CHAPTER IV
RADICALIZING THE WORD: THE LEFT AND THE LITERARY MOVEMENT

Discussions of the ambiguous relationships between literature and social and political power have a long history. Literature has been conceived of as a reflection of dominant power relations, either directly – as bearing the stamp of society’s hegemonic forces, or indirectly as an unintended criticism of the same power relations. Or, literature was seen as a progressive force by virtue of its contribution to enlightenment, in a more general sense, as a criticism of inconsistencies in the dominant culture, a depiction of ethical dilemmas, or as a source of critical reflection on language and narration. Alternatively, literature has been put to use as an instrument of adaptation to existing society or as a vehicle for social change, by aligning itself with collective movements, most prominently as a call for proletarian literature, but for a long time as a strand of feminist and regionalist writing as well.¹

By adopting literature as a revolutionary tool, the Marxist literary theoreticians tend to focus on the representation of class conflict as well as the reinforcement of class distinctions through the medium of literature. Marxist theorists use traditional techniques of literary analysis but subordinate aesthetic concerns to the final social and political meanings of literature. They often champion authors sympathetic to the working classes and authors whose work challenges economic equalities found in capitalist societies. In keeping with the totalizing spirit of Marxism, literary theories arising from the Marxist
paradigm have not only sought new ways of understanding the relationship between economic production and literature, but all cultural production as well.

The Marxist criticism gives an approach to literature that focuses on the ideological content of a work – its explicit and implicit assumptions and values about matters such as culture, race, class, and power. Some Marxist critics use literature to describe the competing socio economic interests that too often advance capitalist interests such as money and power rather than socialist interests such as morality and justice. They argue that literature and literary criticism are essentially political because they either challenge or support economic oppression. Because of this strong emphasis on the political aspects of texts, Marxist criticism focuses more on the content and themes of literature than on its form. The Progressive Writers’ Movement in Kerala, through their powerful literary productions established this literary notion in Malayalam.

The period of PWA was the most vibrant period of literary development in Malayalam language. It was a period of active literary debates and purposeful literary productions. It introduced the methods of critical realism, socialist realism and Marxian theories in Malayalam. When the masses began to rise in the midst of economic crisis and bondage, the progressive writers gave them inspiration to revolutionary struggle and activism. The *Jeeval Sahitya Samiti* of 1937 and the Progressive Writers’ Association of 1944, emerged with the international political movements, gave organizational form to the writers’ united front activism towards this end. The literary works, which were once considered as the realm for enjoyment to the rulers and upper class people, now changed into a place of untouchables and miserables.
The progressive literatures reflected four different faces: (1) the face of poverty created by the war, economic crisis and landlord-capitalist exploitation; (2) the pains injected by the socio-religious injustice; (3) the hope of a beautiful future; and (4) the picture of a man who strives for a better future.\(^4\)

By the time the first conference of the Progressive Writers’ Association was held after seven years almost every major writer in Kerala had been won over by the movement. The movement captured everyday in all its energy and diversity: the writers used different idioms even while they shared the same concerns. Whole sections of people sentenced to the culture of silence spoke through these writers.\(^5\) Landless peasants, fisherman, untouchables, the rural poor, impoverished craftsmen, men and women forced into begging and prostitution and urban workers: all these subaltern layers of society found a place in literature for the first time after the age of the folklore. This change of content engendered a stylistic transformation. In poetry it appeared chiefly as a replacement of Sanskrit meters by Dravidian and folk meters and rhythms and a considerable reduction of the Sanskrit element in the vocabulary. In creative prose it meant the introduction of a strong dialectical element borrowed especially from the marginalized classes, castes and the minorities and the consequent disavowal of the laboured linguistic sublimity of clear fictional modes.\(^6\) In short it privileged realism against mysticism in both content and style. The Communist ideal of classless society has a charm of its own in a communal minded and biased society.\(^7\)

Hundreds of literary works in the form of poetry, plays, short stories, fiction, and literary criticism were written. The content was clear about the new society-an alternative to the existing unequal socio-economic and political order. Under the influence of
Marxism, the writers made sincere efforts, though lacking in theoretical rigour, to take the message of socialism to the masses. It was a new voice, fresh and pure, with strong commitment to usher in a classless and casteless society where the creative faculties of human beings would blossom without hindrance. All those drawn into the PWA were not a part of the Communist Party cadre. Some of them were ‘fellow travelers’ and some were not even that. Quite a few of them were traditionalists in the sense that they were born and brought up in the atmosphere of traditional learning and yet came into the PWA as they grasped the quintessence of Marxism in terms of broad humanism that would translate the ancient saying *sarve jana sukhinobhavantu* into reality.\(^8\) The Communist Party linkages were there but only in a covert fashion and in fact these linkages helped the PWA to get into the programme of mass contact through which the writers felt a sense of fulfillment, which, after all is the ultimate aim of any creative endeavour. Indeed the remarkable achievement of the movement is the realization of almost all writers that all art including literature has a social purpose. They also believed that art forms should be expressed in easy and uninhibited manner, discarding the conventional fetters of grammar and prosody and literary embellishments.

**An Introduction to Progressive Malayalam Literary Scene**

Malayalam is claimed by 96% of the people of Kerala as their mother tongue. Scholars generally agree that the closest kin of Malayalam is Tamil. But as regards the separation of these two languages from the parent tongue, there is considerable difference of opinion. Bishop Robert Cadwell, the author of *Comparative Dravidian Languages*, considered Malayalam as a much altered and ancient off-shoot of Tamil, which got the
position of a sister language in due course. After comparing the morphological element of both the languages, Mahakavi Ulloor, the author of the well known History of Malayalam Literature, considered Malayalam, the elder sister of Tamil.

The history of Malayalam literature may broadly be divided into three periods. The first is a period of receding Tamil dominance and advancing Sanskrit influence. Elitist poets of the age were interested in introducing Sanskrit literary forms like Champu and Sandesa Kavya and in Sanskrit oriented linguistic and stylistic innovations. On the one hand, a shrinking into erotic themes and, on the other, an enlargement of the resources of language and style, could be seen. Next period witnessed the birth of sage-poets for whom poetry was a highly serious endeavour with a lofty moral purpose. They consolidated formal achievements of the former age and turned to the Puranas for noble themes. Malayalam poetry reached its pinnacle of glory in this age, evidently influenced by bhakti renaissance, and joined mainstream of the national literature. The third period is marked by the impact of liberal-democratic spirit which came in the wake of the first encounter with the west and spread of modern education. It is also to be noted that new radical ideologies started exerting influence on writers. This period witnessed the origin and development of the art of prose, spread of journalism, and birth of modern forms such as fiction, drama, lyric and literary criticism. In these decades of unprecedented curiosity and enthusiasm the vision widens and creativity seeks new pastures. Prose takes precedence over verse and becomes the vehicle for both imaginative creation and intellectual exploration.

Malayalam literature, from the beginning had shown a tendency to reflect socio-political problems of its people. There had been Malayalam writers who expressed their
democratic ideas in their works and also had manifested their willingness to accept any
trend or tendency from foreign literature. Though the democratic tradition of Malayalam
literature has a long history, a clear turn in this direction began only in the 1930s. This
was mainly as a result of the influence from the literature of Soviet Union and Western
countries. The new movements were preceded by the emergence of “progressive
literature”, in consonance with what was happening in other major languages of India. It
was evidently a sentiment.\textsuperscript{11}

Even before the emergence of Progressive Literary Movement, progressive
works, which were came out of the cultural renaissance movement led by the socio-
religious reformers, found a place in Malayalam. \textit{Indulekha} of O. Chandu Menon,
\textit{Jathikkummi} of K.P. Karuppan and the writings of Kumaran Asan and Sahodaran
Ayyappan introduced bear this kind of significance.

