit is questioned and an upward journey of human labour is brought back to the centre stage of history. The men with their bodies upright and hands endowed with the potential to produce become the movers of history, though with an occasional ambiguity about the burden history places on them. Here the story begins with the earth, the soil, the source of all that is there. The spirit of revolution is opposite to the spirit of the fall, as revolution proceeds from the earth to the heaven. Many communist poets imagined the turning of the wheels of time also as the evolution of human potential rooted in the soil but growing to embrace the bright tomorrow. The fall is in fact the rising up, a rising up from and against the ties of transcendental philosophy, of the ‘false consciousness’ of sustained by the hitherto keepers of knowledge.

On the one hand, this fall is cherished by the communist writers as the real beginning of a humanly existence, in flesh and blood, which will perish with time as against the immortality of the heavenly bodies. This aspect converged with the realist approach in its celebration of the muddy, soiled and hence real nature of human beings. The pious, god-fearing and striving-to-divinity-through-sacrifice ideal is smashed by these

‘writers of decadence’ who read the collapse of social values and established moral strictures as the basis of understanding the existing bourgeois society. On the other hand, a writer like KPG is using the fall of poetry from the echelons of high culture as the existence of the possibility of creating a proletarian culture anew. Fall became the real rise, as the real human beings of the future i.e. the labourers reside here at the bottom. Then, by her fall, poetry reaches her real subjects as well as owners and hence realizes her ordained function.

The metaphor of the fall is used here to denote the essential and inevitable destruction of the graciousness of the arts, where only the rich and the powerful could be both the subjects and the objects. The ‘halo’ had to be lost in the muddy pathway for the writer to be able to see the world in its real colors.

Poetry, the most beautiful bride
 Whose abode is Ivory Tower
 Is brought to this plain land
 By me the poet to serve Labour...
 Even though you are fed with honey in cage
 You longed for wild fruits.
 You garlanded him as partner,
 The courageous one,
 Who gave you the freedom.⁵⁸ (Namboodiri 1974: 168-9)

⁵⁸ *Dantagopure vaanora sarvaanga-*

Sundariyaam kavitaavadhooitiye

Hanta!yikkavi velaykku thozhiyay

Mannilekkingirakki nirtheetave

Koottilethra madhu chorinjeedilum

Kaattilekkani mohichu nee shubhe

Aararulee ninakka vimochanam

Dheeranaakumavane varichu nee.

The assurance of freedom makes the decision of poetry to choose labour as her partner seem natural and ideal to the poet.

On the one hand, KPG is applauding the idea that freedom is the cardinal requirement of art with the liberal-progressive camp in the movement at that period. Everything else becomes futile if the poetry cannot realize the natural freedom like that of a bird to fly high. On the other, freedom is realized when she is brought down and tied knot to the labour who is the 'son of the earth'. She first has to realize her '*shakti*' (strength) and '*mukti*' (liberation) in him. The union with labour offered her final liberation and it seems like a natural union. KPG attempts to establish an organic connection between the communist ideology (here through the motif of labour being the bride-groom) and freedom. Then Poetry has to sing Labour's and his fellow men's tale where lies her today's joy (*aanandam*) as opposed to the earlier conceptions of delight.

There are Indian mythologies also in which the idea of bringing something/someone down to earth has significant meanings. For instance, a Puranic character Bhageeratha had brought the heavenly river Ganga (that later was also known as Bhagirathi) down to the earth in order to complete the last rites of his ancestors. In a similar but related story is seen in Bhagavatha where Krishnan's brother Balaraman, dragged Kalindi River from its wild path to the plains in order to irrigate the fields. This myth is used by Vailoppilli in one his poems namely *Jalasechanam* [Irrigation] in his book *Sreerekha* published in 1950, to hail Balaraman as the king of agriculture who made the wild river productive. The river is a woman who was forcefully dragged by Balaraman by her hair with his plough to the plains. Then he constructed many streams out of her to water the fields. This is narrated in the poem as the first act of irrigation as cultivation was hitherto dependent upon the natural season of rains.

At one level, Vailoppilli is praising the technological advancement achieved by Balaraman by appropriating the natural resource of river into a means of production. This kind of technological innovation is the core of development of production processes as well as civilization. Moreover, the river leaving her comfortable and free-flowing path to the restricted or channelized routes needed for irrigation is in fact an essential step towards development. Balaraman justifies his action by saying that

one could not allow Kalindi to mix her water with the salt of the sea when the soil and people are dying of thirst. The poet says:

What a stature you gained,

The daughter of heaven

By becoming the handmaid of soil.⁵⁹ (Sreedharamenon 1984: 105)

The specific term '*cherumi*' used for handmaid is to be noted here as it denotes the labourer woman belonging to a particular Dalit sub-caste engaged in agricultural labour. So the fall from the heavenly free path has endowed the river with a rise in her stature as she now contributes her resources to the 'holy' process of production/cultivation. Thus, the contact with the impure, restrictive soil of reality has actually elevated the river in her existence by making her productive. The questions of freedom, planning, technology, productivity and development are related here to the question of the progress of civilization.

The conceptions of freedom are different in KPG and Vailoppilli as far as these two poems are concerned. In KPG *Kavitha* marries *Vela* in order to realize her real/natural freedom. She was hitherto kept in the cage of conservative and regressive approaches from which she is finally freed by labour. The poetry was yearning to fly freely in the sky and taste the fruits of wild like a caged bird. Hence, he assumes an essential and natural association between freedom of creativity and the labour-oriented aesthetics. But in Vailoppilli the river that was flowing freely and wildly is forcefully brought to the mundane and restrictive use of irrigation. The poet is not making any natural association between freedom and creativity. On the contrary for Vailoppilli, creation is *always and already* production that has to be planned and implemented artificially. Hence, art involves artifice as against the romantic idea of original or pure art. The idea of unmediated and conscious flow of freedom and creativity is no longer cherished. These two ideas of freedom and their tussle are constantly present in communist aesthetics. KPG's poetry is elevated by the fall as it realizes something natural to it, whereas Vailoppilli's dragging of the river is to fulfill a larger scientific logic of development and progress.

⁵⁹ *Paarinte dasi cherumiyay pokayal*

Sooraje neeyenthuyarcha nedi.

We have already discussed EMS' arguments about the need for planning in literature as to produce more and more committed literature in a comprehensive manner. He also relates this discussion to the democratization of literature whereby the process of planning and its open discussions about the activity of writing and exact things to be written would enable more and more 'ordinary people's participation' in it. As we saw there, ordinary people could be the door through which the party ideologues could enter and control the process of literary production. However, the history of Malayalam poetry shows us another process of democratization that did not come out of planning and channelizing potential but through the opening up of the realm of 'words' to more and more people in a substantial manner. The purity of art was rejected by the entry of 'impure' lower castes and out-castes to the world of letters and the structure of language and literature changed along with its content or expression.

Even before the progressives came to the scene, Kumaran Asan and Vallathol Narayana Menon had initiated the usage of Dravidian metres and styles. All this has in turn contributed to the intensification of the process of democratization of poetry. "From time to moment, from the *kavya* language to colloquial language, from rigidly bound verses to free flowing prose, from closed forms to open and flexible ones: more or less this has been the trajectory of Malayalam poetry in the post-independence era". (Sachidanandan 2007: xvii) K. Sachidanandan writes that this process of democratization of poetry is like the 'loosing of the halo' by the poet in Charles Baudelaire's poem whereby the poet could transgress the institutionally given spaces of poetry into the streets of ordinary lives. He also calls it a process of humanization of poetry that went against the elevation of poetry and poet to immortal heights by bringing in everything, even those hitherto considered impure and undeserving of poetic attention to the purview of poetry.⁶⁰ (ibid.)

⁶⁰ Pablo Neruda's conception of 'impure poetry' could be read along with this discussion.

...The used surfaces of things, the wear that the hands give to things, the air, tragic at times, pathetic at others, of such things---all lend a curious attractiveness to the reality of the world that should not be underpriced. In them one sees the confused impurity of the human condition, the massing of things, the use and disuse of substance, footprints and fingerprints, the abiding presence of the human engulfing all artifacts, inside and out. Let that be the poetry we search for: worn with the hand's obligations, as by acids, steeped in sweat and in smoke, smelling of the lilies and

Hence, the idea of the ‘organized planning’ needs to be reconsidered in the light of the transgressive and subversive events in history that have led to the democratization of arts and literature in a substantive way. The relations between freedom and creativity, art and technology and nature, labour and progress were re-visited in the above discussion and in the following section we will look at the progressive impulse regarding history as a means to approach memories in a scientific manner as well as a method of rethinking about writing fiction.

History as/in Fiction: The Progressive Writer as the Historian

As we discussed in the first chapter, the debates that took place around the question of progressive literature in Malayalam from the late 1930s onwards, managed to produce a particular historical apparatus that imagined the history of modern Kerala as part of a ‘Great Dialectics’ of modern history of the world. The epistemological underpinnings of this apparatus had in turn developed a vernacular reading and ‘using’ of Marxism that was in conversation with, but not entirely a derivative of other experiences of Marxism like the Soviet Marxism or the British Marxism. Here, we would briefly talk about certain specific instances in the production and manipulation of this vernacular historical apparatus in some of the creative literary works produced around the same period out of the progressive movement.

All along our discussion, the period under consideration and its peculiar trajectories of socio-cultural, political-economic transformations has been the single most important backdrop. The all-encompassing nature of these changes forced the emerging writers to think about it, in terms of a moment of crisis that had the potential to unleash drastic shifts in all walks of the Malayali life. Understanding these changes and responding to them at the right moment was a significant aspect of their writing, which in turn forced them to undertake a detailed *documentation* of these events in the most *realistic* manner possible. Thus, journalism was central to the literary activities of this period and writers like Kesari Balakrishnapilla were eminent and subversive journalists too.

urine, spattered diversely by the trades that we live by, inside the law or beyond it.
(Neruda 1991: xxi-xxii)

The journalistic impulse of this period influenced creative writing also where the writers tried to apply realism in its literal sense to literature regarding recording and documenting the changing society in its entirety. Many writers claimed that their attempt was in fact ‘documenting’ changes in as large a span as possible in the most representational manner so that the new readership would be introduced to these events. This, they thought would inspire the masses to fight with tradition and have a fruitful engagement with modernity. These writers talked about ‘real people’ living their ‘real lives’ coping with the circumstances of ‘real change’. The communist imagination nurtured an unprecedented recording impulse among the writers both in terms of literature as well as journalism. EMS in one of his articles answering questions about the entry of ‘non-Writers’ to the progressive literature debate wrote that just like short story, novel or poetry, scientific articles or journalistic pieces were eligible to be part of ‘literature’ as the underlying effort of all these writings was to *represent reality* though may be in different *forms*. (Namboodiripad 1974: 27-9)

However, apart from such explicit efforts at documenting and recording historical events, the progressive writers wrote like historians at a deeper level also. The time-space axes of the past, present and future were reconfigured by some of the progressive writers as to incorporate certain historical insights into their literary works. These works compelled the readers to imagine themselves as active agents of history by opening up a new relation between the past, present and the future. Let us discuss a few instances where the progressive works performed the task of laying out new ‘truths’ about the history of the modern Malayali that may not have been already taken place in the past or taking place in the present; but a history of a tomorrow that had already arrived.

Kedamangalam Pappukkutty’s *Kadathuvanchi* [Ferryboat] was a much discussed poem in the period of the progressive movement. The use of symbolism by a realist progressive writer was received by the scholarly readership with much caution as it was considered to be an old style used by the mystic poets like G. Sankara Kurup. Kurup was considered to epitomize the mystic style in modern Malayalam poetry even though he has engaged with nationalist and socialist themes as well in a significant manner. EMS believed that the later poets like KPG and Kedamangalam were rescued by the progressive literary movement from the ‘corrupting’ influence of

poets like Kurup. The obscure symbolic nature of *Kadathuvanchi* was considered to be a serious deficiency by Kesari as well because he believed that such ‘difficult’ and ‘dense’ style was not appropriate for a poem written for the ordinary masses. The poem is composed in the rhythm of a particular folk music style called ‘*Kurathippatt*’ that is used by *kurathi* who is a local female fortuneteller.

In the poem, the ferryboat is the symbol of a vanguard party that would take the people to the new land of equality and prosperity. It has to be rowed by numerous people. The bank on which the people are standing is the ‘land of hell’ that symbolizes the present society. The commander of the boat, who is the leader of this revolutionary journey, sings the following lines:

Hurry and join the ferry

Without any worry.⁶¹ (Pappukkutty 2001: 96)

These lines are repeated after every stanza of the poem giving it certain musicality. The river flows connecting two banks that symbolize the two epochs in history; the present era of feudal-capitalist exploitation and the communist era of tomorrow that has to be reached through a revolutionary transformation of the former. The ferry is the means by which the people could reach the ‘promised land’ only if the people can row it against all adverse circumstances. The river has a turbulent flow and many dangerous creatures living in it.

One of the most important features of this poem is its conception of historical time and space regarding the juxtaposition of the present social order to the imagined future society as two sides of a river. Exemplifying the historical and epistemological apparatuses produced by the debates within the early *jeewal sahitya* and later progressive literary debates, Kadamangalam reproduced the grand dialectical reading of the present, past and future times and more importantly spaces. Kesari argued that the river in *Kadathuvanchi* is also the figure that indicates the Romanticist school of poetry that was anachronistic in nature.

The river smiled,

⁶¹ *Madichu nilkkathe kuthichu chadiyee*

Kadathuvanchiyil kerin.

That glorifies the past

Blind and arrogant

And flowed in the middle.⁶² (Pappukkutty 2001: 96)

The river could be representing the traditional conception of time and space that keeps us away from the glorious future time. The 'blind' and 'arrogant' river is arrogant/confident about nothing but its apparent universality and invincibility and blind/ignorant about its inevitable defeat at the hands of an inevitable force that may not be in existence at the moment.

History is a constant flow of time that carries with it all the vices of all ages from the slave age to the present capitalist one. The most dangerous vice among them is the idea that the flow has to exist forever barring us from entering into the Promised Land. There is a particular manner in which the poet lays out the topography of the present historical moment. It closely communicates with the epical notions of heaven and hell that are separated by a tumultuous and mysterious river. Many of Indian and Greek epic stories have images of interfaces between the human world and the afterworlds whether it is heaven or hell. Here, the human world and hell are synonymous and it faces the heaven on the other bank of the river. The only point of connection is the boat and the boatman who is urging the people to join him. The *topos* is thus familiar to the common readers who have at least heard about such traditional themes from epics.

Another instance of the progressive writer re-visiting the existing readings of history can be seen in Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's early works. Udaya Kumar contends that the early stories by Basheer have a radically different approach to history; as against the monumentalizing tendency of mainstream historiography the characters in

⁶²*Aa nadi naduvaloode*

Phenahasam thooki

Bhoothakala bhoothi vaazhthum

Neethivaadam pole

Andhamaayahangarichi-

Ttarthirambi paanju.

