CHAPTER VII
AN ASSESSMENT

In the ancient days communication transmission was exercised mainly through oral means or spoken voice when the source and the receiver were in face-to-face situation. In this method, people who throng up in the market and festival places were the vehicle of such transmission. But this situation changed with the growth of literacy on one side and that of print media on the other. Thus when the audience of the print media became more literate they could acquire from them more ideas and also could propagate them on a commensurate level. In respect of print media also same was the case. The invention of printing made it possible for a single written message to reach many receivers and thus to increase the potential effectiveness of a few individual communicators. Because of the very fact that it is being duplicated or multiplied a number of times it reached the hands of so many. Earlier the lack of availability of such printed copies denied many, from even going to the threshold of information and knowledge. In a competitive colonial world, print literature afforded a space to different sections among the middle classes to carve out their own power basis.

1 B.Kuppuswamy, Communication and Social Development, New Delhi, 1976, p.9.
2 Interview with K.N Ganesh on 29th July 2005.
3 B.Kuppuswamy, op.cit., p.9.
spurred the spread of literacy.\textsuperscript{5} In this process of ‘give and take’ a certain kind of communication channel is opened. It is on the basis of this perception the communication society is formed.\textsuperscript{6}

The communication between the newspaper and the reader is not just like a private conversation of two persons. When one is writing in a newspaper he does not know who are all reading that. Somebody who reads it, may respond and sometimes not. If he responds, it may not be the same day and it can be in a different way. Sometimes that response may be as a letter to the editor. Anyhow by this interaction there evolves a communication network and thereby some kind of ‘links up’ which results in the formation of certain public opinions. In the process, many such networks may evolve which may collectively form into public sphere. It can be inferred from this, that a communication channel is very fundamental for the evolution of public sphere. According to Jurgen Habermas it is this public sphere which is the basis of the communication society.\textsuperscript{7} Public Sphere is a common space, in principle accessible to all, which anyone may enter with views on the common good realized wholly or partially: a maidan, a coffee house, an exhibition hall, the paan shop on the road side, the sweet shop in the locality as also the discursive and representational space available in the newspapers, magazines, journals, radio, television and now internet.\textsuperscript{8}

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\textsuperscript{6} Interview with K.N Ganesh on 29\textsuperscript{th} July 2005.
\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Ibid.}
In this concept of public sphere civil audience is an inseparable part. The speaker who speaks out in the paper and his audience become thus inseparable. The editor publishes each and every item under the impression that there is an audience to perceive each of them. It is not with the certainty that such and such audience will receive such and such news. At the same time the listening audience listens to only what he actually wants. It is through this process the communication society forms and grows. As a result of this kind of interlinking network, opinion is ultimately formed. Habermas explains that this kind of structural evolution leads to the formation of public sphere.\(^9\) For Habermas, the public sphere is a “network for communicating information and points of view”.\(^10\) Print is only one of the communication links. Changes were possible due to a multitude of other links including songs, novels and dramas. But the role of print was decisive. The evolution of the above kind of process is observed even in the early days of the journalistic attempts of Malabar.

By the late 19\(^{th}\) century various innovations took place in the field of journalism in Malabar. The telegraphs helped the newspapers a lot to publish the hot news events, before it gets cold. Various news items were collected from various places, and carried articles able to transfer to the readers the latest knowledge, were published. Also there developed in the papers a forum which would reflect the desires of the public. As a result topics of discussion became matter for editorials; and editorials became the topics of discussion. And since the papers started to make dialogues aimed to resolve the problems faced by the country,

\(^9\) Interview with K.N Ganesh on 29\(^{th}\) July 2005.
the politics got a space in the paper. A public sphere consists of intercommunication spaces available in principle to everybody and into which people may bring issues that concern everyone. The birth of Indian National Congress helped politics not only to acquire a perpetual place in the papers but also to enhance its importance. Chandu Menon’s *Indulekha* is a speaking evidence of the process by which democratic values came to operate within the spheres of language and literature during the renaissance in Malabar.