It was generally accepted that the progressive literary trend in Malayalam
emerged with Sree Narayana’s disciple and the famous poet, Kumaran Asan’s poems.
The new trend was conspicuously inaugurated by Kumaran Asan (1873-1914) with his
\textit{Veena Poovu} (Fallen Flower, 1907), a symbolic elegy.\textsuperscript{12} It did not carry any direct
message of revolt against the existing order but the genre of the literature which its author
Kumaran Asan, introduced for the first times in the history of Malayalam literature made
him recognized as a literary genius.

Among the works of Kumaran Asan, \textit{Duravastha} occupies a unique position. It
marks a clear departure from the beaten track of poetic convention. The inspiration for
writing this poem had come from a shocking episode in history, viz., the Moplah
Rebellion of Malabar, 1921. It was a very significant and meritorious work which has effectively served a social purpose. The poignancy of feeling, the vehement criticism of the social system and the revolutionary zeal as displayed in the work have stirred the people of Kerala more than any of his other works. In Duravastha we find the greatest tirade against caste and the most powerful exhortation for doing away with it. The message of the poem has gone a long way to stem the growing tide of this social evil in Kerala. Through this poem, Asan created a revolutionary consciousness against the caste system. “This poem questioned the orthodox Indian social organization, and it can be seen as revolutionary as the Malabar Rebellion.”

In the preface to the first edition of Duravastha, Asan wrote: “It is the humble aim of the following lay with the title Duravastha that the memories of this great calamity (Moplah Rebellion, 1921) and some of the lessons it had taught, should last in order to serve as a catalytic agent for the recognition of society. Compared to my other works, Duravastha is a poem that does not conform to conventional literary standards. It is based on incidents that took place in the present and just in front of the readers and, what is more, in such narrative poems, which are written with the aim of describing those incidents as faithfully as possible, it is difficult to bring in aesthetic elegance.”

This is the first instance of purposeful poetry, of elements of realism in Malayalam literature; in fact, the first Malayalam poem with the ethos of the land where Malayalam is spoken. Chandalabhikshuki is twins with Duravastha and supplements the picture of the social background. According to Asan progress can be achieved through evolution and revolution; and the two could co-exist. Perhaps according to him, only
when revolutionary ideas spread; evolution will gain its necessary momentum. \(^\text{16}\) When Asan warned the orthodox leaders of the society,

“Change you the laws yourselves
Or else, the laws will change you indeed.”\(^\text{17}\)

We see in him not only a revolutionary poet, but a great prophet.

During the last years of the First World War, the development of the cultural sphere, which was related with the renaissance of Kerala, passed over to a new phase. The national freedom struggle strengthening all over India found its expression in Kerala through the creative writings of Vallathol Narayana Menon. Poet Vallathol by that time completely identified himself with the struggle of the Indian people for freedom. He had become the bard of renaissance in India, proud of its great rich historical and cultural heritage, determined to change the present state of bondage and degradation, visualizing a new India in a new world of freedom, peace and happiness. All these exhilarating new experiences inspired the poet to write “The Song of the Peasants” in July-August 1928.\(^\text{18}\)

During the last years of 1930s tremendous changes occurred both in the political and cultural spheres of Kerala. In that period anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, national, democratic movements strengthened in an unprecedented fashion all over Kerala. Modern value concepts, which were confined to the upper strata of the society in the early phase, now began to spread to the lower layers of society. In addition to the middle class, various other sections consciously entered into the mainstream of public life. Consequently political and cultural spheres became more popular based and it acquired democratic character. Thus the most significant factor that separated this popular phase of
renaissance of Kerala from the past was the appearance of the new class who had not yet acquired a political identity. However, working class emerged as a strong force to reckon within the socio-political movements. Subsequently, the Left wing of the national movement got strengthened and they took the leadership of the working class movements. Thus working class became the leader of the peasantry and the other exploited sections of the society.

In this phase of the progressive literary movement, there emerged two trends in the cultural sphere which tried to fight against the retrogressive and reactionary tendencies. Among them, one trend was represented by democrats who were inclined to the Left wing of the national movement, and offered to fight against the life style and aesthetic concepts of feudalism. Kesari A. Balakrishna Pillai was the best representative of this cultural trend. Literary critics and thinkers like M.P. Pillai, Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai etc., story writers like Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, P. Kesava Dev, and Ponkunnam Varkey, and in a broader sense poets like Changampuzha Krishna Pillai were the spokesmen of this trend. The other trend was represented by those who recognized the working class politics and gave leadership to fight feudal and imperialist systems, separating themselves from the Left wing. They were the leaders of the Communist movement which was formed only during the culmination of the 1930s. They were the spokesmen of a new aesthetic perspective that rejected all established literary concepts of the east and the west. The main force that functioned behind this trend was the formation of the progressive and democratic culture in India and abroad. This movement’s salient features were revealed and its position was clarified by the theoretical works of E.M.S. Namboodiripad and the creative writings of K. Damodaran, Cherukad and the like. Their
feelings were bitter and their expression was vehement in favour of revolutionary ideas and change. Invariably the theme is the “social man” and they attempted to depict or copy the society in which they lived as faithfully as they could. The reaction was definite and its nature was rebellious.19

These radical writers argued for rapid socio-economic change, if not socio-economic revolution. They were inspired by the socialist ideas and the emerging Left-wing politics. This generation of writers asserted that literature should be progressive and to be progressive it had to be realistic and realism had relevance only when it advocated socio-economic changes. While, together came under the platform of the PWA, these writers served as ‘committed’ to the cause of a new literary era in Malayalam.

**Progressive Poetry and New Revolutionary Vigour**

The poetry which this school produced was not of very high quality. But it must be granted that it had great influence on many of the leading writers, by providing them with a new outlook. Especially in the case of Vallathol Narayana Menon and G. Sanakara Kurup, the impact of progressive ideas has been remarkable. The purely ‘progressive’ school also produced some poets of talent, among whom may be mentioned N.V. Krishna Warrier, Akkitham, Olappamanna, Vayalar Ramavarma, P. Bhaskaran, Kedamangalam Pappukutty, Idassery Govindan Nair and O.N.V. Kurup.

Those poets, who have no ardent relation with the Communist ideology, such as Vallathol and Sankara Kurup also got influenced and inspired by the international Communist movement and the anti-Fascist wars led by the Communists.
In his poem, entitled “November 7”, Vallathol wrote:

“Once in a Nineteen Seventeen  
On the Seventh of November of the Christian Era  
The ten days that shook the world  
Through a great cyclone  
All the cruelties and injustice prevailed in Russia  
Have been flown away”

In one of his poems, Vallathol depicted Gandhi and Lenin as two brighten stars and wrote:

“Lenin, the great socialist  
Covered the cold Russia  
With the warmth of revolutionary glory  
Gandhiji, with the moonlight of satyagraha, in India  
To us they are liberators from darkness and  
The Sun and the Moon”

These lines were the evidences for the impact of progressive social revolutions on Malayalam writers, those who holds traditional perspectives.

In 1951, Vallathol went to Soviet Union as a representative of the literary-artist group of Government of India. After returning from there, he wrote a number of poems, which glorified the socio-political and cultural conditions of Russia.