Shabdangal [Voices] for instance, witness and testify their narrative with the most intimate bodily markers. The exteriorized authenticity of huge and eternal monuments is challenged by the singularity and active agency of the testifying witness. Udaya Kumar argues “In *Shabdangal* the discharged soldier appears, anonymous and indistinct in appearance, as a testimonial voice, addressing a writer who records that testimony to produce the literary text presented before the readers. Basheer’s world is full of “characters who testify with their lives.” The monuments are ‘sacralized fetishes’ and complete and meaningful in themselves in Basheer where as the ‘traumatic objects’ can present only the fragmented and ambivalent testimonies of spaces and times. (Kumar 2005: 308)

‘Are there any creatures in moon?’

‘Scientists say there is nothing in the moon. They have understood it as a dead world.’

‘Then what about stars?’

‘There might be creatures in some, they say. After a long time...that is, in an old time in the future, what all will happen? In an old time, before crores and crores of years, there was nothing.’ (Basheer 1994: 438)

The conception of historical time is complicated in *Shabdangal*. There is ambivalence in the intelligibility of the relation between past, present and future in terms of a human being’s capacity. The diverse plains and moments through which one experiences the events complicate the ordinary space and chronological time in which one otherwise live. The effort is not to render everything intelligible and familiar so as to aid some large historical narrative such as the dialectical materialist one of Marxism. Rather, Basheer tries to retain the complexity of historical events as layered and haphazard that does not allow the reader to imagine a linear flow or narrative.

Literature as Science: Reason against Superstition and False Consciousness

Now let us come to the last section of the chapter that discusses the impulse in the progressive writing of producing ‘scientific’ accounts through writing in order to assist the larger process of inculcating the modern scientific temperament among the masses. In the previous chapter we discussed EMS’ argument about ‘literature’

becoming convergent with science and all other scholarly endeavors. This issue came up repeatedly in the reading of these creative literary pieces in two different ways. Firstly, science had a great role to be played in the communist movement as Marxism was introduced as the most scientific approach to life and all its domains. It had a pedagogic aspect that was conflated with the need for ideological dominance and was deployed in literature to raise the class consciousness of the masses.

Secondly, the principles of science i.e. observation, neutrality, rationality and systematic enquiry were to be applied to literature by the writers to eliminate the ‘false consciousness’ of religious faith and superstition among the masses. These were the remnants from a feudal past that had to be thrown away in order to build a new society based on rationality.⁶³

While discussing the scientific spirit of the progressive literature, Kesari argued that Kedamangalam Pappukkutty showed a *scientist’s observation* towards the issue of class exploitation and applied the logical consistency of scientific thinking to poetry writing.

Don’t stare at the god,
Nor you blame the fate.
Whose fault that [we] lurk in the darkness
Even while holding the torchlight?
Whose fault that we don’t rule the world
While we can create a heaven itself.
You fight with the world everyday
Open your eyes to its reason now.⁶⁴ (Pappukkutty 2001: 95)

⁶³ However, there are numerous studies about the manner in which the system of religious faith was supplanted by the system of faith in Marxism as a science. We do not intend to bring that into our present discussion. See for instance, Boli, John. “Marxism as World Religion.” *Social Problems* 28, no. 5 (June 1981): 510-513. Zuo, Jiping. “Political Religion: The Case of the Cultural Revolution in China.” *Sociological Analysis* 52, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 99-110. Zeldin, Mary-Barbara. “The Religious Nature of Russian Marxism.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 100-111.

⁶⁴ *Daivatheyaaarum thurichunokkendithil*

Durvidhiyennu paranjozhiiyendithu.

For Kesari, if literature could teach people philosophical thinking it would be able to impart the essence of scientificity also to them. Thus, the central aim of the progressive literature movement was to educate the ordinary masses not just about the socio-political situation and the need for transformation but to adopt scientific approach to life in general.

Thakazhi on the other hand, took a position against the excessive scientificity demanded of a writer and said superstition is good if it can sustain a moral value. He argued that one cannot see everything through the lens of science because then no relationship could be special and everything would be ordinary and uninteresting. In Thakazhi's writings, the indigenous responses to modern dilemmas and its puzzles were given significance. For instance, in his novel *Thottiyude Makan*,⁶⁵ there is a description of the epidemic of small pox affecting the entire town. Small pox is considered as being created by the goddess Kali and many traditional *pujas* and prayers are carried out in Kali temples as small pox was spreading. In another instance, the epidemic of cholera attacks the town and 'nobody knew what it was due to'. The people were clueless as numerous lives were claimed by it every day in the Municipality. Alappuzha is surrounded by saline lakes and full of canals, and streams and other water bodies. This exasperated the spread of cholera and deaths. After a point, people began to attribute cholera also to the goddess and started prayers and giving donations to the temple.

Kathunna panthangal kaiyilirikkilum

Thappunniruttathitharude kuttamam?

Naakam rachikkuvan kelparnna nammalee

Lokam bharikkaathathaarude kuttamam?

Mannodu nithyam poruthum Sakhakkale!

Kannuthurannithin kaaranam kaanuvin!

⁶⁵ *Thottiyude Makan* will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Thotti *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. Mostly they came from the Dalit communities in Tamilnadu and were engaged in the job generation after generation. In his translation of *Thottiyude Makan*, R. E. Asher 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.

Thakazhi's works neither mock at the way people depended on tradition nor does he hail the modern scientific temper as the ideal spirit. He, in fact, writes that both the hospitals and temples could not save the poor. When Ammu, the wife of a *thotti* called Suntharam, was affected by small pox, Chudalamuthu (the protagonist in the novel) cunningly sends her to hospital even though she refused to leave her home. Chudalamuthu was cursed by the rest of the *thottis* and even his wife Valli as they all believed that once a patient is taken to the hospital she will die. Thakazhi does not moralize the *thottis* for their 'superstition', rather sympathizes with them.

On the contrary for Cherukad, the efforts to demystify the superstitions were an important component of his writing. The belief in astrology and the fear for supernatural elements like the ghosts and 'local devils' was made fun of and declared unscientific and baseless through the systematic revealing of their secrets. Thus, the scary sounds from the attic turns out to be rats running around and the stone pelting at night by a devil was done by a crooked neighbor in order to disturb the family.

This discussion about scientific spirit and superstition leads to a larger Marxist dilemma about the nature of ideology and its relation vis-à-vis science. In the traditional Marxist understanding, false consciousness of the masses is something that needs to be removed through counter-ideological intervention by the communists. This dilemma surfaces in the progressive literature in many forms. The questions of caste and class oppression and the inability of the oppressed to 'realize' the nature of this oppression and rise beyond it remained an important concern for some of the writers. Moreover, the role of the writer was imagined in accordance with this concern, where the writer would act as a teacher who imparts the knowledge about these 'realities' and inspire people to transform it.

For instance, according to Kadamangalam the only reason why this river remained insurmountable until now is this hegemonic notion of its mysterious strength that could grab the passengers into its depths. Kesari, in his foreword to the work wrote that the images of the octopus, shark and the crocodile symbolize the tempting power of money, the coercive apparatus of law and the greedy capitalist class respectively. There are many things in the river that would tempt one to touch the water or sleep off

during the journey. Thus the ideological temptation has to be attacked and destroyed by the leader of the voyage with his inspiring words.

The 'boatman' (*kadathukaran*) laughed and told the panicking crowd:

We are not wretched
 When we are united
 Our sorrow will fly
 When we unify.
 What to lose comrades
 More than the chain of bondage?
 To gain, all the riches
 We ever desired.
 Fear not!
 Leap and swim and enter the boat
 Let's row together
 And reach the shore, merrily.⁶⁶ (Pappukkutty 2001: 97-8)

⁶⁶ *Ezhakalallothuninnal*

Thozharkale nammal,

Sanghatichidum nimisham

Sangadam parakkum.

Nashtamaavathenthu dasya-

Mitta vilangenye

Kittuvatho naam kothikkum

Pushtasaukhya bhagyam.

Pedi venda chadi neenthi il

Otiyil karerin!

Othuthuzhanjakkarayi-

lethitam sukhathil - "

The 'leader' reassures the masses and inspires them to join the grand voyage from the existing 'hell-like' order of things to the 'plain' of future. The future society is imagined as a plain in all its literal meanings. It has neither poor, nor rich; neither prosperity nor poverty. More interestingly, this plain does not have human/ animal distinction as well. The leader/ vanguard/ intellectual invite the masses to join the struggle to achieve such a future. Nevertheless, as the first step, they should be taken out of the false consciousness about their weakness, divine meanings and faith in destiny and this job falls to the sphere of literature. Thus, the connection both EMS and Kesari made in the previous chapter between writing science and writing literature in upgrading the scientific temperament in the society is 'used' by writers like KPG, Kadamangalam and Cherukad in making literature a scientific discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed a variety of themes that could be collectively configured as the matrix of the specific modernity that was at the same time produced and in turn was produced by the progressive literature movement in Malayalam. This engagement follows a number of earlier encounters with modernity both in the social and literary spaces of Kerala such as the missionary endeavors, social reform movements and the emergence of the early social novel in Malayalam. Progressive writers through their diverse approaches to an array of themes like love, marriage, morality and family attempted to re-configure the 'social' of Malayalam. The social relations were revised in the light of many influences both literary and social and all relationships and their meanings were reinterpreted.

The communist poets and prose writers, for instance, stressed on the re-conceptualization of love as the transcendental and sacrificial feeling that enables human beings to think at the 'universal' level whereas a poet like Vailoppilli expressed the (im)possibility of such a puritan and idealistic feeling by complicating it with issues of caste and patriarchy.

All these writers tried to grapple with the transformations their times and spaces were undergoing and to represent these material, emotional and intellectual experiences in

their writings. Love, camaraderie, conjugality and familial relations were 'modernized' in myriad ways so as to write the 'modern social' for Kerala in Malayalam and this (re)writing had been central to the intellectual history of communist movement as well as that of the region itself. The questions of freedom and creativity and history in fiction and the emphasis on literature approaching its objects scientifically were discussed in this chapter.

Now we will proceed to the next chapter that would take our discussion to a more specific dimension of the larger concern. In Chapter Three, we will look at the categories of labour, labourer, labouring class and political economy as took shape in the progressive writing of this period. The major methods and modes of this representation and its relation to the discourse on the theoretical questions of politics and literature as discussed in Chapter One will be explored here in more detail in the context of particular instances of progressive writing.

In the following chapter we will focus more specifically on the issue of labour and labourer regarding the manners in which they are re-presented in the progressive literature of the period. The above discussion will contextualize Chapter Three in the modern social matrix with which the progressive movement engaged in many diverse ways.

Chapter Three

The Labour of Literature: Representations of '*Thozhil*' in Malayalam Progressive Writing

It is true that labour produces wonderful things for the rich – but for the worker it produces privation... It produces beauty – but for the worker, deformity... It produces intelligence – but for the worker, stupidity, cretinism. (Marx 1975: 275)

Now, art is not man's creation, it is a product (and the producer is not a subject centered in his creation, he is an element in a situation or a system): different – in being a product – from religion... Before disposing these works... men have to produce them, not by magic, but a real labour of production. If man creates man, the artist produces works, in determinate conditions; ... All speculation over man the creator is intended to eliminate a real knowledge: the 'creative process' is, precisely, not a process, a labour. (Macherey 2006: 77)

Introduction

The central concern of this dissertation is mapping out the various ways in which a particular communist ideological discourse was produced by the engagements between the communist party intellectuals and the progressive literature movement in Malayalam. A nuanced and heterogeneous process of 'translation' of Marxist philosophy had occurred in this period at the linguistic and conceptual levels. In Chapter One we discussed the ideological discourse produced by the progressive literature movement in the *Jeeval Sahitya Sangham* and *Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana* and the different manners in which E. M. S. Namboodiripad and others in the debate laid out certain fresh aesthetic and epistemological apparatus for the production of progressive literature in Malayalam and in Chapter Two we tried to trace the engagement of the progressive writers with the larger matrix of modernity in Malayalam. In this chapter, we will more specifically try to locate some of the new idioms and concepts being introduced by the progressive writers, like labour, labourer and labouring class.

Thozhil became the dominant word to talk about labour and associated terms were also developed like *thozhilali* and *thozhilali vargam* that respectively meant labourer and labouring class by at least partially displacing other usages like *vela*, *joli*, *pani* etc. that were used to denote different types of labour till then. Another terms used to denote labour that came to be associated with the intellectual discourses of communist politics were *adhwanam* or *prayathnam* both in other contexts signify toil or hard work. Throughout this work we will stick to *thozhil* because it had been used the most in the popular parlance.

The ways in which concepts like labour, labourer and laboring class are ‘imagined’ and ‘represented’ remain central to this inquiry as their formulation and understanding is reflected in the way all other concepts are conceived in Marxism. For instance, notions of love and marriage are to be understood differently by the communist writer in accordance with the differentiated understanding he possesses about the bourgeois classes and the working classes of the particular society.

Moreover, this literature was written about and for the working classes in order on the one hand to bring to the fore the real lives of the majority of the toiling masses and make their voice heard in the hitherto elitist domain of writing and on the other to raise their consciousnesses to the message of hope and optimism in bringing about progressive social change and inspire them to fight for it. Nevertheless, there were a number of particular methods and approaches to visualize and materialize the general idea of progressive literature as discussed in the earlier chapter. The furious debates within the *Jeeval Sahitya Sangham (JSS)* and *Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana (PSS)* was reciprocated in the sphere of creative writing and the mutual interaction of the discourse and practice of writing progressive literature radically revised modern Malayalam language and literature in an unprecedented fashion.

Now let us take up some of these issues in detail by looking at a selection of novels, short stories, poetry and drama produced by the progressive writers. The selection of the particular pieces as already mentioned in the previous chapter, is based on a number of factors like their reception at the time of their publication by the diverse readership, their location amongst the complete oeuvre produced by the respective

writers as a piece that can be considered paradigmatic and their relevance regarding the specific contours of our present study.

Some of the central questions of this chapter are as follows: what were the key mechanisms of representing labour and related categories in Malayalam progressive literature, how the debate in the *JSS* and *PSS* was reflected in the actual literary works, how were these writers engaging with Marxism and the available Marxist idioms in that period and how was this translation actualized through their writing. These questions give rise to another related set of problems: how were the epistemological and historical apparatus created by EMS, Kesari and others in the debate play out in these works and how did these writers perceive themselves as writers and represented themselves and their objects. The overarching concern would be to trace the manner in which the literature of labour(er) and the labour of literature were re-configured through the progressive writing in Malayalam and the role communist aesthetics, as it was being translated into Malayalam, played in this allocation.