This revolutionary change in the minds of the people occurred in various phases. In 1884 when *Kerala Pathrika* was launched there was nothing like public opinion since there was not any predecessor for it to cultivate the same at an earlier date. Thus it was from scratch that Kunhirama Menon developed the power and capacity among the people of Malabar to respond and reciprocate towards issues that prick the human conscience. But by the time it reached 1930’s papers like *Al-Ameen* and *Kerala Chandrika* were ready to stake the life for the right of expression.

Right from its inception *Kerala Pathrika* had free and frank opinions on every subject. It criticized unkindly the inhuman policies of the government. It fought against corruption and nepotism. It castigated the unethical journalism and fought for the freedom of the press. Its opinions were so sharp and attacking that *Kerala Pathrika* was made to pay a fine of Rs.51 for publishing news against the Government. The imposition of fine is a clear indication of the degree of growth of journalism in Malabar, its daringness to make opinion even against the will of the Government, and the fear of the authorities towards the
growth of public opinion. Kunhirama Menon in 1911 when he wrote the Preface to *Vrithandapathra Pravarthanam* he agrees that there was considerable degree of growth in respect of public opinion.

This has been ratified by the editorial of *Kerala Chinthamani* about the reactions of various newspapers about the banishment of Swadshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai from Travancore in 1911. It said, “There aren’t many papers to justify the stand of Travancore Government. We were under the impression that *Malayala Manorama* would give a clear statement. But instead in it appeared only an article, Sanskrit rich, none can easily understand. *Kerala Sanchari* which will not usually make a hasty comment but here wrote an article in favour of Ramakrishna Pillai. It is a common belief that *Kerala Pathrika* is usually against the deeds of Travancore Government. But none would accuse that ‘journalist uncle’ (Chenkalath Kunhirama Menon) for favouring somebody or eulogizing anybody. None is against the argument that Travancore has the right to banish Ramakrishna Pillai, but everybody agrees that it would have been made only after a trial in a court of law”. 11 Here the prominent newspapers of Malabar like *Kerala Pathrika* and *Kerala Sanchari* are mentioned as opinion makers and creators. At the same time *Kerala Chinthamani* which had been edited by Murkoth Kumaran and which was circulated well in Malabar, while commenting on the opinion of other papers makes its own comment also.

Within another decade, the boldness of newspapers to express their views escalated to such a level in which they found imprisonment

11 *Kerala Chinthamani*, October-November 1911.
much better than shirking their commitment to the public. Antagonized by a few editorials in *Lokmanya* published from Trichur, immediately after the Kerala State Congress held at Palakkad in 1923, the Government of Cochin started proceedings against the editor Kurur Namboothirippad and the publisher Sebastian. Both of them were asked to pay fine or undergo six months imprisonment. But they preferred imprisonment rather than paying the amount. Then congratulating the national fervour of Kurur, *Mathrubhoomi* wrote: “Kurur Namboothirippad has assumed an important place among the Congress workers of Kerala by the virtues of truth, national pride and perseverance. Every community will feel proud of such a young man. …..we now congratulate him, his family and Namboothiri community as a whole.”12

*Kerala Kesari* edited by Moyyarath Sankaran was made to sacrifice its life for the single reason that it gave active support to both National Movement and Tenancy Movement. The pressures from the *janmis* and government became so intolerable such that it was first forced to shift its office from Calicut to Cannanore and later for the closure of the publication.13

The saga of *Al-Ameen* in its fight for the freedom of expression and opinion is indeed still heroic. The editorials written against the curfew and the reports of the agitations during the Salt Satyagraha made by the Congress enraged the authorities. Immediately they imposed upon *Al-Ameen* on August 4th the Press Ordinance which asked it to remit Rs.2000 as advance security. Since Abdurahiman denied paying

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the amount the Al-Ameen press was sealed.\textsuperscript{14} After suspending publication for three and a half months in consequence of its unwillingness to pay security demanded of it, the Al-Ameen re-appeared on the 20\textsuperscript{th} November 1930 with a bold statement that it is very glad to be once again to carry on the services of the community and the country without the shadow of slavery.\textsuperscript{15} Here Abdurahiman was highlighting the high values of public opinion to manifest the public space for action.\textsuperscript{16} According to Habermas the public space is an emancipated space, liberated from the constraints of absolutism and unrestrained by controls on freedom of expression.