Sankara Kurup was profoundly influenced by the social and economic urges of the modern world and his poetry reflects the progressivism of the younger school. But as in Vallathol, there was a dichotomy in his attitude. Some ways he was orthodox, emphasizing the Indianness of his culture and the continuity of tradition. He was also at
the same time, in a measure, moved by the social theories of the Left. In 1935, G. Sankara Kurup wrote a poem entitled “Naale” (Tomorrow) in which the poet criticized the life of the wealthy people, who owning the whole wealth of the land and leading luxurious life. He warned them and sung:

“Look, pale and shiver
See a glorious tomorrow just in front of you!”

When Russia won over the Nazis, G. Sankara Kurup wrote a poem entitled *Jaithrapadaham*, in which he opened up his ecstasy:

“Rejoice, my heart O Rejoice!
Today the Russian soldiers blow the clarion of victory
His sword glittering not with the glory of war
In the days of terrible miserable,
It glitters with love of mankind and love for humanism
Rejoice, my heart O Rejoice!
Fly up with the liberal red flag
In the peaks of the virtue of man and;
In the crimson flag that flutters
The oft-longed blush of the new dawn dances”

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai also once dedicated his hope in the Communist ideology and it is evident from his lines:

“Throw away the bundles of palm leaves
To the burning pyre, that carries age-old cultures
In this world, what remains to be learnt by us?
That I will tell you, it is the philosophy of the sickle!”
Changampuzha’s poem *Vazhakkula* (A Bunch of Bananas) is an attempt to focus attention on the have-nots, who are denied the fruits of their labour by an unjust socio-economic system. *Vazhakkula*, which was published in the year 1937, portrays the injustice in the *jenmi*-tenant relationship. When the All India Progressive Writers’ Association held its second anniversary at Kottayam (1945 May 29-30), Changampuzha was selected as the President of Young Writers’ Session.\(^{27}\) It was in a way an honour bestowed upon the poet.

Writers like, Edassery and Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon who stood mostly outside the movement also could not but respond to the new social and literary ferment. Through his poems, Edassery portrayed the picture of the peasants and labourers who were preparing to struggle for a new life. In his poem, *Puthan Kalavum Arivalum* depicts the striking agricultural labourers, through the thoughts of Koman, aiming at the capture of power before the harvest;

> “First let us reap the harvest of power  
> Then the golden rice fields”\(^{28}\)

The poem, *Panimudakkam*, depicts the agony and anger of a textile labourer Raman, who continued the mill strike even after all his children, died of starvation.

> “Let us bury deep all our pains,  
> And leap forward to strength”\(^{29}\)

This was the message that the poet gave through this poem. Edassery could portray the determination and activism of the peasants and factory workers.
His poem, *Kudiyirakkal* dealt with the issue of the denial of permanent ownership of land to the peasants. In this poem, he portrayed the unflinching emotional attachment of a peasant with his agricultural land and cattle. It was important in this sense that this emotional attachment to their land led the peasants and tribals to start revolt against the colonial occupation.\textsuperscript{30} The poems of Edassery, *Mainakasringam* and *Ramayanam* also deals with the peasant struggles in the background of agricultural laws.

Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon also gave a place to the ignored workers in his poems. His *Kannikoythu*, *Padayalikal* and *Kaakka* were evidence of this. In his *Padayalikal*, he called the workers as the “builders of foot to the world”.\textsuperscript{31} Further, he asked to sing glorifying songs for the dedicated activities of the workers.

Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon, who wrote *Kudiyozhikkal*, a long poem, which describes the eviction of a tenant from his tenement by the landlord.\textsuperscript{32} He also visited Soviet Russia and wrote a beautiful poem *Lenin*.

There is a whole galaxy of progressive poets who came up along with the leftist revolutionary movements. The legendry Punnapra-Vayalar peasant revolt inspired the youth poets like Vayalar Rama Varma, P. Bhaskaran and Thirunelloor Karunakaran. P. Bhaskaran wrote an inspired poem entitled *Vayalar Garjikkunnu* (Vayalar Roars) which dealt with the peasant-worker’s revolt under Communist leadership at Vayalar, a coastal village in Alleppey district in 1946, became immensely popular and was banned by the Travancore Government.\textsuperscript{33}
Vayalar, P. Bhaskaran and O.N.V. Kurup, famously referred to as the “Communist Poet Triumvirate” contributed much to the peasant-labour movements in the later periods.

In his poem “Vayalar Garjikkunnu”, P. Bhaskaran exhorts the memory of the comrades, who dedicated their lives in the Punnapra-Vayalar Revolt and echoed their sound:

“I will rise up and spread all over the land
Once again I will rise up
By giving a new life to the land!”\(^{34}\)

Through his poetic language, he viewed the Punnapra-Vayalar Revolt as:

“In the sacred breast of the Malayalam land
The poem written by the oppressed in their own blood”\(^{35}\)

In his poem, “Theejwalakal”, he commented that the police cannot suppress the emerging revolutionary struggles of the workers and stated:

“It won’t be put off so easily
This mountain of fire that smokes to burn
It won’t be calm down so quickly
This sound of the tempest”\(^{36}\)

The theme of his poem, “Samskarathinte Naalangal” depicts the strike movement of the factory labourers. Regarding the labour movements he wrote:

“The labourers who spins the coir has a brilliant story of struggle
When that story is told,
Is not my country proud?
Know it is not just a story to you,
In the history of class struggles
Written throughout in blood
The only truth that stands bold in red.”

The songs written by O.N.V. Kurup gave much inspiration to the oppressed people than these poems. The lyrics of his songs like;

“All the fields we reap
Will be ours, my birdie!”

Gave the hope for a better future in the minds of peasants and agricultural labourers.

Praising the Punnapra-Vayalar martyrs, O.N.V. wrote:

““The Paris Commune” of Kerala
That is this “Vayalar”
Offer our salutes”

Vayalar Ramavarma was the poet who held the Communist ideology of ‘class’ and he developed the poems as an intervention for a new cultural structure.

Kedamangalam Pappukutty and K.P.G. Namboodiri admired their aim of working class poem and wrote a number of revolutionary poems and lyrics. The poems of Kedamangalam Pappukutty were very popular among the workers.

“We, the poor
Receive the brandished sword on our neck
As the sacred garland\textsuperscript{40}

These lines of Pappukkutty showed the extreme revolutionary spirit and his call to
give up the life for the revolutionary struggle.

“Kadathuvanchi” is another important revolutionary poem written by him. In this,
the poet remained the working class about

“The nakedness of the weavers, who clothed the world,
The hunger of the peasants, who feed the country,
The tottering huts of the builders of palaces... and
The chains on those who gave freedom to the world” \textsuperscript{41}

Further, the poet asks the working class to take the forward march to revolution.

“Time calls on us to stand firm hand in hand
The path for forward march is all clear now
There goes the grand train of revolution
Come on comrades, enough we had suffered
The cruelty, the hunger of this wicked world” \textsuperscript{42}

From the personal experiences as an activist of agricultural and labourer’s unions,
he wrote poems depicting the life of peasants and workers from 1931 onwards. Regarding
his contributions to the proletarian cultural movement, the 11\textsuperscript{th} All Kerala Labourer’s
Conference, held in 1936, by accepting him as a working class poet, gave a medallion to
him. \textsuperscript{43} In his early career, he actively participated in the State Congress movements and
he was imprisoned for that.
In the forties when the Communists gathered momentum in Kerala, several works were written with themes directly concerned with the proletariat and its vanguard, the movement. K.P.G. Namboodiri, a great revolutionary poet, who was an active participant in the movement, translated Mayakovsky’s famous poem, *Lenin*.\(^{44}\) He also wrote several revolutionary poems which inspired workers and peasants.