Representing as if Redeeming: Dominant Communist Imaginations of the *Thozhilali*

Understanding different modes of re-presentation is the core idea in studying literature. Here, the central aim is to trace the dominant mechanisms through which the categories of labour, labourer and labouring class are represented in the progressive writing in Malayalam. A parallel effort will attempt to seek any less-dominant/ marginal methods adopted by some writers that may not conform to the dominant paradigm of representation.

Here we intend to argue that one of the dominant mechanisms is to show labour as hard toil by which the labourer is exploited and oppressed by the feudal and capitalist classes. There are numerous instances that describe the working class life as full of hard-work, misery and experiences of oppression and humiliation. Let us look at a few such moments in the corpus of progressive writing. K. P. G. Namboodiri in his

poem *Premam* (which have already discussed in detail in the previous chapter) describes the body and soul of the labouring class as follows:

With a soul that is soaked in the dust
 And burning with blistering sweat of this world
 With a body that is soiled with blood and sweat
 Of oppression and daily drudge
 With an instinct of revenge of the oppressed
 Branded as filthy ...⁶⁷ (Namboodiri 1974: 99)

Kedamangalam Pappukkutty in his poem '*Sakhakkale!*' [Comrades] writes in a similar manner:

Hey poor comrades! Sighing on the
 Banks of the depth of sorrow,
 Hey the selfless! Decaying are your lives
 Without food, rest and clothing.⁶⁸ (Pappukkutty 2001: 94)

There is an effort to inspire the toiling masses about the injustice and exploitation they suffer in the hands of the capitalist classes. The naturalist tendencies in the progressive discourse justified such descriptions of these images in the way they encountered it in the society. But the important question is the allocation of a particular ethical significance to this trope of the worker who is the image *par excellence* of the victim and in turn of an alienated human being, who needs to be *redeemed* from this miserable plight through external interventions including political organization and mobilization mediated through the party and ideological transformation mediated through arts and literature.

⁶⁷ The transliterated version of this poem is given in the previous chapter, page no

⁶⁸ *Kannerkayathin karaykkirunnepozhum*

Dandichu veerppidum sadhu sakhakkale!

Unnathurangathudukkathe jeevitham

Jeernikkum adhwanamarnna niswarthare!

A different structuring of the image of the *thozhilali/ thozhilali vargam* is also widespread in the progressive literary discourse. Here, the labourer is not the victim to be uplifted but a hero to be celebrated. His/her labour needs to be understood as the most fundamental activity that builds the world and moves the history forward. In *Velayum Kavithayum* [Poetry and Labour] KPG's depiction of labour is different from the earlier construction of labour as toil and labourer as *the* victim of oppression and exploitation. Here the muscular bridegroom, Labour and his ability to work hard are portrayed as the building blocks of the world. He is *the leader* of the whole production process and hence the conceptual anchor for communist aesthetics. This poem describes the image of a man who is labour itself whom the bride Poetry chooses to marry.

He is a leader of work ...nothing more,
 He has no illustrious lineage,
 Nor wealth; nor powerful relatives.
 Two powerful arms
 Are his sole possession
 And with that he never plunders
 But works hard and bold.
 You [poetry] vested the power and relief
 Of your life in him...⁶⁹ (Namboodiri 1974: 169-70)

Kedamangalam writes in a related manner:

⁶⁹ *Velathannude naayakanaanavan*

Vereyilla thanikkoru menmayum

Illa thellum kulaproudhi, swathuma-

Yilla, bandhamirukaramkondume

Nallapol prayatnippathinnenniye-

Yilla moham pidichuparipathil.

Kevalanaamavanile kandu nee

Jeevithathinte shaktiyum muktiyum.

By granting the riches to the world
 Aren't we accepting all the misery?
 By giving the meaning of freedom
 Aren't we embracing unfreedom? ...

How did the tough builders of the world
 Became eternal slaves? ...
 Whose fault that we don't rule the world
 While we can create a heaven itself.⁷⁰ (Pappukkutty 2001: 94-5)

The labouring class is considered as the creator of the wealth of the world while living without any share in these riches. This contradiction is shown as the basis on which they should realize the need to change the existing state of affairs and rise up to fight for the change. The structure of Kadamangalam's poem *Sakhakkale* is interesting for the manner in which it is neatly divided into three parts. The first section that addresses the comrades (the labourers) depicts all the miseries they suffer such as the never-ending anxiety of survival, pain of helplessness, the decay caused by hunger and starvation, the fragility of their bodies, and the propinquity of death due to severe oppression. In the second part, the poet maps out the irrational (dis)order of things epitomized by their poverty in the midst of all the wealth they produced. For him, labour is not only the *source* of all wealth and prosperity but also the *basis of* freedom, creativity and happiness. This idea is juxtaposed to the lives of the labouring class that is punctuated precisely by the lack of these things. The third section urges the comrades to sense this reality and realize their ability as well as duty to alter it.

⁷⁰ *Pushtasubhagyam jagathineki sada*

Kashtatha kaineetti vangukayalli naam

Paarinnu swatanthrya saaramekumbozhum

Paratanthryathe punarukayalli naam...

Vishwathe vaarkkum sushaktharinnengane

Shashwatha dasya nukathinnadiyilay?

Naakam rachikkuvan kelpparnna nammalee

Lokam bharikkathatharude kuttamam?

Here both these means of representations come together in forming their logical connection whereby the victimized status and associated alienation of the labourer is due to the ideological hegemony of the dominant class over the labouring class.

Another instance is Vailoppilli's poem called *Malathurakkal* [Mountain Drilling] in *Sreerekha* published in 1950 regarding the new questions regarding labour; new kinds of works that were emerging and people trying to cope up with these changes in production relations. 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 part of a labourer-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'. (Sreedharamenon 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 be melted in our sweat?
What a task they have given us
The leaders, trying to make this land heaven!⁷¹ (ibid: 130)

⁷¹ *Nettiverppilurukuvan uppim-*

Kattayo kulaparvatha kootam.

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 in whatever troubles may come. *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.

Can Ambivalence be Progressive? Reading Vailoppilli’s *Kudiyozhikkal*

Kudiyozhikkal [Displacement] is a long poem written by Vailoppilli Sreedharamenon that consists of five hundred and thirty two lines and divided into seven sections. We do not wish to undertake an analysis of it in any manner that would be even remotely complete or comprehensive. The attempt will be to track down some of the tropes that are significant to this dissertation and see how certain imageries are produced and connected with others in order to understand Vailoppilli’s possible answers to some of our questions.

Kudiyozhikkal presents a different and more complex picture of the particular question of land-labour relations in Kerala. *Kudi* 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 *kudiyozhikkal* signifies the forced uprooting of the tenant/labourer from his house, by the landlord who is also his employer. It is written during the late 1940s and published in 1952. There is a complex narrative that’s unfolded in this piece centering on 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 working class. In the given context this question is further complicated by the enmeshing of class with caste as well as gender.

Since it is a long poem with many storylines it is important to briefly mention the different events as taking place in the poem before coming to the points I would like to delineate the poem in relation to the above mentioned issues. In *Kudiyozhikkal*, the protagonist, a poet and the male member of a wealthy landlord Nair family is disturbed by his drunken labourer/ *thozhilali* who 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 expulsion from his land if he does not change his drunken behavior. The labourer is scared and silently walks away. The very next moment onwards the poet is troubled by his conscience somehow realizing how he used his noble dominant status to ‘reform’ the labourer. The labourer comes back next evening, again drunk, and abuses the landlord and curses the women in the landlord family and the landlord household to be ruined. The poet again went to the drunken labourer and repeated his threat making him 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 poet’s labourer witnesses to one of their secret meetings and mocks at the girl for trusting him. The poet breaks the relation when he realizes that he cannot take it further unless he is willing to compromise his noble upper-caste position. He searches for all sorts of logics to justify his action. Yet, he is constantly haunted by an inner voice that mocks at his cowardice, hypocrisy and moralistic efforts of justification. This issue of the ‘inter-caste/class’ love in *Kudiyozhikkal* is already discussed in the previous chapter along with other instances of dealing with the question of love by the progressive writers.

In another incident the laborer’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 ‘magical-realist’ sort of an event of uprising by the labourers, a revolution, where he feels completely helpless, misunderstood and lonely. Among the masses, he notices his labourer and the labourer-girl whom he loved, in the march. They crowded around him shouting and howling. They ignored his words when he said he loves them. When he cut his chest open to show them his heart, the girl spits on it and the labourer squeezes blood out of it and drinks it along with toddy. He falls down and the mass procession goes away, trampling over him. His flesh and blood gets merged with the soil and water and a hundred crickets chirped around it. The last section in this poem is titled as the ‘Song of Crickets’ where the poet reflects upon the revolution and afterlife.

Vailoppilli is complicating the question of representation for Malayalam aesthetics, as he refused to re-present the ‘realities’ of the working class from a position that is framed beforehand and loaded with certain extraneous determinants. Rather, his attempt is to deal with certain ambivalent points in the way things are presented in the discourse by the communist and anti-communist intellectuals. The act of spectatorship or witnessing is crucial here with the kind of ethical positioning one does to oneself and the subjects of the text. The labourer ‘became the hero’ in the narrative when he witnessed to the ‘superficial love’ the landlord had towards the lower-caste girl and realized its real nature. (Gopikrishnan 2011: 41) The pungent comment of the labourer repulsed the poet so much so that he had to break the relationship realizing the ‘inevitable failure’ it would have to face in the long run.

The labourer is neither a victim with whom we can sympathize unconditionally, nor a hero who seem like a hard-working, disciplined cadet unlike the earlier conceptions. The labourer is an ambivalent category as much as the poet in the peculiar figuration; he is a drunkard, beating his wife, shouting out abuses even sexist ones, but at the same time he utters philosophy of deep reflection at times.

We have seen two major ways of representing labour/ labourer and their ethical status. One is to consider labourer as the source of all energy and production that build the

world. The ability to labour is valorized in the former approach as the fundamental activity by which human history moves ahead. Other is a different but logically related approach whereby the labourer is the victim *par excellence* of the exploitative socio-economic relations under capitalism (as well as feudalism in the local context). This exploitation and victimization is massive and all-encompassing as everyone becomes a wage labourer in this system where old values and relations have decayed. In the particular context the transition from feudal mode to capitalist/ commercial mode presented further intensification of the processes of exploitation. These two approaches are not logically antithetical. However, in a text the affect that is to be produced through these approaches are poles apart and these two approaches provide two completely different ethical statuses to the figure of the labourer in a literary text.

In *Kudiyozhikkal*, the issue is further complicated at various levels. On the one hand, the power exercised by the poet over the labourer is not simply that of an economic nature. It involves another long-standing history of hierarchical social organization of caste. The *janmi-kudiyaan bandham* (landlord-tenant relation) in Kerala has been extremely particularized as one landlord household had remained the lords of many lower-caste labourer families for generations. The most important identity of a labourer household was their bondage with the particular landlord *tharavad*. Generation-old dependence and patronizing cannot be ignored or undermined in these power relations. Caste is another factor that further complicates the issue of representation in the specific context. Vailoppilli is aware of the fact that the noble upper caste poet is perplexed at the diversity of his objects.

Here we looked at a mode of representing the labourer-intellectual relation through a caste-ridden and gendered language that is open to acknowledge and deal with the ambivalence opened up by questions of 'declassing' oneself to become one with the labourer going beyond the logic of self-righteousness. The effort is to draw a distinctive approach to the class structure of one's society that is complicated with more axes as different from the simpler or more conventional ones used by many other writers as discussed in the earlier section.

Contemplative Labourer – An Oxymoron?

Now we will read two major novels written by Thakazhi Sivasankarapilla in order to look at another problem in the field of representing the labourer. The trope of the ‘thinking labourer’ is central to Thakazhi Sivasankarapilla’s imagination of social transformation. Before discussing this theme, it is important to briefly talk about the storyline and context of two of Thakazhi’s novels that we will closely read in this section.

Thottiyude Makan 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 life⁷². The spaces in this novel are the night-soil pickers’ colony, toilets, streets and the night-soil depot. Chudalamuthu became a *thotti* after his father Isahkkumuthu’s death in Alappuzha Municipality. 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 and their son starts living in the street. Later his son, Mohanan becomes a *thotti* in the same municipality and part of an organized trade union 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 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

⁷² *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. Mostly they came from the Dalit communities in Tamilnadu and were engaged in the job generation after generation. In his translation of *Thottiyude Makan*, R. E. Asher 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.

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?" (ibid: 124) The entire narration is in third person like most of Thakazhi's writings. But the last section brings in a first person narrative where the writer calls the workers, beggars and other lower classes as 'them'.

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 state⁷³. A Paraya labourer, Koran marries Chirutha after a lot of efforts. They try hard to make both ends meet working under a huge landlord on a seasonal basis. Koran and his colleagues were cheated by the landlord 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 was working in underground set up. He was 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 was released and the family is reunited. Thakazhi ends the novel with a scene where all of them began shouting communist slogans of 'revolution long live' and 'land to the tiller'. (Sivasankarapilla 2010: 116)

Now we will analyze both these novels in relation to the trope of the 'contemplative labourer' in progressive imagination. Whether it is Koran in *Randidangazhi* or

⁷³ 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 the mechanization and commercialization of agriculture. Alappuzha district was also well-known for its coir industry which was organized by the socialists and later communists in 1930s and 1940s. In 1946 the historic Punnapra Vayalar incident took place where a thousand workers were killed by the army.

Chudalamuthu in *Thottiyude Makan* the entire trajectory of the story changes as the labourer begins to doubt or to think for himself. Chudalamuthu thinks:

If there were no *thottis*, if man (*manushyan*) refused to be *thotti*, then how would this town be like? 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. (Sivasankarapilla 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 who was a *thotti* 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.”(Sivasankarapilla 2009: 24) Whereas 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.⁷⁴ He despises his work and lifestyle. He does not want to improve his working conditions or have more wages. He wants to get out of this work. He is not the larger-than-life figure who refuses to surrender his dignity as a labourer to the compulsions of the state/ market/ bourgeois lifestyle.

⁷⁴ 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 Keshavapilla 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.

Similarly, 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 ignored it by laughing aloud. He built a decent hut and treated all his people with a feast when they started staying there. Hence, the sincere labourer in Koran was changed to a rebellious political being who stopped showing reverence and fear to the landlord.

The beggar in Thakazhi's novel *Thendivargam* [The Beggar Class] also managed to emerge out of his miserable existence once he began thinking about the 'machine that produces beggars'. 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. For instance, the Paraya labourer, 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 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. (Sivasankarapilla 2010: 26, 27)

They talked 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”. (ibid: 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, 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 the successful communist mobilization among labourers in Kerala.