There is no doubt that it was due to the strenuous work of daring newspapers and competent editors public opinion reached its pinnacle and the public space was manifested. Readers started to respond to various issues. They informed the editor about various matters occurring around them, with their views and opinions. Sometimes they were treated as a source of exclusives. Sometimes they were published as letters to the editor. Anyhow people criticized and evaluated the authorities as to what extent they have exercised their duties. They informed the authorities their desires. A stage emerged in which no government could ignore or surpass this kind of public might.\textsuperscript{17} As a result the duties bound to be done by the authorities became the subject

\textsuperscript{14} N.P Chekkutty, \textit{Muhamed Abdurahiman}, New Delhi, 2005, p.64.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Al-Ameen}, 20\textsuperscript{th} November 1930, MNNPR, New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{16} Neeladri Bhattacharya “Notes Towards a Conception of the Colonial Public”, in Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld, (eds.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.131. This is indeed a space that nurtured critical opinion and questioned the premises of public authority and power, replacing a public sphere in which the ruler’s power was merely represented before the people, with a sphere in which the state authority was publicly monitored through informed discourses of the people.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Yogakshemam}, 10\textsuperscript{th} June 1921, NMML, New Delhi.
of surveillance and audit of the public. This conceding aspect is explicitly visible in the formation of Malabar Relief Fund by the District Collector in 1921. He assured that the administration of such fund will be entrusted to a committee of non-official gentlemen, working hand-in-hand with the District Officers. Had it been in the 19th century it would have been never with public participation and vigilance.

Thus by the last decade of the 19th century a diminutive social formation which could restrain the power of the officials and political institutions emerged. It could control and shape these powers by the public action of an active citizenry. This shaping may take the form of bending state power to cater to the basic needs of a more or less passive citizenry. Mathrubhoomi was doing exactly the same when it campaigned in the tenancy problem and Al-Ameen did in the Andaman scheme.

It is by standing on a particular platform of idea and conviction that each newspaper speaks about. They do all this with the anticipation of a public sphere in front of them. Otherwise neither Chenkalath Kunhirama Menon nor Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar could have published Kerala Pathrika or Kerala Sanchari. For Kunhirama Menon, when he started Kerala Pathrika, what he had before him was airy nothing. He could only foresee in his wildest imagination, the kind of audience before him. But he was very convinced about his platform and mission. He wanted to enlighten the public and boost their cultural standards so as to enable them to live in the modern times. So he used the pages of his paper to instill in them the legal awareness and knowledge about their rights. He wrote reports against the step-motherly

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18 Madras Mail, 16th September 1921, Micro-film, NMML, New Delhi.
treatment of the British against his fellow-men and corruption and nepotism in the administration. His desire for the autonomy of the country made him to work for Congress and argue for representation in the Councils.

It was all the more easy for Kerala Sanchari in its mission since it had already a model before it, Kerala Pathrika. It mainly addressed the issues of the educated Thiyyas. But it also tried its level best to infuse the people with their rights. It taught the lessons how to invest money and motivated them with entrepreneurial skills so as to enable them to amass money to become match with the Europeans.

Mithavadi laid its thrust on the upliftment of the Thiyyas. It also raised voice for the other backward communities and chalked out advises for the well-being of other communities. Mathrubhoomi, Al-Ameen, Kerala Chandrika etc.made clarion call to liberate the country from the British by the inflammation of national fervour among the people of Malabar.

All these newspapers could enlighten the public and create a space for the public to make the state to lean towards their wishes. When official institutions of the state are compelled to respond to the needs and requirements of citizens crystallized in their own public opinion and formed by rational-critical debate, then we have something akin to Habermas’ liberal public sphere.