K.P.G. wrote a number of marching songs and many of them were sung at the Communist political marches, meetings and processions. His famous lines flow as follows:

“Those who writes the history of new free India with their own blood,
Those who fly up the red flag in the struggles of the oppressed,
Those who have no hesitation to come to the forefront of the battlefield,
Those who show their anger even in front of death,
Oh! The courageous men, having the blood of labourers flowing in their vains”\(^{45}\)

While criticizing the poets, in their negation to the life of marginalized peoples, K.P.G. wrote critique lines in poetic style. He asked to those poets:

“O! You the sophisticated scholars
Why didn’t you write
Even a quarter of a line
About this poor farmers
Or this toiling labourers?”\(^{46}\)

K.P.G’s poems echoed his revolutionary sound and while considering the emerging revolutionary movements, he wrote:
“This revolution that rushes in
Is the blasting of the dam of stagnant life”"47

In his poem, _Naniyude Chintha_ (Naani’s Thought), he portrayed a village woman, who wished to be born at Soviet Union.

“There is a land known as the ‘Soviet’
How fortunate it is to go there
How sad it is, I could not be born there
Not in the sacred land”"48

Through their poems, these revolutionary poets praised the persons, who died in the anti-feudal struggles. The following line shows their attitude to the martyrs;

“O! You the courageous comrades, you are fortunate
We, who are here, are extremely unfortunate”"49

Urging the necessity of unity among the writers to back up the revolutionary movements led by the peasants and working class, Thirunelloor Karunakaran exhorted:

“O’ the Singers of a new dawn
Story tellers of a new awakening
Standing united and in one voice
Let us blow the clarion of fighting art”"50

He also wrote poems like “Tashkent” and “Vayalar”.

V.T. Kumaran, who was a revolutionary poet, gave enthusiastic inspiration to the revolutionaries in the Communist agitation periods. When the Punnapra-Vayalar Revolt
occurred he wrote a poem, which concludes with a warning to Dewan C.P. Ramaswamy Ayer:

“Go and tell that Ayer
Not to throw a stone
To let loose these wasps”

He also wrote poems to project the merits of Soviet Union, which have the lines:

“Soviet, the Sun which born in our land
Why this cacophony to see it inspiring us?”

When the anti-Jap meetings and processions were held in Kerala, V.T. Kumaran wrote anti-Jap songs to sing at these occasions. It sung as;

“What to tell
To those who say
It is better if the Japanese come
If the entire world declares that
Fascism should be destroyed
Think about its virtues”

The lyrics written by Kumaran were sung as the introductory songs in the theatrical performances and as the marching songs at the political processions.

When the revolutionary movements emerged under the Communist leadership, the police took oppressive measures against the Communists. Along with the oppressive measures adopted by the police, any expression of ideas against imperialism and landlordism was also proscribed. The Progressive Literature Society of Chirakkal Taluk
had published a collection of poems with the title *Rakteetham* (Blood Song). In this collection, a poem entitled *The Pledge*, which was written by Azhicode Srinivas, rises the questions like;

Oh, when are we going to have any scheme here  
Which can give relief to the oppressed?  
When will the land-owning and the capitalist classes disappear  
And the sun of equality rise?  
When will these workers wield the scepter and redeem this land of Bharath?  

Further Pallathu Narayanan wrote a poem, entitled “Coming!” which narrates the march of the oppressors against imperialism and its cruelties. The next poem, “Take up the Sword”, which was written by Parayangatt Kunhi Raman, enthused the peasants by asking:

“Let us rise and be in the lap of a bright future of unrivalled charm  
The struggle is on, come; oh, heroes of agrarian struggle (peasant warriors)!”

This collection of poems was proscribed under the regulations of the Indian Press (Emergency Powers) 1931 Act.

The poems and the labour struggles of these periods mutually influenced the labourers and the poets. By this time, Malayalam poems immensely reflected the life of peasants and working class people and their movements for a better future. The number of revolutionary poems, which were published in Malayalam increased rapidly and this shows its wide acceptance and impact. T.J. Nossiter points out that in 1951 alone, Kerala’s left-wing magazines published around two thousand poems and short stories in
Malayalam—the language spoken predominantly in the state—dealing with the popular struggle for a United People’s Democratic Kerala. These poems gave inspiration, enthusiasm, class consciousness and organizational strength to the peasants and workers to wage revolutionary struggles.

Prose and the Adoption of Proletarian Themes

Progressive Literary Movement in Malayalam lent ideological support to most of the writers from its formative years. The prominent young writers of the period like P. Kesava Dev, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Ponkunnam Varkey, S.K. Pottekkadu, Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, P.C. Kuttikrishna Pillai, and others were influenced by this new ideology. A new wave of realism with a social emphasis reached the shore of Kerala and the first fruits are seen in short stories and short plays. Even the mere titles of the early novels indicate the change. The realism of these novels and short stories came as a shock to the ordinary readers.

These writers affiliated with the PWA that came of age in the 1930s in Kerala, took inspiration from Marxism and from their idealistic faith in the policies of the Communist government in the Soviet Union. Rejecting ornate language, they focused on writing that was accessible to all classes and could galvanize social change.

P. Kesava Dev, one of the pioneers of the Progressive Literary Movement in Malayalam was lived approximately eighty years of which almost half was in pre-independent and the latter half post-independent period. This period in the history of
Kerala was one of great significance as far as the socio-economic life of the state is concerned, for reasons well known.

Kesava Dev was an infant terrible of the 1940s. He plunged into leftist politics, championed the cause of the downtrodden, worked as a trade unionist, participated in the freedom struggle and used his writings to propagate Marxist ideology. He was less than subtle in declaring his commitment to his politics. In the first volume of The Stories of Dev, he states: “I am proud to acknowledge that I am a propagandist. I am the propagandist of the progress of life. Some critics have alleged that I do my literary work on behalf of a certain political party. I do not deny the Party bias alleged against me.... As far as I am concerned I admit unhesitatingly that there is Party bias in my writings.”

Further, Kesava Dev proclaimed, “I do not write to enrich my literature. Literature for me is my sincere and earnest attempt to examine the complicated issues in life.” According to him, the fountain of literary creation is real life. They have no existence independent of it. The emotions, thoughts and imaginations all come from real life. He asserts that without understanding this fact a meaningful evaluation of literature is quite impossible. The writer is a product of society. He is not above it or outside it. He represents it. The literary works mirror the writer’s time. They are the products of those societies. The writer is a part of nature and that he is capable of bringing about changes in it is the distinctive fact about him. He is then the oracle of all inclusive nature. At a lower level, he is the oracle of his environment.” In another way, Dev argued that “a literary creation cannot but be the reflection of the class oriented social structure... literature could be categorized into conservative and progressive based on class character. These two are in constant struggle as the dialectical forces in society. The history of literature is
the history of this struggle. And every writer represents either the ruling class or the exploited class.  

He believed that the writer has the duty to direct the readers towards his own good and the social good. “A writer has to take the pursuit of art seriously... writer has essentially to be a purveyor, a progressive minded, scientific evaluator and a prophet who has a sense of responsibility.”