As mentioned above, if the troubling questions and disconcerting thoughts of these illiterate Dalit labourers had been the spark that further got consolidated into a movement that led 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 had 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 occurred when they realized that the landlords were also organized. They called a meeting that was chaired by a young Paraya man called Narendran. 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 assembly elections were round the corner when the *Karshaka Thozhilali Union* (Agricultural Labourer’s Union) was registered in Kuttanad. Since they were an organized force all candidates tried to woo them with money. An independent candidate was contesting against the State Congress candidate in Kuttanad who offered the union ten thousand rupees for their votes. But they refused to take the

money and decided to vote for the Congress. Initially the labourers belonging to the Ezhava and Nair castes refuse to join in the union calling it a lower-caste initiative. It was 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 was a significant success in the activities of the union as the wages were re-fixed as two measures of paddy and money at the government rate. The union began demanding for their fair share in the harvest as wages. Kuttanad witnessed many strikes, meetings and marches under the banner of the union. As union got strengthened the government began 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: "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." (Sivasankarapilla 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 extremely 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 talks about class differences and exploitation, oppression and rights resembles the popular understanding of Marxism.

Interestingly, *Randidangazhi* does not stress on a pedagogic relationship between the intellectual/ activist vanguard that is consolidated by the party and the illiterate and ignorant working population. In fact, the traditional wisdom and the indigenous categories of thinking are employed by the labourers to deliberate upon their lives and changing circumstances. We can discuss at least two such instances from *Randidangazhi* which give insight into the peculiar localness of the logic that initiates the workers into a movement for change.

First of all, it is important to make a point about the different kinds of labourers among the Paraya-Pulaya workers in terms of their relationship with the landlord. All landlord families used to have some specific Paraya/Pulaya families attached to them as traditional servants to work in their fields. They were called *adiyaan* of that particular family. This was a relationship sustained over generations and the identity of the *adiyaan* family was part of the landlord household. Thakazhi says 'it is true. Long time ago, the farmer and the Pulayan of Kuttanad shared an intimate relationship. They were a joint family then'. (Sivasankarapilla 2010: 34) By the times of this story, this kind of relationship was almost replaced by the contractual system whereby each season the labourers had to approach one of the landlords in the region and renew his contract to work. The wages, work time and other benefits had been

thoroughly revised and most importantly, major part of the wages was now paid in money in contrast to the earlier system in paddy.

This change was felt by the labourers initially in terms of the treatment they experienced from the new generation landlords who refused to connect with them in any extra-economic aspects of their lives. Kunjappi puts it so categorically when he says ‘all those lords have gone. If they had beaten us, they would cry. They would take care of us themselves. For them, *adiyaan* 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 *adiyaan* was treated grandly. But, today all that has gone’. Interestingly, this change at the experiential level was connected to the larger structural level by Kunjappi when he went on to say ‘but, then at that time for the lord, agriculture was not a means to become rich. It was for the subsistence of both *thamburan* and *adiyaan*... Today they sell the entire paddy by giving us wages in money’. (ibid.)

The reality of the commercialization and profiteering in agriculture and contractualization of labour was understood by the Paraya labourer through the changing nature of the *janmi-adiyaan* relation. Thakazhi explicitly mentions that these discussions with Kunjappi ‘woke the thinking power of Koran’. 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 another instance, the labourers were listening to the speeches of Travancore State Congress meeting. This was followed by an elaborated discussion among the labourers on the speeches they heard in the meeting. 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. (ibid: 47-49)

This extract 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 skillfully 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 skepticism 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 realize 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.

Irrespective of the disputability of the factual implausibility such a group of Parayas and Pulayas in Kuttanad and building of a trade union in the conspicuous absence of upper caste, educated leaders of the party, this narrative evokes certain interesting points. The kind of 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 Koran and his fellow-Pulayas/Parayas. 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. 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.

The above discussion provides some interesting insights into the diverse possibilities of imagining the labourer and his relation to the objective material conditions around him. The complex connections between the ideological and material worlds of the labourer in terms of their mutual interaction and transformation are rethought in these progressive narratives by Thakazhi Sivasankarapilla.

The Limits of the Labourer: The Beggar, Prostitute and the Criminal

The ways in which writers represented the newly emerging images of labourer and labouring class as we discussed above, were intricately connected to the manners in which these intellectuals made sense of the rapid transformations in the Kerala society, like coming up of urban spaces, industries, commercialization of paddy cultivation, emergence of other cash crops, community-reform movements, changes in caste structure etc. While referring to particular idioms and symbols in order to effect this representation (which meant different things for different writers), they needed other categories to pit against their celebrated images.

In other words, most of the progressive writers encountered a strange set of characters around them as different from ideal figures of labourer and labouring class whose existence had to be accounted for in order to produce a coherent narrative of the society. Particularly, the figures of the *thendi* [beggar/lumpen] and *veshya* [prostitute] formed this *strange other* that had to be dealt with somehow. They were also influenced by writers Émile Zola, Honore de Balzac, Gustav Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, Oscar Wilde and Fyodor Dostoevsky and Maxim Gorky who portrayed the underclass life in its myriad dimensions.

Thendivargam [The Beggar Class] is a short novel written by Thakazhi in 1950. As the name suggests, the story depicts the life of those who dwell the streets and engage in many activities like beggary, daily-wage jobs, theft, petty crimes and prostitution. The protagonist is the society as it can be said about the progressive literature in general. The story begins with the description of the body of an old man whose ‘age could not be determined accurately’. Yet, after observing the man closely the narrator comes to the conclusion that he had been a hardworking peasant from a nearby village. He, along with his middle-aged daughter, Kalyani and her two children now live under a tamarind tree on a road side in the city. The old man was a tenant of landlord and had worked hard in the field for all his life. Then he was thrown out of his land and house by the land owner. Even though he is puzzled about the misfortune by which all his labour could only bring this state of affairs to them, his daughter is clear that the labour in fact brought prosperity and peace to the landlord who cheated them.

The main character in the narrative, Kesu, son of Kalyani grows up losing his grandfather, mother and his sister. He goes to jail for a theft he carried out in a rich man’s house. When he was released he was all alone in the world without even knowing that his grandfather, mother and sister had died and his sister’s baby had been living on the street. Kesu sees the baby and begins to take care of him without knowing that the boy is his nephew. Kesu becomes labourer in a factory and gains some knowledge about the socialist ideas during his stay in the jail. Kesu is part of the trade union in the factory and participates in the discussion of planning a huge strike in the city. Their sole problem was the lack of financial resources and Kesu decides to steal some money from a rich man in order to facilitate the strike, after a lot of

rumination. However, when he brings the money to the union leaders they refuse to accept it for the cause of the strike. This gives a blow to Kesu's aspirations to be in the forefront of the struggle of the working class as he was made to realize his lowly origins as a beggar and a thief.

Kesu occupies a particular juncture in the history of Kerala society where factories are beginning to be set up and the trade union activism is rising in the urban scenario. The rural joint family structure founded on agriculture production was at the verge of extinction as a result of the new legal and social changes that promote profiteering in agriculture. Towns were growing and the landless labourers and tenants who lost their land to the landlords due to debts and rent arrears were beginning to populate these new spaces. A new group of poor is emerging; the urban poor.

There a number of interesting issues at work in this piece. There are three different figures of the labourer in this story; none of them confining to the typical image of the truthful, morally sound, optimistic worker that is central to the progressive canon as discussed in the earlier section. The old man was an agricultural labourer who was forced out of his work and made a street-dweller/ *thendi*. He was a failed labourer as well as a failed man who never understood why all his labour went in vain. He asks, "So, there is no result for a man's work, you say?" (Sivasankarapilla, *Thendivargam* 2010: 3) Kalyani also works hard in order to feed her father and her children both as a beggar in the street and maker of the non-existing home under the tamarind tree. Her unending labour of caring is mentioned in the narrative at several places, but hardly be counted as wage-labour in the conventional sense.

Kesu comes closest to the figure of the wage-labourer when he joins the factory. But, he is not a larger than life figure unlike Pappu in Keshavadev's *Odayil Ninnu* [From the Gutter] (which will be discussed later in the section) and does not really confine to the image of the truthful, committed and optimistic worker. He is weak and confused in his own ways; he is skeptical of the potential of the society to change. There is a dilemma that constantly puzzles the protagonist, Kesu. "...still, which is the machine that produces these beggars?" "What can I do in order to stop this colossal machine that's producing beggars in such large numbers?" (Sivasankarapilla, *Thendivargam* 2010: 41)

The 'unproductive' figure of a beggar prone to indiscipline and 'immorality' does not have a comfortable place in the organized trade union movement. Whatever he does, it is not a result of the class consciousness. His ingrained inclination is to steal and beg. Kesu's act of theft shows him his real place; not among the respectable union members but in his original abode, the street among the fellow-lumpen men and women.

Thendi became an important category to pit against labourer when labour forms the ultimate productive activity. Productivity was the standard set in order to classify different characters and their ethical positioning in the literature. Both in terms of productivity and respectability the beggar class fail to meet the criteria to become part of the working class. More importantly, on the question of maintaining family like a bourgeois family becomes important for the worker as against the *thendi* to prevent his women from immoral means. Love is described as a natural phenomenon; an organic flow that is either facilitated or obstructed by the material conditions. The beggar class better not expect to love and be loved as they cannot live an organized life according to the societal norms. Their material conditions do not allow them to live as stable families.

The structural relationship between the capitalist, the surplus production, profit, lumpen class that is used to break the strikes and work temporarily for meager wages and the organized working class that fights the exploitation with a larger revolutionary plan for liberation is developed in the text as the understanding of a *thendi* woman who is the widow of a 'real' worker.

Now let us discuss two narratives by Vaikom Muhammad Basheer called *Vishappu* [Hunger] that is paradigmatic of the early writings of Basheer and *Shabdangal* [Voices] one of the most controversial literary pieces ever written in Malayalam. Both *Vishappu* and *Shabdangal* exemplify some of the most important traits of Basheer's prose like the presence of raw experiences and their candid recollections, the focus on the materiality of the body and the primacy of sensations in aesthetics and the eventual radical restructuring of the regime of the politics of literature. Udaya Kumar in his outstanding reading of Basheer attempts to untangle the interrelation between the two crucial features of what he calls 'the Basheer text' namely, 'a remembrance

and a performance'. Two acts of writing overlap in Basheer's works- those of historical narration and autobiographization. Udaya Kumar divides Basheer's oeuvre into earlier, middle and later works as to show the different tropes and strategies deployed by Basheer in them. Here our focus would be on the earlier works among which *Shabdangal* is of classic import. (Kumar 2005: 308)

In *Vishappu*, the protagonist, Kochukrishnan is a peon in a college in a city and lives off his meager salary in a shared apartment with two other men. He is always looking at the beautiful wife of the Principal of the college and other young women with awe and desire. He is 'hungry' for a woman's company and physical closeness. Later, he accidentally comes across a young woman who turns out to be a prostitute whom he falls in love with. After a lot of thinking, he goes to her and fixes a meeting with her. He reviews his daily budget and decides to cut down on eating and other expenses in order to manage a single apartment so that he can meet her in a decent, private place. He also buys some gifts for her and waits for her to come at the fixed place. However, she does not turn up again and Kochukrishnan feels thoroughly disappointed and miserable. He cannot forget the woman and the time he embraced and kissed her in their first meeting. Months pass by and one day he spots her on the street, ailing and out of her senses. He gets her food and enquires about her life only to realize that she does not have any memories of him or their meeting at all. *Shabdangal* is a dialogue between a discharged soldier from the army and the writer himself where the soldier recollects his myriad experiences in life. They talk about life, death, war, love and philosophy while the writer notes it down on a paper.

Shabdangal deals with a discharged soldier's experiences and memories as revealed to a writer like Basheer. In both *Vishappu* and *Shabdangal*, the intensity of the experience described in it affects us. It was unprecedented in Malayalam. The description of life is at such an elemental level where all the larger narratives seem hollow, whether of morality or of order. It is the 'animal-like' experience that one engages with while reading Basheer here. In *Vishappu*, the hungry man does not evoke any sympathy from the readers as his hunger is not confinable to the dominant bourgeois moral economy of the times. The lust, the intense desire to love a woman becomes the sole concern for Kochukrishnan in his otherwise boring and monotonous life.

Here we recollect Marx's discussion about the estrangement of labour. Labour is the ultimate expression of creativity for any human being whereas for the labourer his labour becomes the most mechanical and animal-like activity. Hence, a labourer's engagement with the most animal-like activities including eating, drinking, having sex and procreating becomes the only means for him to be human, to feel humanness. This realm of most intimate yet animal-like aspects of a worker had to challenge the norms of bourgeois morality and respectability. This kind of a candid and raw description of a labourer and his life cannot but disturb the readers without allowing them to sympathize with the labourer or to glorify his labourer-hood.

The political charge of these experiences and their rebellious ambivalence against coherence and totality could contribute to a radical Marxist discourse that aims at destroying the foundations of emerging bourgeois morality and civilization and its complicity with the already existing hierarchical feudal culture. However, the kind of criticisms that was directed against Basheer right after the publication of *Vishappu*, and more importantly of *Shabdangal* tells us the extreme discomfort and repulsion it generated not just among the traditional literati but also within the Marxist intelligentsia of that period. One of the leading critics of the communist party in the progressive era was M.S. Devadas and some of the aspects of his approach to literary criticism had been discussed in the earlier chapter. According to Devadas, these were pervert representations of society that would only encourage the 'anti-social' or 'immoral' tendencies in the society like prostitution and illicit liaisons. For Devadas, such naturalistic descriptions of the societal decay had nothing to do with progressive approach.

Devadas' criticism of Basheer came out of the middle-class discourse of Marxism that was founded on certain bourgeois conceptions of morality. This middle-class discourse could not break away with the traditional criteria for respectability and thus could not accept the unpleasant and 'animal-like' experiences of the worker in his or her everyday existence. The figure of the labourer had to be monumentalized for them to identify with it. The image of the labourer needed to be chastised and disciplined to seem respectable and worthy of empathy. The typical figure of the labourer, devoid of everything and hence capable of bringing about universal revolutionary transformation was conflated with the figure of the head of the

bourgeois household. This bourgeois bread-winner had to be differentiated from those who belong to the underclass but live undignified lives as prostitutes, criminals and beggars.

The respectable worker and his family live a civilized and morally laudable life as against the ‘lumpen proletariat’ or the ‘*thendivargam*’ (beggar class) who live like animals. Hence, the characters of Basheer’s stories fit well within the beggar class either in terms of their occupation and life style as the prostitutes and vagabonds in *Shabdangal* or in terms of their ‘uncivilized’ thoughts and desires as the college peon Kochukrishnan in *Vishappu* rather than the middle class Marxist imagination of the labourer. This latter vision that monumentalized the image of the labourer invariably had certain metaphysical underpinnings that assumed some *larger* meaning or *deeper* significance to the being of a labourer.