The stories of Dev were forceful and moving as he was telling stories of the starving and exploited people in a vigorous style the incisive quality of which was always unmistakable. His clear social and political visions lent a new strength to his themes. Never did he write a story without the objective of exposing some injustice or decadence-social, political or economic of the contemporary society. Dev always identified himself with the sorrows and sufferings of the characters whom he depicted in his stories. He always waxed eloquent on love and human dignity. Devastating is the effect that he produced when he writes with fully revolutionary ardour of a champion of the exploited and the downtrodden. The variable rebel in him often gets the better of the artist and sometimes runs away with his themes.

Dev was one of the earliest to write a novel with a real working class hero as the novel was significantly titled *Odayil Ninnu* (From the Gutter, 1944), highlighting the sufferings of the working class and their innate nobility. Pappu, the riksha puller, is the central character of this story. To narrate the picture of class struggle, Dev posted his hero Pappu as the son of a farmer, who is a tenant of a *jenmi*. They lived in a hut at the land of that *jenmi* and worked hard in the land for the welfare of that *jenmi*. He, from his
childhood opposed all forms of oppression and authoritarianism and earns his living through hard physical labour. In the beginning we see the child Pappu going to school but suddenly stopping his studies. One day the teacher punished him and other lower caste students for a simple crime. But the son of the school manager, who was also jenmi, involved in that crime was exempted from the punishment. The little boy Pappu got angry and he made his mind to live freely from the clutches of jenmi and he left his home. Then he started his career as a head load worker and struggled for his day to day life. But with hard work, he could earn enough money and he brought a riksha. It became the salvation period for him from his bondage. Pappu is a new type hero, who in later life gives sustenance to a destitute girl – Lekshmi – and manages to get her educated. But in course of time Lekshmi feels shame with the relation of a riksha puller-Pappu. Gopinathan, who married Lekshmi, tells her about the greatness of Pappu. In the final stage, due to the hard work, Pappu became a tuberculosis patient but had to work hard for his livelihood. His self respect and compassion triumphed over his own suffering. Through this Dev depicted the whole life of a labourer who in his entire life working hardly to live and dying without achieving anything.

Ayalkkar (Neighbours) is a more mature work and Dev here tries to evoke the life of an entire village community; the feudal aristocracy and its old time grandeur and inevitable decline and downfall, the rising middle class especially the Ezhava community and its dilemmas and the rising of Christians in the field of education and economic prosperity which are vividly portrayed in this long tale with great complexity and wide sweep.68
Kesava Dev brought rikshaw-pullers, rowdies, peasants, factory workers and other less privileged class of people as the heroes and heroines in his novels and short-stories. He wrote in their language with all its inherent power in a style that was unknown till then. Through his writings, a reader can find the struggles of the working class people in their day to day life, the different faces of feudal landlords’ hardships, problems of middle class families and economic exploitation on the labourers. Through these novels Kesava Dev portrayed the pictures of class struggle and exploitation.

Kesava Dev’s Kannadi is a novel dealing with the working class mobilization in Alleppey and the formation of Alleppey Coir Thozhilali Union and their public strike of 1938. Katt, who was the mainstay of the novel, with his vibrant attitude, leads the working class and working as their ideological mentor. This character resembles P. Krishna Pillai who gave the ideological leadership to the working class movements in Alleppey.69

Kesava Dev portrayed the strikes of the working class in his short stories also. In his story “Red Volunteer”, Govindan, a labourer activist, joined in the striking of the work in his factory and giving his life to the cause of his class. Through this Dev portrayed the usual life of a labourer in the historical period of labour struggles. In one labour procession, Govindan sung loudly:

“We are not slaves,
We will not calm down
We will fight by stand unitedly”70

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, one of the most famous novelists of this period, wrote in the traditional European socialist realism. He wrote with a fine scorn the social
and economic inequalities and this made him a ‘committed’ writer. The clearest and the most successful demonstration of the impact of Marxism on Thakazhi’s literary work is to be seen in the four novels of the forties, namely *Thottiyude Makan* (Scavenger’s Son), *Rantidangazhi* (Two Measures), *Thalayodu* (The Skull) and *Tendi Vargam* (The Beggar Class).\(^1\)

Thakazhi wrote these novels, by adopting the Marxian literary ideology – “art for social progress”. The ideology that the “social objective of the writer should be in working class vision” is quite evident in this novels.\(^2\)

His involvement with leftist politics has left its imprint on his early novels like *Thottiyude Makan* (Scavenger’s Son, 1947) and *Rantidangazhi* (Two Measures, 1948). Whatever be the final assessment of the aesthetic quality of his individual works, there is a fierce and sustained concern for the suffering of the underdog – beggar, prostitute, peasant, factory worker, fisher folk, scavenger, shopkeeper, the downtrodden, the impoverished middle class, destitute women, orphans, and what not.

Thakazhi’s *Thottiyude Makan* which deals with the life of the scavengers of Alleppey, made waves when it appeared because of its unusual theme. It is set at a time preceding the advent of modern sanitation when human excreta were carried away by the ‘scavengers’ on their heads who went from house to house. Thakazhi narrates the painful story of a scavenger determined his son not to take up his wretched profession, eventually mortified to see him, following his footsteps. His *Thottiyude Makan* has the same theme of Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchables*.\(^3\)
In the novel *Thottiyyude Makan*, we witness the story of three generations of scavengers, cleaners of night-soil. Chudalamuthu, the hero of this novel was born in the lower strata of the society and he followed the work of his father as a scavenger. In his early life he himself witnessed the pathetic life of his father and his last days. He faced several hardships from the hands of the authorities and the public. Finally he decided to organize the scavengers under the banner of a union and he gave inspiration to all of its members. But gradually, economic motive came to his mind and he betrayed the union. Through this Thakazhi depicts the picture of another category of workers. Later, Chudalamuthu trying to educate his son Mohanan and sent him to a school. Child Mohanan had to face derogatory comments from the fellow students in the name of his father’s job. In the meantime Chudalamuthu and his wife died of Cholera. Mohanan had no other way than to follow his father’s job and he also became a scavenger. But Mohanan enabled the struggles of scavengers to assert his individual dignity and to lead his fellow-untouchables to rise against oppression and prejudice. Through this novel, the writer portrayed the life of a large section of the society, workers, who in their whole life worked hard to live and struggled hard to survive.

*Thottiyyude Makan* ends with dual images: a revolutionary procession (red flag prominently in the lead), which is fired upon by the authorities, and a plot of wasteland that serves as a graveyard for those martyred in the procession. The last sentence of the novel hints at the unjust deaths and the future retribution of the revolution: “Even today on that wasteland, there are skeletons that dance!”
The *Thottiyude Makan* questioned all the existing *savarna* symbols, which prevailed in the Malayalam novel writings. The book published in 1947 charts the slow emergence of political consciousness among the oppressed. Chudalamuthu, the main character realizes much later in his life that his acquisitiveness and dreams of upward mobility are self-defeating unless the power structure that generates scavengers’ changes. Thakazhi writes: “It is not scavengers who create scavengers. Even if a father thinks a child should not become a scavenger, that child might become one.” From Chudalamuthu to his son Mohanan, the society has moved a long way. Mohanan tells his friends: “In reality, it is not the individual boss who is the worker’s enemy. It is the boss’s government”. Mohanan dies as a martyr in the cause of a revolutionary dream. What makes the *Thottiyude Makan* a moral fable is its emphatic statement about the need for workers or peasants to organize themselves to be heard.

Nagavalli R.S. Kurup’s *Thotti* (The Scavenger) is another important work which presents the painful life of a scavenger. In this novel Kelu, the hero was a scavenger and he married Nani, a sweeper. After gave birth to a girl child, Nani died in the absence of medical assistance. Then Kelu gave his daughter to an orphanage and later she was married to a labourer. The novel raised the questions like; what Kelu gained throughout his life? Why his life became in pathetic condition? The hero, Kelu, represented the life of thousands of working class people, who throughout their life carried hard work without getting anything substantially.

In his novel, *Thalayod* (Skull), Thakazhi recreated the Punnapra-Vayalar revolt led by the Communists. When the working class organized themselves for a better life,
the government sided with the capitalists and suppressed the working class movements. The Kandavar Village of Thalayod gives this picture. In the police firing, many workers lost their lives, many became scavengers and women were ill-treated. Then the Government officials including the ministers became corrupted and helped the capitalists. This led the oppressed and have-nots towards the Communist ideology, which aimed at a socialist state.

Thakazhi’s Rantidangazhi was a detailed study of landless peasant labour in the marshy lands near Alleppey. The vigour of the characterization and the realistic study of social conditions raised the work immediately to the position of a classic. Koran was the mainstay of the novel. His jenmi denied him to take a bunch of paddy, which was grown by him, to his home to change his starving life. This incident made him conscious about his rights and he engaged in the strikes for the rise of his payment. Through this novel Thakazhi portrayed the strike movements of the agricultural labourers of Kuttanad. Rantidangazhi not only depicts the history of the growth of class consciousness among the agriculturists but also deals with the question how class consciousness and class struggle arise the people?81

Thakazhi’s description and picturization in Rantidangazhi have a real life force which is appreciable. It depicts the story of the Pulayas and Parayas, the downtrodden communities, and the growing class consciousness among them. The story also brought the hardships, which were experienced by the peasants from the land lords and the struggles of the peasants to build up class consciousness among them. His other important work Chemmeen (Shrimps) is a story of the fishermen community of Purakkad
in Kuttanad. The theme is an intense love story, but we see a whole world of human emotions of love and hatred buffeted around the theme. Moreover, the work reveals the tradition bound society of the fisher folk which stick on stubbornly to their values and beliefs. His work Kayar (Coir) describes two hundred years of the life of the working class and landowners.

In his novel Avan Thirichu Varum, Thakazhi portrayed the painful story of a labourer activist-Sreedhar. He joined in the labour strikes and shot dead at police firing. His friend told his mother that he went to underground. At the end of the novel, she became frantic in the memories of her son and dies.

Thakazhi wrote in the tradition of European socialist realism. He wrote with a fine scorn of the social and economic in equalities. And this made him a “committed” artist. Thakazhi is a little more subdued and sedate than Dev. Though like Dev, he consistently followed the path of social realism, Thakazhi shows greater psychological insight in the delineation of his characters. He always gives the impression of lesser direct involvement in the light and plight of his characters.

The landscapes of Thakazhi’s novels are people with thousands of characters who represent a cross section of Kerala. While studying Thakazhi’s writings, we can see his efforts to narrate the social realities in some more depth. But Thakazhi, like Kesava Dev, gave more importance to class struggle and class oppression. Thakazhi and Dev not only wrote stories to uphold the ethical codes of the downtrodden, but also declared in literary forms that those characters were as valid in literature as Rama and Sita.
The same theme of poor classes has been treated in Muhammed Basheer’s novels differently. Both Thakazhi and Basheer seem to be asking the question, ‘whose nation is it any way?’ Basheer is a writer gifted with an imitable style of story-telling, a rare sense of humour and a deep insight into men and things. Instead of describing events and situations for his readers to see objectivity, Basheer made them share his slightly cynical characteristically humorous response to such events and characters. His razor-sharp sentences seldom fail to cut the core of hypocrisy, superstition, injustice, oppression of all kinds against which he was committed a fighter as any of his brother-writers. Basheer is fundamentally interested in bringing out the essential man with his simple fears and hopes, loves and hatred. Therefore, he develops deep into his inner being tearing away his social, political and other masks.

The first sensational novel from Mohammad Basheer, which has the impact of progressivism, was *Voices*, which was published in 1947. In this, the author made a deliberate attempt to horrify the readers by presenting a confusing picture of ugly humanity prevailing in the post-war world. It is an angry book that articulates the anguish and the violence at the very root of the concept of modern state. In his extensive journeys through the length and breadth of the country, Basheer had witnessed the turbulence of Indian society. *Voices* is born of the realization that the modern state is a monolithic violent entity that will have no place for the marginalized and the homeless. The disjointed narrative is made up of drifting voices from the world of tramps, criminals and prostitutes. The central voice is that of an ex-soldier afflicted by venereal disease who is hunted by the deprivation of the life he has led. He has no means of relating himself to any idealistic notions of a popular nation state. The hallucinatory nature of this narrative
metaphorically sum up the existential choices that have to be made before the moral conscience of the nation can be reclaimed.\textsuperscript{87}

In a public meeting for congratulating Basheer and T.J. Chandy, which was held on 26-04-1944 at Thirunakkara Maidan, Trichur, under the presidency of C. Joseph, Basheer openly exhorted the students to intervene in the political matters. He exhorted that: “As future citizen, the students should take part in political matters”.\textsuperscript{88} Further, he argued that: “We should do what is necessary for attaining responsible government in Travancore.... Caste and religious considerations must go. It cannot be said that Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Ayer’s government is beneficial, because it granted temple entry. Temple entry was granted only when the government found that they could not resist the power of the people.”\textsuperscript{89}

Ponkunnam Varkey is another gifted writer, who basically a short story writer with a deep commitment to the leftist political ideology. Like his progressive contemporaries, Varkey had also come under the spell of Marxism. Even in his fighting favour, Varkey did not forget to forge his stories into a powerful artistic weapon. He spent most of his fire-power to explode the religious hypocrisy and economic exploitation of the land owning class abetted by the corrupt clergy of the church.\textsuperscript{90} He has created a few unforgettable simple peasants with incredible capacity for hard work and an instinctive hatred of all hypocrisy and deceit. It is through these characters that he propounded his simple philosophy of unadulterated human love.

His writings portrayed the life of the poor and downtrodden and took firm stand against the feudal system that prevailed in Kerala society. His outspoken nature and open
criticisms against various social evils and the Church as an institution earned him the title of ‘The Rebel’. He always rebelled against the conventional hypocrisy in society. His stories revolved around themes of disloyalty and treachery, which prevailed in the society in his novels and stories and this gave him immense popularity and fan following. He wanted the common man to go against such negative aspects that remains prevalent in the society. His short stories *Manthrikkettu* and *Model* were banned in 1946 by the government of the princely State of Travancore on the charge of treason and Varkey was imprisoned for six months.

Another ‘committed’ novelist, Cherukad’s works projects the life of peasants, who revolts against the landlordism. In his novel *Manninte Maaril*, he depicts the picture of old and new type peasants. The old peasant helplessly endures the torture and exploitations of the *jenmi*. But the new type peasant opposes these hardships with courage and forming organizations to unitedly check this. *Bhooprabhu* was another important novel of Cherukad, written as the second part of *Manninte Maaril*.

P.C. Kuttikrishnan, whose stature is equal to that of Dev, Thakazhi and Pottekkat, is indeed a very significant link between them and the moderns. He combined in him the social and political consciousness of his senior contemporaries with the ability to unrare the areas of the tension of the human mind like his junior fellow-writers. His vision is that of a humanist and at the same time, he never fails to see the broad political, social and cultural conflicts of the age.