The character of the rickshaw puller in Keshavadev’s well-known work *Odayil Ninnu* [From the Gutter] published in 1944 could be an interesting figure to be read along with this discussion. The storyline of the novel could be summarized as follows. Pappu, the strong and hard-working rickshaw puller happens to meet a young widow and her little daughter who had no one to take care of them. Pappu decides to provide them the necessary material and emotional security. He had no family of his own and dedicated his life and work to the mother and daughter. He fulfilled the daughter’s wishes just like a father even though she called him ‘uncle’. Above all his virtues stand his moral quality of ‘sleeping outside the house’ which means not approaching the widowed mother for sexual indulgence. He not only rescued them from poverty but safeguarded the woman from a lowly and undignified life. He also managed to send the daughter to school and later to college. In the meanwhile, Pappu was attacked by tuberculosis and coughs constantly.

In the college she happens to meet a rich and educated young man whom she falls in love with and their marriage is fixed. Soon enough, Pappu begins to feel neglected in the midst of the new fortune and Pappu’s old-fashioned and working class life style along with his pride begin to create problems between the daughter and Pappu. Pappu also grew old, weak and ill without any change in his self-respect. On her wedding day after the function Pappu leaves the house without a destination, coughing. Even

though the ending is obscure, one could very well imagine that Pappu dies soon after the story ends.

The magnanimity, courage, self-respect and selflessness of Pappu are unparalleled in the history of Malayalam literature perhaps except for the mythological figures in epics. He is the personification of strength and hard-work on the one hand and love and sacrifice on the other. He was not ready to compromise his manly pride at any cost. There is a larger meaning to Pappu's working class identity and he fits well within the grand structures of bourgeois morality and masculine virility.

This figure of the worker is radically different from the figures presented by Basheer even though the economic and sociological location might seem quite the same for both. Pappu's ethical status is entirely respectable in the middle class Marxist discourse as well as in the traditional approach. Keshavadev created a labourer who was the embodiment of all virtues and goodness that are established by the modern bourgeois culture and juxtaposed him not only to the cunning and selfish capitalist/land lord but also to the lumpen sections of his own class.

The discharged soldier in *Shabdangal* on the contrary, does not represent anyone other than himself; in fact he does not represent even himself coherently. The impossibility of translating an experience of such intensity into the regime of words and figures stands tall in front of the writer who is presenting the text before us. Moreover, the underclass – of labourers, ordinary soldiers, prostitutes, beggars, street-criminals and the homeless – are not the creatures of language and articulation unlike the educated middleclass. It is not to generalize the scope of experience and the possibility of their articulation along the lines of some sociological location of the subject. However, the need to classify and re-present experience in literature (arts in general) and distinguish it from other fields of life such as thoughts and imagination has been bourgeois in character. The sharp distinction between the realm of primary material experience and that of secondary ideal/ mental representation (in words or figures) was not familiar to the pre-bourgeois thinking as this classification corresponds to the modern Cartesian mind-body allocation of human existence.

I am not the representative of anybody. I only represent myself! Don't I have the right to say certain things?" (Basheer 1994: 420)

‘All soldiers have lovers. One lover for many. Many lovers for one. It is a complicated issue. Ordinary soldiers get low-grade prostitutes. As your grade raise, the social status of the prostitute you get also goes up. What do you have to say about prostitution?’

‘Whether it’s good or bad?’

‘Yes.’

‘I have heard that prostitution is the oldest trade in the world; even today many carry out it. From beggar to queen. Anyways, I would not like if my mother, sisters or wife engage in it! (ibid: 427)

Basheer stripped away this metaphysics associated with the labouring class and portrayed the figure at its bare minimum. In other words, Basheer brought the narrative closest possible to the level of bodily sensations. The phenomenological experience of the body and its materiality makes every narrative singular and unclassifiable. Basheer’s attempt, thus, radically rethinks about the category of experience and its representation, if at all possible, in literature.

Devadas’ criticism of Basheer’s works that they encourage anti-social tendencies in society, assumes a direct and pedagogic relationship between the text and its readers. In such an approach, the readers were considered as children to be taught morally sound stories to learn from. For Basheer, however, we can argue that such an approach did not exist. Rather, the attempt had been to challenge the readers by introducing new and radically different things in all aspects of literature.

The underclass characters are not empathized or identified with; nor is there anything in them that could be monumentalized for a larger purpose. Their strangeness and the peculiarity of the experience are not lost in the effort to render their suffering intelligible and respectable to the middle class moral sensibility of the readership. These traumatic images are woven together in a plot that is ambivalent and open-ended in *Shabdangal*.

The Writer: as the Labourer, for the Labourer and from the Labourer

In Chapter One we discussed EMS' interesting formulation that the task of writer was not different from that of the political activist. It seems that a writer like KPG was the epitome of such a writer whose contributions to the domain of literature was as much a contribution to 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'. Hence, by becoming a communist, a worker was in fact becoming a human being. This idea has 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 CPI.

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 is to become the basis for the modern Kerala society. Yet, he was 'adopted to' the proletarian class as he originally belonged to the dominant class (very strongly 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 accepts and in fact cherishes this transformation that he had undergone. As EMS aptly points out the poet in 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'.⁷⁵ (Namboodiri 1974: 124)

For KPG, the communist poet is the mediator between the bride (Poetry) and her groom (Labour) as discussed in the previous chapter. 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 instills confidence and optimism in the masses about this scientific knowledge that would in turn emerge as their revolutionary consciousness.

⁷⁵ *Annu njan addehathe kandathinnormikkunnu.*

Mangiyorolappurakkullil vechanennnalum

Enthoru raajochitha sweekaranamaanortha-

Lannenikkaruliyath addeham athinnullil!

Vibhavangalaalalla, vithaproudhiyaal alla.

Hrudayam niranjulla nirmala snehathaale.

Paranja mozhiyinnumen kaathil alaykkunnu:

"Varika kave, thozhilaali angaye kaanum".

In these situations the intellectual-writer is set at a distance from the laboring class and their reality that is being represented and 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 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 as depicted by KPG in the poem *Velayum Kavithayum*.

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 laborer 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; enables the labourer to raise his consciousness to the 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.

Unlike KPG or Kadamangalam (and some of Vailoppilli's own earlier works), the later poet in Vailoppilli is not confident about his ability to re-present the conditions of the laboring class in Kerala, let alone their revolutionary aspirations. The poet realizes his position as a landlord belonging to an upper-caste household. He explicates the fundamentally different material conditions in which the labourers of his village live and other cultural differences. But he is confused when he also realizes his position as a left intellectual who is influenced by some of the Marxist ideas. Hence, his life itself becomes a dilemma whereby he is unable to fit himself into any

section of the society. This dilemma is closer to the realistic presentation of a petty bourgeois intellectual at the juncture of a social transition.

In *Kudiyozhikkal*, the poet is fully aware of his unconditional power over the labourer and his family. Yet, he cannot but exercise this power when his poetic inclinations were disturbed by the drunken laborer's ruffle with his wife. The poet, even though conceives of himself as progressive suddenly brings back his feudal power over the labourer and tries to discipline him with the threat of throwing out of his land.

I rose slowly with my cane

Adorned with the silver of nobility... [And said]

“You should leave your *kudi* (drunkenness)

Else, I will throw you out of your *kudi*”.⁷⁶ (house) (Sreedharamenon, 1984: 690)

The poet, immediately after scolding the labourer, is feeling heavy with the realization of the larger reality where he is relishing on the fruits of the laborer's labour. He is deeply disturbed by the realization about his complex location as belonging to an upper caste landlord family on the one hand and a progressive writer and intellectual on the other.

... Your wretched hut and you

Scolded me silently:

“Well done, you aristocrat!

You should leave your *kudi* (inebriation due to wealth)

Else, we will throw you out of your *kudi*”.⁷⁷ (ibid.)

⁷⁶ *Melle njan eneettabhijathyathin*

Vellikettiya chooralumaayi...

“Nin kudiyozhineedanam, ee najn

Nin kudiyozhippikkum allengil!”

⁷⁷ ... *panjamutta nin koorayum neeyum*

Enne mookamay shasichu perthum:

“nannu, nannu, nee van tharavadi!

Nin kudiyozhinjeedanam, njangal

The idea of forcefully revealing a truth that is not visible/ known otherwise, constantly comes in this poem. 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.⁷⁸ (ibid: 689)
 Why should I keep my heart for my funeral
 Wrapped in the silk of a stupid-smile?
 I shall bare it, shining with truth
 By spilling my blood.⁷⁹ (ibid: 691)
 “I...we...love you always”
 I uttered somehow.
 I tore open my chest
 Showed them my heart.⁸⁰ (ibid: 703)

However, we come to realize that even the poet himself is not sure of the truth as a result of his ambivalent position regarding the existing social relations in the society. On the one hand, the poet wants us to recognize his genuine concern about these unequal and exploitative structures and his readiness to join the supposed revolutionary class in order to change it. On the other hand, he asks us to rethink

Nin kudiyozhippikkum allengil!”

⁷⁸ *Punchiri ha, kuleenamam kallam*

Nenju keeri njan nerine kaattaam..

⁷⁹ *Pattadaykkayi moodhhasathin*

Pattil njan pothinjenthinu vayppoo?

Neruminni thilangumen chitham

Chorachinni thurannu njan kaattam.

⁸⁰ *Enganeyo paranju najn, “ee njan,*

Njangal, ningale snehippithennum.”

about issues of 'de-classing', raising one's political consciousness through knowledge and getting adopted as working class poet/ intellectual.

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!⁸¹ (ibid: 703)

In Vailoppilli, the poet is a cricket, not a nightingale or koel contrary to conventional imageries. He does not sing beautiful songs to enthrall you; 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 discomfoting 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.

Keshavadev has written a number of autobiographical pieces and memoirs. But as different from them, *Njan Kathakaranaya Katha* [The Story of How I became A Story Teller] was published as part of his short story collection. This story is paradigmatic

⁸¹ *Veenu njan, poyithenne chavitti*

Maanushavyooham, kaalapraavaaham...

Innumengilum paadunnu neele

Mannil ninnu mannattakal njangal.

Spheetah'minni'nte rangathilengum

Bhoothakaala pashchathala geetham!

of the reflections of the spirit of progressivism among those writers who distanced themselves from the communist party at different points and issues. Unlike Thakazhi (and others) who proclaimed at some point that he is proud to be a Marxist but later said that he was proud that he was no longer a Marxist, as a result of their disillusionment with both Stalinism as well as communist party in Kerala, Keshavadev tried to distinguish these particular experiences from the universal philosophy of Marxism. He equated Marxism with the ultimate form of humanism and aesthetics, its foundation. He described Lenin as a compassionate and humane person whereby Lenin could propagate Marxism and bring about such revolutionary changes in Soviet Union.

There was utter disgust and disappointment among all these writers once the Stalinist turn of Soviet Union came to the fore. Many writers/ artists who were hailed as the masters of progressive literature and arts were either executed or expelled from Soviet Union. It was the collapsing of a utopia, a dream that was built with hope and dream. The doctrinaire form of Zhdanovism propagated 'socialist realism' as the most appropriate approach in writing. In Malayalam also, as we saw in the debates in the PSS these was a conscious effort from the party to keep a tag on these progressive writers and their writing.

Keshavadev was trying to distance himself away from this attempt to discipline writers by the communist party. But at another level, he wanted to retain the progressive potential of Marxism as an approach to life and society as he understood it. In this particular piece, he writes about the way he perceives himself as a writer in the progressive mould. Hence, he calls himself a story teller (*kathakaran*) as against the traditional literati (*sahityakaran*). The image he gives of a *sahityakaran* is as follows:

I have seen some creatures who were called *sahityakaran*. Hair tied on top of their heads, bathed and rolled over ashes, reciting cheap Sanskrit and Malayalam shlokas, giving foolish speeches, these gross creatures spent most of their time in the cemeteries, licking the bones of their predecessors. (Keshavadev, 2010: 9)

Hence by calling oneself a story teller as against a writer in the conventional sense he manages to root himself in the popular legacy as a people's figure. Even though he resists the party's attempt to 'plan literature' to make it more productive and efficient

in the name of serving people, he himself tried to justify his voice as a progressive writer in the name of people (*janangal*). As Keshavadev remarkably adds: “if at the first sight in my story one notices the artist then both the activist and the artist is successful and if it’s the activist who is dominant in a story then both fail”. (ibid: 11) Keshavadev imagined a peculiar relationship between politics and literature in this work. The politics of a literary piece had to be distributed all over the aesthetic qualities of the work like soul is distributed all over the body.

This conception of soul cannot be confined to a metaphysical connotation. As we can see, his effort is to reach to that essence or core that is constrained by dogmas and unfreedom. Hence, a conception of freedom ingrained in the activity of artistic creation is presented by Keshavadev. This dilemma is ever-present in theories of Marxist aesthetics. On the one hand, writing/ art is labour like any other productive activity and could be approached in the same manner to plan, to dictate or to channelize it in certain more collective and productive directions. But, a thought is at the heart of art/ literature that has to be understood at the level of the individual writer/ artist. This question of striking a balance between the social and individual aspects and material and ideational aspects had not been as easy one for communists.

Keshavadev wrote that both the form and idea as inseparable from each other and had to come from the author, not dictated from above. He did not accept that artistic creation is just like any other material labour for instance, carpentry as a sense of autonomy had to be assigned to the writer. Modernity is equated with progress and the ultimate aim of the writer is to talk about the humanist ideal of progress. A utopia is created and sustained here, not as a blue print to the future but as an external vantage point from where one can critique and re-imagine/re-write the present. The world of artistic creation is one where ultimately the goodness reigns over all bad, dark elements, of pain, exploitation, oppression etc. “even the pain is sweet there”.

Unlike many writers of the period, Basheer hardly claimed to be a progressive writer in his non-literary discourse. He did not proclaim to be writing for the people, or the social progress; nor did he identify the activity of writing with the process of social transformation directly. Nevertheless, his writing with all its transgressive and

subversive tropes and treatments managed to ‘bring a new continent of experience to Malayalam’ as M. N. Vijayan uttered.

Basheer owned a philosophy of experience that conquered every other philosophy...He measured history with his life, his chest, his sentences and his language. I am the story, what I write is the language, Basheer asserted proudly. The love he received was the scratch marks on his body. His independence struggle was the beatings and abuses he suffered. His world was those lands he wandered around. The contentment of his experiences was his philosophy. (Vijayan, 2008: 360)

In *Shabdangal* the figure of the writer is different from but not external to that of the story-teller. The writer does not claim to represent the characters in his work. In *Shabdangal* he works as a transcriber of the oral testimonies of the characters. The account in *Vishappu* is in third person although the presence of the writer in the first person is felt in the particular historicity of the narrative and its minute recollection at the level of bodily markers. As Udaya Kumar asserts “there is no third-person narrative in Basheer’s word without its translucent surface revealing the presence of the first person account beneath it”. (Kumar, 1998: 307) The authenticity of the narrative is not derived from the self-righteous exteriority or the truth claims of the writer.

‘Once upon a time, there was a young man who did not have publicly recognized mother or father. He committed many murders. When he was twenty four, he –’

‘Let me interrupt you in the middle! Are you beginning with the story?’

‘Yes’.

‘Whom are you talking about?’

‘About myself only!’

‘Well!’

‘You told me to begin from somewhere, right?’

‘What are you drawing?’

‘Not drawing. Writing. If I use a tape recorder, I will forget what you are saying. Now I can write with my own unmediated experience. At the end, I will read it out to you. There will be nothing that you have not said. What say?’

'Fine'. (Basheer, 1994: 417-23)

In Cherukad's famous novel *Shanidasha*, a young Nair landlord and a school master Kunjukkutta Kurup and his wife Thankamma become martyrs in the fight against the feudal and authoritarian forces due to the conflicts of history. He was contented with his noble life until he got arrested by the Police for allowing his friend Menon who is a communist party activist to stay at his house for a few days. His marriage was fixed by his family with Thankamma who was already in love with him and he was supposed to get married on the next day of his arrest. In fact, Kurup was arrested as a result of his confrontation with the manger of his school and his uncle Kittanunni Kurup for paying the teachers much less than their sanctioned salaries. This issue was so common in Kerala in almost all privately managed schools and school masters and mistresses were living in stark poverty. Cherukad argues that it was common in that period to label the rebelling teacher as communist and get him arrested in order to avoid any possibility of them organizing.

When Thankamma's family refuses to marry her off to a communist who was arrested by the police Thankamma leaves her family and follows Kurup. Later, both of them were imprisoned again due to conspiracies between the police and the school manager and Kurup dies in the Police custody after getting beaten up brutally. Then, Thankamma commits suicide jumping into a well in the jail. As a concluding remark to the novel Cherukad writes:

Shanidasha spans for nineteen years they say. I finished the nineteenth chapter. It might be a great sin that I killed this couple in the path of life. Forgive me. Forgive me as well as the Congress that brutally murdered Comrade Moyyarath and other hundreds of comrades. (Pisharody, 2010: 272)

This remark is his presence in the narrative as a communist activist/ writer the way EMS had discussed this issue in the *PSS*. This statement forms the bridge between the text and the political context that exists out there, for Cherukad. This kind of a presence of the writer in the narrative prevents the personal story of Kurup and Thankamma from becoming a romantic tragedy by situating it in front of the larger history of its times. By the time *Shanidasha* was published some of the dilemmas regarding the independence of India were settled by the communist party, especially in Kerala where the new communist government was dismissed from power and

communist activists were hunted down, tortured and killed. Kurup resembled the identity of the author as an educated middle class school teacher who was initiated to the communist movement later in life. In Cherukad's novel *Shanidasha* the middle class identity of the protagonist was not problematized once Kurup realized the truth and justice in communist ideology. In a short story called *Interclass* [same title in Malayalam] Cherukad depicted the intellectual middle class as the vacillating section at the moment of revolution.

The communist leaders were mostly educated and well-versed in English in Cherukad's stories and this enabled them to bypass the presence of ordinary police men and directly communicate to the Magistrate or other higher officials as the ordinary police men were not educated. These ordinary police men were poor and trying hard to make two ends meet in their lower middle class households.

In this section we dealt with various conceptualizations by the progressive Malayalam writers regarding the ideological relationship between the figure of the labourer and that of the writer as well as the activity of writing conceived as labour. Apart from the more direct approaches like 'declassing' and 'writing for the labourer' we also came across certain complex attempts that take into account the difficulties involved in such simplified readings. The ideational aspects involved in the activity of writing opens up interesting questions for the Marxists to think regarding the connections between production and creativity.

Supervising labour and Managerial labour: The Middle Class/Caste vis-à-vis Labouring

The above discussed theme of the relation of the middle class progressive writer to his activity of writing as labour leads to another important theme; the differentiated idea of labour. One of the important bases for the middle class communist intellectual to consider his activity as labour was the prevalent idea that capital has reduced every activity into wage-labour in its times. But Marx's emphasis in *Capital* vol I on the 'abstraction and congealment of human labour' as the hidden underpinning beneath

the related concepts of value, socially necessary labour time, exchange and wages, did not fetch much attention in the vernacular contexts. (Marx 1954: 43-87)

Hence, the major effort was put in to visualize a range of varied activities as part of the large abstract category called labour and to establish 'equivalences' amongst them, rather than doubting the paradigm of this homogenization itself. People were categorized loosely into those who labour and those who do not. Even when such differences were addressed they were seen only in terms of binaries between manual and mental labour or labour which is more exploitative and one that is less exploitative. Thus, it becomes important to note those rare instances where at least a possibility for conceiving differentiated labour is open in the literature of this period.

In his *Kudiyozhikkal*, Vailoppilli tries to distinguish between two kinds of labours, both varying in their nature and significance; the manual work of the Dalit labourer and the managerial work of the farmer. The protagonist of the poem, an upper caste, land owning poet utters:

I reached my home in the evening

After a day of non-manual works.⁸² (Sreedharamenon, 1984: 691)

There is a conception of labour that need not be physical in nature all the time. But the non-manual works are presented mockingly as to suggest their privileged position. His works had been that of supervising the labour of the agricultural labourers in his land, smoking a cigarette, pampering his cow for a while, scolding his labourer for drinking and trying to 'create' poetry. The idea of the managerial tasks as discussed in *Kudiyozhikkal* is an important point to think about. The job of supervision and the managerial tasks carried out by the landlords or their managers (*karyasthan*), the works of reaping the harvest, collecting the paddy and removing the grains from the hay, done by the labourer-women, and the tasks of ploughing the land using oxen, readying the plots for other cultivation like coconuts and vegetables etc. performed by the labourer-men are considered as qualitatively and quantitatively different jobs by Vailoppilli not just in *Kudiyozhikkal* but also in other poems.

⁸² *Meyyanangatha velakal cheythu*

Melleyanthiyil njan gruham pooki,

One's conception of these works, their significance and their relation to various skills and potentials becomes important to the position of the worker in the production relations. It is all the more important when the dominant effort in literature had been to collapse all these labours into some obscure corpus of 'wage labour' and talk about this non-existent group called labourers. In order to explicate this point we would go back to one of EMS' writings about the land relations in Kerala. This argument proved seminal in the later project of land reforms that were carried out in the state by the different communist governments. In a speech addressing the Peasants' Conference in Ponnani Taluk on 9th May, 1937, EMS dealt with the confusion regarding who was a peasant and what are the duties of a peasants' organization⁸³. EMS argued:

Even though we hear many interpretations for the term peasants (*Krishikkar*) we need to know a direct and straightforward meaning of it. To denote this clear meaning, a friend of mine used the term 'managers' or 'handlers' (*nadathukkar*) recently. I think it is an appropriate effort. Those who manage the land in real are the peasants. Some of them would be the owners of the land or landlords (*janmi*). Some others would have rented the land from the *janmi* under various terms and conditions...In brief, whatever be the ownership rights, if a person keeps the land and cultivates it whether own his own or with the help of wage labourers in actuality, and having to pay the rent to government or the *janmi* are peasants. (Namboodiripad 1998: 220)

As this speech further discusses the functions of a peasants' organization that was to be built in Malabar EMS went on to describe the 'interests and immediate needs' of peasants according to his earlier definition of the term. This included 'everything that was needed for this majority of peasants and their families to live dignified lives' such as 'reducing the credits, rent and taxes, avoid the violence during their (credit, rent and tax) collection, facilitate farming amenities, provide health and education facilities for the household. Hence, the peasants had been conceptualized as deserving both the rights over cultivable land as well as access to social welfare measures like health and education. EMS also describes the 'agricultural labourers' (*kaarshika thozhilaalikal*) as 'the vast section of people related to agriculture' but 'do not possess even a single cent of land neither as a landlord nor as a tenant and work for livelihood'. He adds:

⁸³ This speech was published in the *Mathrubhumi Daily* on May 12, 1937.

I did not include them in the category of peasants purposely. There are many reasons for that. [Firstly] that is not included in the ordinary Malayalam word '*Krishikkar*' (peasants). Secondly, even though they also go for wage labour in farming-related activities, a large majority of them in the rural areas do whatever work comes their way. They are similar more to the urban labourers than to the farming managerial groups. Thirdly, in certain matters, the peasants and agricultural labourers may fight with each other. So it is not wise to club them into one organization. (ibid: 221)

This passage illustrates the position as clearly as possible. Since the agricultural labourers are not 'entirely' dependent on agriculture (as 'they do whatever job that comes their way') they are not qualified to be called peasants. They are closer to the urban working class than to the peasants for whom they work. This lack of managerial ability vis-à-vis the land and lack of specialization and skill in their trade made them part of the empty category of 'labourers' who do not own any means of production. Thus, they were later kept out of the land redistribution under land reforms and their rights were confined to small plots of land for housing and access to welfare policies. The managerial abilities possessed by the middle caste peasants made them deserving of the ownership of cultivable land. The argument in favour of this managerial efficiency is directly linked to maximum agricultural productivity and development. We may argue that the limited redistribution of cultivable land that excluded all traditional Dalit and *Adivasi* labourers as part of much acclaimed land reforms was not a technical mistake that can be corrected but deeply founded upon arguments of productivity and development. Ergo, the 'supervisor' cum 'manager' in *Kudiyozhikkal* was the 'real peasant' who came to own the cultivable land according to the scheme imagined by EMS and other fellow-communists who worked behind land reforms.

Paattabaakki: The Pedagogic Performative of Political Economy

The best quality of any pedagogic instrument is to be simple, direct and interesting as to keep the attention of the learners intact. This would enable the pupil to engage with the subject matter, which ought to be more complex than his comprehending ability in an easy manner without feeling repelled from it. This common sense works in the issue of mass mobilization of any political party as well, especially when the subject to be taught is of alien origin and thoroughly new to the masses.

The political and pedagogic potential of drama performances was already realized as a result of the reformist plays that came out in the 1930s especially the historic plays by the *Yogakshema Sabha* activists like V T Bhattathiripad, M. R. Bhattathiripad, Premji and Muthiringot Bhavathratan Namboodiripad. They evidently unleashed the ability of plays to exercise a strong direct pedagogic control over the audience. With plays, literacy was no longer an issue for communicating the complex socio-political-economic problems with the masses. However, adopting a popular language rooted strongly in the indigenous cultural milieu was crucial to the success of the plays. They could provide an imagination of art closest to democracy and ‘people’s art’. This threw up a number of issues regarding the activity of representation as ‘acting as the other class’ was central to these communist plays.

Let us discuss briefly about the emergence of the progressive/ communist plays in relation to the existing tradition of performing arts in general and play in general. The communist plays were the performative of the political economy which was the most significant difference they had from all the earlier forms of performances. They had to come up with such tropes and ideas as to convey these nuances to the masses.

We will begin with a brief discussion on Malayalam drama preceding *Paattabaakki*. Malayalam had a number of traditional performing arts including *Kathakali*, *Koodiyattom*, *Padayani*, *Kooth*, *Thullal*, *Chavittunatakam* etc. However, eminent playwright and scholar G. Sankarapilla argues that Malayalam drama was not evolved out of a sequential development of these earlier forms or as a result of a conflation of their appropriate factors. It was a movement that came primarily as imitation’. There were scholars who translated the Sanskrit dramas from the sole perspective of literature and ended up making works that were not suitable for the stage. The reproductions of Tamil drama performances were focused more on the performative aspect of the play while weakening the significance of the text. Nevertheless, these imitations and translations inspired a range of first generation original Malayalam dramas from the last decade of the nineteenth century onwards. Some of them had play scripts dealing with indigenous issues of the time while some still depended on the earlier themes. Many works of Shakespeare were translated in the same period. But, as the writers did not try to experiment with the performative and formal aspects

of the art form the techniques of presentation remained the same throughout these decades. (Sankarapilla 1980)

The last decade of nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth witnessed immense changes in the field of Malayalam literature with the coming of writers like Chandu Menon, Kumaran Asan and Vallathol. They initiated unprecedentedly progressive and radical discourses within their respective genres like novels and poetry. However, these changes had no immediate reflection in the field of drama. It remained confined to the old imitations of Tamil musical dramas and a few dealing with social criticism (*prahasangal*) in line with the European farces. Their major theme was the cultural transformation brought about by urbanization and modern education and the impact of these over lower castes and elite women.⁸⁴

In the early 1930s, a number of professional drama troupes were formed and they experimented with the popular literary works of the time by adapting them to the form of drama. For instance, the well-known poem *Karuna* by Kumaran Asan was staged by Brahmavrudhan, Sebastian Kunjukunju Bhagavathar and Ochira Velukkuty and their troupe became established thereafter. Another significant theme for dramas was the historical narratives like that of Veluthambi Dalava, Iravikkuty Pilla etc. who fought against the colonizers at different periods in the history of Travancore. Other troupes like 'Royal Cinema and Dramatic Company' owned by P. J. Cherian took up Christian themes for their drama performances. There are other names like that of Kainikkara Kumarapilla and Kainikkara Padmanabhapilla to be mentioned in this discussion as their productions became so popular that they remained in the memory of the audience for many decades altogether. These performances focused substantially on the melodramatic quality of their dialogues than the visual elements. (Sankarapilla 1980)

The most significant event in this decade in terms of the history of Malayalam drama was the adaptation of this art form for the clear and direct purpose of criticizing the

⁸⁴ Anindita Ghosh mentions about a similar genre of Bengali farces that became popular in urban Bengal from 1870s onwards. In the Bengali context, the colloquial language in these farces stood in sharp contradiction with that of the high-dramas written in standardized modern Bengali. The authors as well as the readers of these farces came predominantly from the 'large sections of immigrant lower middle class groups in Calcutta, still fiercely loyal to traditional social mores and distrustful of the vices they associated with the new urban culture'. (Ghosh 2002: 4333-4)

social stagnation and the oppressive and regressive tradition. In 1929, V. T. Bhattathiripad (henceforth VT) wrote and presented a drama called '*Adukkalayil ninnu Arangathekk*' (From the Kitchen, to the Stage), in a meeting of the *Yogakshema Sabha*. The meeting and the performance took place in a house where many *antharjanams* (Namboodiri women) were present. As far as the reform movement within the Namboodiri community was concerned, these performances were crucial. Most of the Namboodiri women were illiterate and all of them were denied any opportunity to step out of their *illam* (Namboodiri household) to public spaces of any sort. EMS was part of this first performance of '*Adukkalayil ninnu...*' as he was an active part of the *Yogakshema Sabha* activities. This play was hailed as an 'atom bomb' against the unequal and exploitative structures prevalent among the Malayala Brahmins. *Aphante Makal* (Uncle's Daughter, 1930) by Muthiringot Bhavathratan Namboodiripad, *Marakkudaykullile Mahanarakam* (The Hell beneath the Cadjan Umbrella, 1930) by M. R. Bhattathiripad and *Rithumati* (The Pubescent Girl, 1938) by Premji were all published in the following years and a small number of Namboodiri women were allowed to attend schools in the same period.