Ugly details, careful documentation, minute description and above all a concealed anger characterized most of these writers. *Red Volunteer* by Kesava Dev, *Ananda*
Mandirangal by Thakazhi, Inquilab Zindabad by Basheer and Achane Kandappol by Pottakkad were written with a purpose. They showed their discontent with present society either by retreating from it, or by mocking it bitterly, or by urging major reforms or changes in people’s attitudes. None of them indict the bourgeois system itself.94

These novels, stories and poems opened up the human struggles of a period, which developed through the emerging striking fervor, growing working class consciousness and willingness to abandon the life. Many works inciting class struggle also came to be written.

**Revolutionary Songs**

Though it laps artistic elegance, the songs, developed as a literary branch with the organizational activities of the peasants and depicted the pathos of the peasantry under the colonial rule and contributed to the growth of class consciousness and revolutionary spirit among them. For example, when the Party organized the Volunteer camps for the Punnapra-Vayalar Revolt, K.C. George remember that: “Women workers were not allowed in these camps. But they used to visit the camps in procession and give the inmates of the camp moral support and inspiration by shouting and singing revolutionary songs and slogans.”95

K.A. Keraleeyan, K.P.R. Gopalan, Premji, T.S. Thirumumbu, and others wrote a number of lyrics to inspire the peasants and to inject class consciousness among them. There were no peasants, who ever sung at least two lines of this songs.96 These songs were now formed the part of Malayalam folklore and hence difficult to identify its
authorship. These songs depicted the dialectics of the luxurious life of the *jenmis* and the miserable life of the peasants.

Keraleeyan wrote several *Njattupattukal* points the life of the *jenmis* as:

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“The wealthiest, in the bigger palaces living in luxury
Have they ever seen a rice field?
Have they ever touched a rice plant?
We toil in the land from dawn to dusk
Yet, only getting this sheaf”
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During 1937-38, Keraleeyan published songs in *Prabhatham*, entitled *Kollakkola* and *Vayalpattukal* were aimed at the propagation of class struggle and class consciousness. In one of his *Vayalpattu*, he called the peasants to organize themselves and asked that:

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“To be united in our shouts
Women and our mothers,
To eliminate our sorrows
To stop the looting of the white people
Let us join in the Union”
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T.S. Thirumumbu was another lyrists, who inspired the peasants with his revolutionary songs. The song, which was regularly sung at of *Kisan Sangham*’s flag hoisting time, was one of his masterpieces. In which he wrote:

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“O! You the agricultural labourers and working class
The exploited and poor
Come and join together under this red flag and
Let us be ready to march forward
For what?
To destroy poverty
To fight against torture
To burn the fort of capitalism
Which creates poverty....”

It ends with the socialist command and imagination:

“Stunt and shiver
The big capitalism
Let us shatter land lordism”

In his poem, “Vikasam”, he depicted the pathos of the peasants, who working to fill the money purse of the jenmis.

“To fill some body’s cash bags
Should the poor break their bones
To make some body’s family rich and fill their stomachs?
Should we toil without rest
Without a kind word or help?
Should we lose our self respect?
When gold accumulates in leaps in one side
The other side, crying and begging for coppers”

He wrote an emotional poem “Lal Salam”, on remembering the martyrs of Kayyor Revolt and it was widely accepted as the emotional view of Party. E.M.S. Namboodiripad regarded him as the “Singing Sword” of the Communist Party.
The song written by P. Krishna Pillai also reflects the new ideological content and unity. The following song written for the jatha asks the workers to stand firm and fight for the new world:

“We are not bounded men any more
We will not give up, shall stand firm and fight
We who bowed before the jenmis and capitalists,
Shall not waste our life any more
We who are needed to work in the slush of the fields
For filling the belly of the cruel masters”102

To indoctrinate the rural illiterate peasants and labourers, a number of agricultural songs, *Pada Paattukal, Njattu Paattukal, Poorakkali Paattukal, Kurathi Paattukal, Thullal Paattukal*, etc., were written by adopting the folklore style. Through simple lyrics in day-to-day language, the Communist doctrines and aims such as class struggle, class consciousness, organizational necessity, revolutionary struggle, anti-landlordism, socialism and rule of the proletariat, all these were presented before the peasants and workers.

In one of his *Poorakkali Paattu*, T.S. Thirumumbu wrote:

“Even if one wears the knee length Congress dress
Thieves are thieves
Aims to destroy the unions
To gain selfish motives
No, the farmers are conscious, won’t allow that
They won’t be defeated by these oppressions
Nobody hopes that we take rest until
Overthrowing the landlordism”\textsuperscript{103}

In several meetings of the agricultural labourers, the \textit{Poorakkali Paattukal} of Thirumumbu was performed with \textit{Poorakkali}.\textsuperscript{104} The ideologies of class struggle and class consciousness was included in these songs. These songs in folklore style projected a new social structure and dreamed a socialist world.

Singing also stirred the village life. Puthuppally Raghavan’s \textit{Songs of the Freedom Struggle}, collected and published in 1985, includes 64 popular patriotic songs, most of them by the Communists and composed in the 1930s and 40s. One called ‘Organize!’ – could there be a more fitting title to express what had been happening in Kerala since the 1920s? – exhorted the people to unite to free the country and end poverty. A marching song of 1945 was called ‘Destroy Landlordism!’\textsuperscript{105} When the hunger processions marched through the countryside, A.K. Gopalan writes, one member, often K.P.R. Gopalan, was placed in charge of the singing. “As the comrades got tired, KPR would start singing aloud. Others chanted with gusto and everyone would be active again.”\textsuperscript{106} At a time when films had not yet come to Kerala, plays and songs captured audience and ruptured the somnolence of village life. As a form of propaganda, moreover, they had one distinct advantage over films: they allowed dialogue between the players and the audience.\textsuperscript{107}

When, S.A. Dange, the then President of All India Trade Union Congress arrived at Alleppey on 10\textsuperscript{th} February 1944, under the auspices of the local trade union a public meeting was held in the Kidangaraparambu Maidan at 7 pm to accord a reception to
Dange. R. Sugathan, the secretary of the AITUC, introduced Dange to the audience. The organizers of this meeting also included cultural programmes for attracting the public. There were recitals by girls and *Oattam Thullal* regarding the food famine, hoarding, profiteering and black marketing. The function ended at 10pm with the songs of the volunteers of the Coir Factory Workers’ Union.

In order to impart class consciousness among the peasants and working class, several booklets, which includes songs, speeches and requests were published individually, collectively and in the name of the Communist Party. Most of them were proscribed by the government. One of the booklet entitled *Thozhilali Ganam* (Labour Songs) authored by M.K. Padmanabhan and published by P.N. Narayanan from Sherthalai and it was stated that the funds received from the sale of this book will be utilized for the *Perumthuruthu Yuvajana Samajam* Reading Room. About the content of the booklet, the Inspector General of Police reported that: “The booklet exhorts the labourers to wake up from lethargy, to get organized and achieve equality. The alleged sufferings of the labourers are detailed, the capitalists are attacked and the labourers are urged to dismantle the fortress of religion and to agitate for getting their grievances redressed, even at the risk of their lives, resisting *lathi* charges by their coordinated activities. The labourers are remained that they are being exploited by the selfish capitalists and the unscrupulous priests and are exhortd to get organized with a view to oppose the capitalists. A change in the existing social order is also advocated.”