This brief discussion about the history of Malayalam drama is essential as this marks the beginning of the use of performance arts like dramas for the propagation of political ideologies among the masses. Literacy was no longer a problem and performances could communicate more to a large number of audiences at a single time. EMS urged the writers to focus more on writing plays than stories or poems as this was a much more powerful instrument of mass mobilization and communication compared to other arts.

In this backdrop the first communist play was staged at the *Ponnani Taluk Karshaka Sammelanam* (Peasants' Conference at Ponnani Taluk) in 1937 called *Paattabaakki* written by K. Damodaran.⁸⁵ As he himself mentioned later, though he had published a

⁸⁵ K. Damodaran (25 February, 1912 – 3 July, 1976) was born in Tirur in Malabar now part of the Malappuram district and began his political life as early as in 1930 participating in the Salt Satyagraha in Calicut and getting imprisoned for twenty three months. He joined the Congress Socialist Party and worked as the trade union leader in many parts of Kerala. He was closely associated with all the intellectual and ideological discussions that took place with the national CPI leadership that led to the formation of CPI in Kerala in 1939. He had written a large number of pamphlets, articles and books introducing various theoretical aspects on Marxism to Malayalam. He also wrote plays, poetry and short stories. He was part of the editorial board of the first communist party publication called *Prabhatham* that was established in 1934 and supervised the publication of communist magazines like

few poems and a short story collection, he had not written any play yet. Damodaran mentioned many changes in the field of drama that influenced the communists to think of organizing a play for their peasants' meeting in order to 'attract the peasants'. The Malayalam adaptations of Hindi, Bengali and English plays had been staged, Ibsenist dramas that dealt with the family lives, marital discords and individual crises of the middle class became popular and VT and others had already established drama as a strong means to deploy for the purposes of social reforms. Damodaran took up EMS' suggestion about writing a play for the meeting and finished writing it in two days. Then, he directed the play in three days and acted in it with a few party activists and workers as the cast. Damodaran says: "I was also a speaker in the meeting. Right after my speech, I rushed to the backstage, changed my costumes and checked everyone else's costume. By the time, all speeches were over, we were ready. Thus took place the debut of '*Paattabaakki*'. (Damodaran 2001: 314)

As the performance was a huge success, they decided to stage in other taluks also. Damodaran took back the script sheets from all actors, re-wrote it sent it to *Mathrubhumi* Weekly. "I never thought this would be celebrated as a milestone in the Malayalam drama and a new beginning of the drama movement. This gained much more appreciation than it deserved as a play written so fast, merely for the sake of propaganda." (ibid: 314-15)

Most of the critics in that era like Kesari Balakrishnapilla and C. J. Thomas stressed on the 'realistic' qualities of *Paattabaakki* as it enabled the ordinary masses to easily identify with it. The storyline was 'believable, yet artistic' and all the moments were taken from real life. Another observation common to both Kesari and C. J. Thomas was that in order to realize an ideal society where morality and welfare is protected, it was unavoidable to transform the entire society radically. This latter point was the moot difference *Paattabaakki* had with all the earlier plays including those of the Namboodiri reformers; the proclamation about the inevitability of the radical transformation of the society as a whole. This was in turn related to the structural understanding provided by Marxism about the relation between the economic realm and other realms like morality, culture, religion and family.

Communist, Munnott [Forward], and *Marxist*. After getting elected to Rajya Sabha in 1964, he began to collaborate with P. C. Joshi in his research on the history of the communist movement in India.

Damodaran was a member of the *Jeewal Sahitya Sangham* formed in 1937 and all his works including *Paattabaakki* and another play *Rakthapaanam* [Drinking of Blood] are considered to belong to the first generation of progressive plays. The inspiration behind *Paattabaakki* was not the genius of Damodaran or his intellectual endeavor. As C. J. Thomas puts it:

The story, scenes and characters in it [*Paattabaakki*] was only the reflection of the peasant life. The philosophy, towards which Kittunni (the protagonist) was drawn, was not emerged in the brains of Damodaran; but pointed out by the peasant community through their daily lives. (Thomas, 1964: 67)

Nevertheless, Damodaran is aware of the ‘artistic lacks’ of his play like portraying all characters as types rather than unique individuals. The characters were far ahead of their times in most of the scenes like Muhammad in a tea shop uttering ‘only in a socialist society a human being would be able to live like a human being’. Damodaran later felt that it was him, the author who uttered these dialogues rather than the characters. Most of the intellectuals of the time also critiqued *Paattabaakki* for not focusing on dialogues as to have made them in the day-to-day tongue of the masses.

Damodaran recollected that the form and content of the play had changed throughout the years of its staging through the inputs of all those people who performed it, watched it and appreciated it. ‘It grew and transformed as a result of the efforts of numerous people and I wanted to rewrite and publish it in the new form.’ But he could not do that due to his subsequent arrests till 1951. ‘It seemed to me that the political circumstances of Kerala had been changed and it was neither easy nor desirable to re-write *Paattabaakki* after fifteen years. Hence, I left that effort.’ He concluded his foreword to the seventh edition of *Paattabaakki* with the following words:

The Kochi government that banned *Paattabaakki* does not exist now. Against which landlordism Kittunni and Kunjimalu struggled hand in hand with thousands of oppressed people, that landlordism is also non-existent now. Let only *Paattabaakki* live for a few more years as a historic event. (Damodaran, 2001: 320)

The story is set in a peculiar space where the protagonist is a poor tenant as well as an industrial labourer. On the one hand, Kittunni has to pay the rent arrears to the landlord who threatens the family with eviction and on the other he has to deal with

the exploitative capitalist system in the form of extended working hours and low wages. He is a perfect type to explicate the semi-feudal, semi-capitalist mode of production in which both feudalism and capitalism enable each other to exploit the workers in an augmented fashion.

Kittunni is the young head of a poor tenant household consisting of an aging mother, youthful sister and a little brother. They are too poor to afford even a meal a day. Because of a bad harvest they could not pay all the rent (*paattam*) they were supposed to, to the Namboodiri landlord. The landlord sends in his manager Raman Nair frequently to inquire about the *paattabaakki* (rent arrears) and Raman Nair misbehaves with Kittunni's sister Kunjimalu. Kittunni works in a nearby mill where his wages are so meager that the family is at the verge of permanent starvation. He has borrowed money and other necessary things from many people and no longer can ask anyone for some help. In such a miserable condition he decides to steal some rice from a shop. He is sentenced for six months' imprisonment and sent to the jail. One day, Raman Nair approaches Kuttimalu and tells her that the rent arrears could be taken care of if she was willing to provide him some sexual favors. When she refuses to succumb to that and beats him with a broom, he takes revenge in the form of evicting them from their hut and land. The mother dies at the street urging her to take good care of the little son. Kunjimalu later becomes a prostitute in order to take care of her brother, Balan.

In the meanwhile Kittunni meets many people in the jail including Muhammad who had been his colleague in the mill. Muhammad was arrested as a result of organizing a strike in his factory. They came across many ideas including that of socialism, building up trade unions and changing this exploitative and oppressive system.

When he was released from jail, he goes back to meet his family. He was scandalized at the sight of his sister living as a prostitute. Even though he scolded her initially, he understands that it is her income from this profession that kept both her and Balan alive. Concluding the play Balan tells Kunjimalu that they should 'take revenge' against the society and completely reconstruct this social structure and that he would tell her 'what to do' for that. (ibid: 311)

There are two major events that take place in the play; one is the crime of theft performed by Kittunni and other is the sin of prostitution committed by Kunjimalu. When they meet each other in the last scene Kittunni initially berates Kunjimalu for becoming a prostitute who has destroyed the grace of her brother. He utters: “My sister, whose honour and propriety (*maanam-maryadaka*) I considered to be most important above everything else – no, you are not my sister anymore – you are fallen (*kulata*), I have never faced such disgrace in my life.” (ibid: 309) But soon, he realizes the real cause behind this entire trauma they suffered; the oppressive and exploitative social system in which they live. The cruel and cunning social forces through its relations of production as well as reproduction (family) coerce the poor masses to live undignified lives as criminals, beggars or prostitutes. This is a simple, if not simplified narrative of the political economy of the particular society where landlordism and capitalism work hand in hand. Both the Namboodiri landlord and the mill owner are portrayed as greedy and callous characters who extract profit through the labour of their workers. But the capitalist entrepreneur seems to be more intelligent in terms of making use of the police and state power to crush the labour movement. The role of the middle man (*karyasthan*/manager) in the older system is replaced by a ‘*khadi*-clad’ politician (apparently a Congress man) in the capitalist sphere.

In the initial scenes Kittunni’s starving mother tries to reason out all their miseries as the result of their sins in the earlier births and god’s decision. That logic is simply inverted by Kittunni and Muhammad when they blame the capitalist system for their wretchedness. When Balan blames god and says that if god had given them hunger then the god should be killed in order for them to live happily. Even though the mother (probably along with the audience) is shocked at this blasphemous utterance of the boy, the audience soon realizes the truth in the utterance. They in fact realize that god is not the omnipotent force behind these allocations of happiness, sadness, starvation and prosperity side by side; it is the politico-economic relations in the system. The difference as we can see is the tangible solution to end the omnipotence of the latter unlike the unfathomable nature of the former.

Most of serious dialogues about the political-economic are uttered by Kittunni in solitude to himself. They do not form a part of a dialogue except in a few teashop

dialogues of Muhammad and the dialogue inside the prison between Kittunni, Muhammad and a criminal prisoner. For instance, in Scene Two, Muhammad proclaims in response to Kittunni's remarks about the deplorable condition of his family that in the present society, human beings are considered as animals and only in a socialist society they can truly live as humans. The thematic of this narrative is the unjust socio-economic relations in the society that forcefully change human beings into animal-like existences; that of a criminal, a prostitute or a beggar.

This 'simplified' textbook to teach political economic ideas of Marxism does imply more than merely this. It was not teaching the masses about an alien theoretical or ideological discourse that had developed in completely different time and space. Writers like Damodaran act as intermediary links between these ideas (as they understood them to be) and the masses in the particular societies. By displacing/killing god and placing another powerful force at the centre *Paattabaakki* told the audience (mainly the poor peasants of Ponnani) in 1937 it is not a bad harvest that brought starvation to them but the economic evil of *paattabaakki*.

As we have already discussed in the previous chapter, in this Conference EMS spelt out the definition of peasant and agricultural labourer and the difference between them. We have seen, how EMS skillfully put the agricultural labourers into the category of industrial workers without making them part of the process of cultivation. It was strategically important for the as to keep the antagonism between the peasants (mostly Nair/Ezhava/Muslim households) and the agricultural labourers (different Dalit sub-castes varying according to the region) at a low in the initial stage of mobilization. The narrative also had to be about a middle caste peasant household forced out of their shelter and morality/dignity by the cruel feudal-capitalist forces. The vicious cycle of debts among the poor including the workers, small peasants and petty shop-owners and between them and the rich landowners and moneylenders forms the connection link between these diverse groups. Through these debt-relations different deprived sections could identify with each other and realize the rich as their common enemy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to map out the different mechanisms through which the progressive writers engaged with the newly-produced categories of labour, labourer and labouring class and political economy. After introducing the major writers to be discussed briefly, we went on to figure out the dominant mechanisms of imagining and representing these concepts. Two dominant means as we discussed were: one, portraying labour as backbreaking toil and labourer as the victim of severe exploitation and oppression and two, hailing labourer as the builder of the world through his labour that is the ultimate human attribute. Both these images are logically related as they discern the primary contradiction of the capitalist system. Nevertheless, the ethical status and the affect that was generated through the performative aspects of these texts were substantially different. We also read Vailoppilli's *Kudiyozhikkal* that presented a more complex picture of the question of representation as the poet was not free from the ambivalence about his ability to 'represent' something by merely ideologically identifying with it. The figure of the writer and the activity of writing, as emerge from the progressive movement, break with the traditional authoritative notions. Yet, the question of writing being labour and the significance of ideas in it remains unresolved.

There are two other central points that we dealt with in this chapter. One was the idea of differentiated conceptions of labour and their political relevance and the other was about the first political play in Malayalam, *Paattabaakki*, as the performative of political economy intended to engage with the audience in a pedagogic manner. In the first point, we saw how the centrality given to the managerial labour associated with agriculture by EMS is connected to the later land reforms legislations that redistributed cultivable land only among the managerial/ supervising classes/castes. Secondly, *Paattabaakki* was read in terms of its contribution in familiarizing the masses with the complex political economic ideas of Marxism in ways that are easily understandable to them and in turn its translation of these ideas to Malayalam.

Now let us come to the concluding section of the discussion where we will recapitulate our discussion. We will also try and open up certain issues that flow from the discussion that needs to be taken up later.

Conclusion

The central theme of the work has been the dominant mechanisms by which the early communist discourse had mediated the production of the progressive/ radical ideological and literary imaginations of the social and the political in Kerala, in particular through its engagement with the category of labour/ *thozhil*. To begin with we had discussed the ideological discourse that was constructed through the debates that took place in the progressive literature movement mainly between the communist party ideologues and other progressive writers who did not organizationally associate with the party. Then we dealt with a range of concepts as imagined by the progressive writers and the implication of these portrayals for the creation of the cultural and social matrix of modernity in Malayalam literature as well as larger society. Finally we narrowed down our discussion to the specific issue of representing labour in the progressive writing and its consequences for the mediated re-production of the communist ideology in the particular social and linguistic context. In the conclusion let us recapture these discussions and their larger implications for the study of communist movements in the subcontinent and beyond.

The progressive literary movement in Kerala (as well as in other parts India) in the decades of 1930s, '40s and '50s was substantially molded by the involvement of the communist activists in it. E. M. S. Namboodiripad and his fellow comrades in the communist party were dominant in the progressive literary debates of the era and in turn were able to significantly influence the ideological and aesthetic contours of modern Malayalam literature. However, the efforts of the communists, at creating an ideological hegemony through this debate did not go uncontested by other writers and critics who tried to imagine the spirit of progress and modernity in the domain of literature and aesthetics differently. While some of these writers sought to directly confront the communist attempts by laying out a distinct set of literary and aesthetic parameters regarding the socio-political issues of the times, others tried to grapple with the problems rather subtly through their radical writing strategies that challenged the dominant understanding of being modern and/or progressive.

In the first chapter we looked at the intellectual debates surrounding the question of writing progressively so as to contribute to the process of social transformation that Kerala was experiencing then. This debate tried to map out and classify the various meanings of producing progressive literature in Malayalam. The complex linkages between politics and aesthetics were laid out rather sophisticatedly whereby the questions of commitment and alignment of the writer was addressed. Kesari Balakrishnapilla and EMS (along with others) structured the discourse in interesting fashions, when they deployed *their* understandings of Marxism by producing sophisticated historical apparatuses to configure a new dialectical epistemology for modern Kerala.

On the one hand, Kesari attempted to scientifically classify and organize the field of literature according to the different forms and techniques used and the dominating modes of expression in it. This impulse for planning literature was taken up by EMS in order to argue for a more collectively planned and hence democratized sphere of literature. We argued that this tendency was not merely an attempt at democratization; rather the effort was to create an entry point for the communist ideologues as representatives of 'ordinary people' into this field and to regiment and manipulate the ideological world produced through it. The larger epistemological apparatus constructed by these efforts translated the dialectical materialist reading of history as understood by the local leaders, especially EMS.

EMS particularly tried to strike balance between different modes of translation in order to undertake an effective and 'simple' dissemination of a 'foreign' philosophical system to the vernacular. On the one hand, the complicated terminologies and their meanings were to be simplified and made familiar for the uneducated masses who could not 'understand' the relevance of these, unless it is contextualized in their daily experiences. On the other, the philosophical density and epistemological superiority of the same was not to be lost in the 'high intellectual' discussions, like the one we studied in the chapter. The former mode of translation 'for the masses' were to take place mainly through literature (including prose, poetry and most importantly plays) apart from the issue-based pamphlets and speeches by the leaders. This pedagogic potential of literature was to be realized by progressive writing.

In the second chapter, we undertook the study of the progressive writing regarding its complex engagement with the Malayalam 'social', in the backdrop of the feudal and colonial experiences, missionary endeavors, community reform movements and most importantly the advent of modernity as already mediated through the literature produced since the late nineteenth century. The modern social of Kerala had to be written keeping with the historical and epistemological apparatuses 'given by' the communist discourse and this was carried out very differently by different writers of the progressive epoch. They imagined social relations -of love, camaraderie, marriage and family- in the light of the emerging bourgeois modern in a society that was undergoing speedy transition from the older 'feudal' mores.

This complex aspect of progressive literature and its dilemmas about 'becoming modern' through the engagements with questions of class, caste and gender provide us with an entry point into the broader arena of writing social history through literature. The dominant communist imaginations as propelled by the 'simplified' translations of Marxist concepts as discussed in the previous chapter were read in their relation to other modes of representation adopted by other writers who significantly experimented with not only the explicit content of literature but also the given value allocations in the realm of the social sensibilities.

The third chapter deals with the specific and varied representations of the idea of labour and other associated ideas in progressive literature by reading selected writings from the period that either represent the dominant sensibilities or stand out as exceptions. In the discussion, we came across two dominant modes of representing labourer (*thozhilali*) by the progressive writers; one, as the victim *par excellence*, of alienation and living animal-like life and the second, as the builder of the world and hence, closest to being human. Though, both these images are logically connected by the understanding of 'labour' in Marx as the most humanly activity that mediates between Man and Nature and produces everything through this process of mediation, the affective sensibilities brought about by both these portrayals are qualitatively different.

A few exceptional works raised the complicated aspects of representation by invoking the questions of caste and gender and their interrelations with class. Vailoppilli's

ambivalence in determining the role of a writer/intellectual vis-à-vis the working masses apparently for whom he had to write and in negotiating this identity of a poet in a context fraught with complex power relations operated through the categories of caste and gender exemplifies this tension in progressive writing. Thakazhi established an intrinsic link between the experiential and intellectual registers of oppression and exploitation in the history of working class movement in the region through allowing his labouring characters to contemplate and realize their 'reality' as a constructed field in which political economy becomes a key player. A radical break was imagined with the ethically and morally bourgeois-fied labourer in the conventional communist imagination and cunning, lazy, undisciplined and confused labourers were portrayed as rebellious and revolutionary.

The discussion also laid out the process through which certain 'others' were juxtaposed to the figure of the labourer that in turn tried to give a moral highhandedness to the labourer as against the beggars, prostitutes and criminals who were unproductive and anti-social. Some of such works were discussed, for instance Basheer's *Shabdangal* where the radical potential of the character lied in their 'anti-social' existences where the social was always, already oppressive and hierarchical.

The important issue of writing as labouring and writer as a 'skilled' labourer committed to the 'real' labouring class was treated with varying confidence by different writers. For some, like KPG committed writing signified the commitment to the people mediated through the communist party and for some others like Vailoppilli commitment meant the commitment towards 'social reality' as Raymond Williams calls it. Labour as a materially mediated activity was to be now extended to include the activity of writing that involved the process of ideation above all.

Now we will identify some of the questions that this discussion opens up for further reading and critical inquiry in the light of a brief discussion of the contemporary debates around the moment of progressive literature movement in Malayalam.

K. E. N. Kunjahammad, a well-known contemporary communist intellectual in Kerala, has argued that the *Jeeval Sahitya Prasthanam* [*Jeeval Sahitya* Movement] had strong indigenous roots although the immediate influence for the formation of JSS was the progressive writers' conferences that took place in Paris and Lucknow in

1936. Thus, the *Bhakti* movement, Malayalam Renaissance Movement (*Navothana Prasthanam*)⁸⁶, the national movement and the agricultural-labourer movement that preceded it, provided the essential intellectual energy for the progressive movement in Kerala. Since its relation to the Renaissance Movement was very significant, it can be called a 'second and higher' Renaissance Movement. The readership was uncompromising as they had broken away from 'the caste and religious narrowness, limitations of hereditary jobs, linguistic unfreedom and exploitation, with certain limitations'. (Kunjahammad 2009)

According to Kunjahammad, the most significant contribution of the progressive movement was its engagement with the emerging secular public sphere in Kerala beyond the caste-religious solidarities. The progressive movement, for him, imbibed the heritage of the Renaissance and took it forward by inculcating the new energies of the modern labouring classes' struggles. This spirit was toppled by the 'Liberation Movement' of 1959 that led to the strengthening of the communal and reactionary forces and their anti-democratic orientation.

The introduction and sharpening of the humanist and tendentious aspects of literature in Malayalam, the use of the realist technique of writing that depicts the social contradictions in the society that was transiting from the feudal-landlordist phase to the bourgeois-democratic one and the focus on the influence of capital in the cultural sphere and the need to unleash an aesthetic fight with the decaying values are the major aspects of the movement that Kunjahammad wants to foreground as the markers of its progressiveness. It tried to overcome the caste-based frameworks of the first Renaissance movement and initiated the formation of the secular, democratic, modern sensibility in Malayalam.

We may tend to agree with these points at large unless we notice the sweeping generalization he has made about the homogeneity of the movement in embracing all these values of modernity as progressive. In fact, besides the explicit divide in the movement between the communist party writers and the non-party writers that Kunjahammad mentions, the progressive writers were deeply divided precisely

⁸⁶ Renaissance is the dominant concept used by the communist intellectuals like EMS and P. Govindapilla, to denote the caste/community-reform movements that took place in Kerala in the early years of twentieth century.

around these issues as we have already discussed in the earlier chapters. The overriding labor of the communist intellectuals in this period was to circulate the bourgeois ideals of modernity regarding morality and family as progressive and even communist. Some of the writers who tried to critique the bourgeois moral codes as reactionary and restrictive were vehemently opposed as ‘immoral’, ‘anarchic’ and ‘anti-social’ by the communists as discussed in the second and third chapters.

The effort towards framing the male labourer as the family-oriented, disciplined and ‘civilized’ bread-winner of the middle class household was achieved by plotting the figures of the *thendi* and the criminal as the other of it.⁸⁷ This image of the labourer was already gendered as we can clearly see and it associated the woman as the counterpart of this but mostly ‘at home’. The patrilineal, nuclear family set up and the monogamous, conjugal couple were celebrated as progressive against the matrilineal *tharavad* structure (though it cannot be generalized as existed in all communities and castes) and ‘looser’ man-woman relationships of the past.⁸⁸

As far as the creation of the secular (as different from caste/community based) sensibility is concerned, the more recent Dalit and feminist scholarships on Kerala communist movement needs to be closely analysed. The issues of subsuming the languages of caste and gender that invariably worked for the disadvantage of the lower-castes, particularly Dalits, some minorities, Adivasis and women, under the garb of ‘universal aspirations of the people’ or the ‘oppressed’ are yet to be thoroughly studied in the Kerala context. The recent struggles by the Dalits and Adivasis for agricultural land as ‘promised’ by the land reforms has to read along with our discussion of the early theorization by EMS about the land redistribution question and ‘managerial labour’ of the tenants, in the second chapter. The Dalit agricultural

⁸⁷ M. S. S. Pandian has argued that the dominant construction of the ‘Indian modern’ has been upper caste in its model and has portrayed lower castes as the ‘other’ of this modern. Hence, lower caste movements and ideologies needed to be cautious with modernity as the language of caste was obliterated by the dominant nationalist discourse as part of the ‘spiritual/personal’ realm as distinct from the material/political realm. Thus, Pandian asserts that the lower caste movements’ relation with modernity had to be by ‘being one step outside modernity’ and characterized by ‘antagonistic indebtedness’, borrowing the term from Paul Gilroy’s discussion about Black politics. (Pandian 2002: 1735-41)

⁸⁸ See J. Devika’s *En-Gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-forming in Early 20th Century Keralam*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2007, for a detailed discussion about the construction of the modern Malayali individual as a caste-ridden and gendered self.

labourers were not considered as belonging to the 'farming community' among whom the cultivable land would be re-distributed. They were clubbed with the industrial workers who are eligible only for social-welfare policies of education and health along with a plot of land for housing. The logic of 'productivity' and its relation to abilities of management (that was possessed by the tenants not the labourers) was central to the communist discourse of progress and development in Kerala.

Priyamvada Gopal in her outstanding work on the progressive literary movement in the Hindi-Urdu scenario argues that these progressive writers' engagements with questions of modernity in the colonial and post-colonial setting invariably gave their works a sort of 'hybridity' and 'ambivalence'. It is significant to note that in the Kerala context, the task of communist political intellectuals was more often to do away with these confused aspects and give these issues coherence and confidence of a scientific approach.

These ambivalences in the communist movement regarding social and cultural modernity have to be considered seriously if we need to trace the larger related histories of these movements in the subcontinent. The ways by which Marxist idioms were 'translated' conceptually in this early period requires more inquiries into the specificities of these engagements rather than clubbing together all such moments as 'progressive' and democratizing.

Another significant direction that needs to be taken in further studies is the engagement of the progressive literature movement with the idea and materiality of nation. For instance, unlike the Hindi-Urdu progressive literature, the issue of partition was not central to the Malayalam one, obviously owing to the geographical distance to the events. Nevertheless, the ways in which the nationalist movement and later, communist movement dealt with the issue had created its impact on the progressive literature in its imagination of an independent sovereign nation into which the Aikya-Keralam (the state that was formed on linguistic lines by bringing together the two princely states of Travancore and Kochi and the region of Malabar from the Madras Presidency) was to be annexed. The discussion of the process that 'wrote' the modern social of Kerala cannot but understand the imagination of the nation that undergirds all other categories.

In Priyamvada Gopal's work the Hindi-Urdu progressive writers' involvement with the question of nation assumes centre stage. "In their [the progressive writers] engagement with issues ranging from intercommunity romance and female sexuality to masculinity, morality and class mobility, each of these writers was concerned with the nation as an imaginative possibility and as a ground on which to stake a claim". (Gopal 2005: 4) Their relationship to the project of nation building, Gopal asserts borrowing Terry Eagleton's phrase, was a kind of 'coexistence of irony and commitment'. This she believes to shed light on the category of the 'postcolonial intellectual' that needs to be reexamined.

Moreover, the complex history of the ideological hegemony that the communist movement managed to create and sustain even after the 'liberation struggle' of 1959 that led to the termination of the first communist ministry from office, has to be studied keeping in mind the considerable impact the progressive literary productions had on the popular political imagination and parlance. Manali Desai argues that the most overarching reason for the sustained hegemony of the communist party in Kerala (in contrast to many other states) was the result of the appropriate political intervention by the early Congress Socialist Party (CSP) leaders and the later CPI leaders in all major issues including national movement and caste oppression and their success in accommodating all these issues together in their larger socialist agenda. In colonial period, the national struggle was successfully accommodated by the communist movement in Kerala, unlike the communist movements in other regions where they faced serious trouble regarding the national movement. Desai suggests that one of the reasons for this might be the fact that the communist party evolved out of the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala that was formed as a leftist faction of the Congress Party. The involvement of the CSP leaders in caste-reform movements, the organizational weakness of Congress, weak opposition from the landed elites compared to other regions along with the effective political mobilizational practices of the CSP in Kerala led to the stable founding of the communist party in the grass roots in Kerala.

Desai gives the agentic response of the party leaders to the opportunities presented by the peculiar structural circumstances most importance. In Malabar the issue of caste oppression was effectively linked to the class aspect of landlordism and in the

princely states of Travancore and Kochi, questions of newly emerging working classes in coir industry, toddy tappers, and agricultural labourers were connected to that of the struggle for responsible and democratic government. Reading rooms, initially established by the reform movements for the spread of literacy was transformed by the CSP leaders to spaces for politicization and education. Their post-independence movement included the “parliamentary and extra-parliamentary initiatives that include minimum wage legislations, land reforms, unprecedented levels of unionization of informal workers, and development of social services such as prenatal health care, hospitals, an extensive food distribution system, and schools.” (Desai 2002: 618)

This discussion about the hegemony of the communist party in Kerala could be taken forwards with a detailed analysis of the cultural domain of the communist movement, especially in the formative decades of 1930s, 40s and 50s for which the engagement of the communist movement with the progressive discourse is an indispensable aspect.

If one wants to raise these complex set of questions regarding the communist discourse in a vernacular context, it is essential to read the discourse in its heterogeneity and density. The political and cultural history of Indian Marxism, if at all the project is imaginable, has to be written not as a monolithic entity manifested in different regions differently due to certain ‘structural factors’. Rather, the effort should be directed towards a differentiated mapping of all old and new, large and small, strong or weak movements and parties in a related fashion, not by subsuming any one under another. This work may contribute to the nascent efforts in this direction that have begun in various contexts, not just in India but also in other parts of the world.

The relationships between the Soviet Marxism and other regional contexts have to be studied in this perspective i.e. without taking it for granted that certain simple process of importing of the Soviet model to other spaces happened. The contextual specificities of the processes of translating Marxism have to be taken into account if one has to remain sensitive to the material and ideological particularities of these movements in each circumstance.

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