The Government, through a notification, evaluated that “the booklet is likely to promote feelings of enmity and hatred between different classes” and declared “every copy of the booklet thereof forfeited to the Government.”
Many instance of Government ban on Communist publications and literature are seen in the Confidential Section Files. In one, the I.G of police reported on a Malayalam booklet titled *Revolutionary Songs* written by T.M. Prasad, an Alleppey Communist.\(^{113}\)

The report stated that “the book contains songs which are highly prejudicial and inflammatory. When the songs are set to music and sung freely its effect will be to rouse feelings against the government and the present social order. The dissemination of such prejudicial literature at this juncture is likely to excite disaffection and hatred towards constituted authority and incite the masses to act of violence.”\(^{114}\)

Another similar booklet titled *Calling Forth* was also banned. On this booklet, the I.G. wrote: “These songs contains highly exaggerated accounts of a alleged atrocities of the capitalists and landlords and thereby are likely to unleash wild passions and blind emotions especially when they are attuned to music and sung with effect”.\(^{115}\) Another leaflet published by the Desabhimani Press, not dated, but presumably published before the Punnapra-Vayalar revolt, contains songs written by Olappamanna, O.M. Anujan, V.T. Kumaran and Ponkunnam Damodaran. The work was titled *The Battle Field*.\(^{116}\) “It contains songs with revolutionary Communist ideas intended to be sung by the members of the student *jatha*, who had an idea of coming to Travancore in support of the workers struggle in Alleppey. The songs are highly prejudicial, inflammatory and mischievous. The Communists are reported to be responsible for its publication”.\(^{117}\) This booklet also banned in Travancore. The government was extremely critical of the Communist Party and the Trade Unions ever since they rejected the new constitutional propaganda.
E.M.S. Namboodiripad estimated that in 1951 alone no fewer than 2000 poems and short stories dealing with aspects of struggle for a United People’s Democratic Kerala were published in left-wing magazines.\textsuperscript{118}

Though, contrary opinions are there in the debates of the social purpose of literature, nobody can reject the role of PWA to the transformation and modernization of the socio-political and cultural structure of Kerala. The progressive literary movement has used art as a means of mobilizing the less privileged sections of the society. The writers imbued with the spirit of socialist realism, were earnest in their mission and purposive in their writings. They were able to delineate realistic picture of the pathetic environment in which they were living. It was not difficult to convince anyone under the peculiar conditions available in Kerala “that many are born to weep” and the callous indifference by the rich to the suffering section was common place and familiar. What they saw around them, they depicted with deep feeling and poignancy in expression.

There was a real craving for a new order and a new society. The workers asserted “Labour converts sterile rocks into fertile fields and gathers bread from the salt waves. But who benefits? – the privileged few. Who starves? – the worker.”\textsuperscript{119} These were not merely a subject matter for poetic fancy but they are truths. It echoed and re-echoed in many a less original works and repeatedly from the press and platform again and again, with acquired powers of appeal and trained minds of reasoning. They succeeded in their own way to create a new feeling and awareness of the undesirable conditions of existence. The life of the society gradually flowed into the stream of literary movement and revitalized it.
“On the whole, this period was one of the vitality and worth and Malayalam literature became more proletarian and humanised.”\textsuperscript{120} The progressive writers displayed an uncanny interest in depicting the seamy of life; peasants, workers, beggars and the have-nots in general became the centre of attention in their narratives. The early works of the progressive school, both novels and short stories were commentaries on contemporary socio-political conditions, in sharp contrast to the traditional ways of narrating episodes from the \textit{Puranas} or epics.

“This phase was also responsible for the great advancement in popular publications and popular reading, which was the characteristic feature of the 1940s.”\textsuperscript{121} The increased production of literary works, distribution of books and spread of libraries accelerated the development of print and publishing medium in Kerala. The Progressive literary movement in Kerala brought a new awakening in printing and publishing industry. Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society (SPCS), formed in 1945 is one of the chief organizations, which played an important role in the development of Malayalam book publishing and sales industry.\textsuperscript{122}

The Progressive Writers’ Movement produced a lasting impact because it brought the vast, submerged section of humanity to the focus. The humiliations heaped on the oppressed classes all over the world through centuries of cultural progress got their due place in the themes of creative literature. Writers were committed to the cause of the ultimate redemption of the suffering humanity from man-made miseries – ‘committed’ in the sense that they were conscious of the aim and deliberate in their attempts to achieve the aim. The basic urge behind the motivation and the determination was the noblest of human sentiments-compassion of suffering brethren. This automatically involved class
consciousness because materialistic ideologies and philosophies presented revolutionary concepts of the structure of humane society.\textsuperscript{123} Most of the suffering vast majority had undergone was no longer held to be the creation of an unknown power but was proved to be the creation of a selfish minority. This suffering could be alleviated by equitable distribution of wealth, resources and opportunities. Thus the main motivation of Progressive Literature came to be building around class conflict and the redemption of the downtrodden masses. This conscious motive was noble, holy and sublime. With man-made human suffering in the focus, casual forces like God and Destiny were banished from the realm of Progressive Literature.\textsuperscript{124} This anthropocentricity with respect to the cause of human misery was rational and scientific, and therefore promoted optimistic enthusiasm in the minds of writers and readers of literature. This was the most salient feature of the impact made by progressive literature.

The common man-worker, peasant, etc., became the centre of their creative works. Their sufferings, their struggle for existence and aspirations appeared in Malayalam literature for the first time in its history. They portrayed the oppressed and the humiliated as the victims of surroundings. The formation of a new hero, an active fighter for truth and justice can be seen in the centre of literary creations of this period. For these writers, a positive type of hero is a rebel or revolutionary, who dedicated his life for the upliftment of the downtrodden. They are idealized in their writings. For these writers, the rebels and revolutionaries are born through generations, through natural experiences. Though the rebels and revolutionaries are shown in these works with their natural human weaknesses and ideological immaturity, their ultimate aim is the formation of a force, a mass movement, which can liberate the human beings.\textsuperscript{125}
When the exploited laborers do finally become conscious of the ideological state apparatus, they will also become aware of the conditions of their exploitation. It was during the period of the progressive literary Movement, the working class emerged to the forefront of Malayalam literary creations.


Political considerations were significant in the deliberations of developments in the literary sphere, and differences of opinion were not in frequent. Nevertheless in its short-lived history the PWA was able to exert considerable pressure on the course of politics and literature.
END NOTES


16. K.M. George, Kumaran Asan, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1972, p.81.

17. N. Kumaran Asan, op.cit., p.16.


23. C. Kunhan Raja, op.cit., p. 140.


25. Ibid., pp.146-47.
27. S. Guptan Nair, *Changampuzha*, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 2001, p.54.

42. *Ibid.*


44. V. Aravindakshan, *op.cit.*, p.42.


55. *Ibid.*


71. For a study on Thakazhi’s literary works, Vide, Ayyappa Panicker, *Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai*, University of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1989.


78. E.V. Ramakrishna, *op.cit.*, p.38.


80. Vide, the details in M.R. Jayakrishnan, *op.cit.*


86. E.V. Ramakrishna, *op.cit.*, p.38.


108. *File No.102/44/C.S.*, Copy of Report from the District Magistrate of Quilon to the Chief Secretary to Government, KSA, Thiruvananthapuram, Vide Appendix XVII.


111. *Ibid*.

112. *Ibid*.


114. *Ibid*.


120. K.M. George, *Western Influence on Malayalam Language and Literature*, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1972, p.79.


