CONCLUSION

Literature and art are closely intertwined with people. Their inseparable nature leads to the adoption of new cultural forms by people or groups in their struggles for change. This was amply demonstrated in the case of the popular cultural movements led by the Left in Kerala. Culture, in this context, is implicitly transformed into a force that creates a new political order and a radical transformation of the existing literature and art. The progressive literary and theatre movements in Kerala demonstrate the Left attempts to develop an alternative culture or to build a counter cultural hegemony.

The progressive school of thought in Kerala had their variegated cultural discourse anchored in Marxism Praxis. The Marxist theory, of course, had always recognized the political importance of culture through its concept of ideology. Marxian theorists ranging from Georg Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, T.W. Adorno, Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, et al have employed the Marxian theory to analyze cultural forms in relation to production. The historical and societal imbrications along with their impact and influences have been largely comprehended in this backdrop. Thus the materialist and political approaches of the study provide important tools to understanding various types and forms of cultural manifestations in the present age.

The emergent Communist International and the Soviet Union, gave leadership to the creation of Communist ideals all over the world by the dissemination of Communist propaganda literature. The propaganda aimed to advance the ideology of Communism, its
worldview and the interests of the movement. It included the expression of the public will of the working class, their needs and interests, antagonism to the bourgeoisie and dissemination of propaganda about the ideal Communist state. Thus in order to empower the proletariat to compete with the ruling class ideologies, it advocates the use of every propaganda medium, in which the cultural initiatives stand foremost. The propaganda literature disseminated in India from the Communist International and Soviet Union, and their interactions with the Indian Communist Party, confirm their efforts to propagate a proletarian culture in India.

Both progressive writers’ and people’s theatre movements in Kerala have to be viewed as a part of the all India movement that arose during the late 1930s, in the wake of the spread of socialist ideas within the nationalist movement as a reaction to Gandhi’s principles and methods of struggle. The impact of socialist experiment in Soviet Russia, the economic depression of 1929-30 and the rise of Fascism also contributed to this ideological rethinking. Consequently, Left political movements were closely connected with the emergence of socialist ideals and their mutual interaction with the socio-political and cultural life of the region. It is an interesting but significant coincidence that popular movements inspired by the Left ideology such as Kisan Sabhas, agricultural labour organizations and trade unions on one side, and popular cultural movements-literary and theatre-one the other, developed simultaneously, one motivating the growth of the other.

The Left political interventions and cultural activism were inextricably connected and these can be classified into periods of: formation, mobilization and domination.
The first phase starts with the Left ideological and political formation in Kerala. Inspired with the success of the October Revolution and the creation of a socialist state-Soviet Union, the leftists used all propaganda tools to indoctrinate the poor peasants and laborers with a radical political ideology. The birth of the All India Congress Socialist Party as a radical microcosm within the anti-imperialist movement gave an impetus to the formation of a counter hegemonic culture. Though the leadership at the local levels was not wholly cognizant of Marxist philosophy or its modes of revolution, by projecting Soviet Union as a model country, they tried to carry Communist propaganda to the agricultural and working class centers of Kerala. This was a period of ideological indoctrination and the Leftists mainly depended on the print media to assist their mission. This resulted in the emergence of a number of Left oriented weeklies, journals and newspapers in Malayalam. The Prabhatham and Thozhilali played an important role in this regard. Parallel to this, the early Leftists conducted numerous study classes to indoctrinate the illiterate downtrodden people. Apart from classes on Communism, socialism and Marxism, they were mainly taught the dignity of labour, demerits of alcoholism, importance of hygiene, necessity of unity, etc. The leaders explained the exploitative nature of the landlords and capitalists, the rights of the proletarian class and continuously intervened in the issues of peasants and labourers. Hence they strategically glued themselves to the cause of the peasant and working class.

To maintain regular debates on proletarian issues it can be seen that the Communists slowly utilized the local libraries, which were started earlier in many parts of rural Kerala. When the Communists began to dominate the library movement, the libraries were dumped with Left newspapers and weeklies. The libraries were then
converted into places for political discussions and working class gatherings. This helped
the Communists in creating socio-cultural groups which gradually led to the formation of
trade unions among the working class. Later many of the libraries were attached to the
trade union offices. Thus in this period of political formation, the Leftists assiduously
exploited and used the cultural and social background of rural Kerala for building their
ideological base.

In the next phase, the Leftists directly intervened in the cultural realm with their
initiatives by the formation of *Jeeval Sahitya Samiti* in 1937. Through this they
introduced a realistic approach in Malayalam literature in an organized manner and tried
to bring the elite class writers within the movement. This led to domino effect, when the
Progressive Writers’ Association was formed in 1944. The progressive writers’
movement acted as a forum of writers to combat the menace of fascism and colonialism
and to interact with the common people. The progressive writers believed that the
principle function of literature was to reflect and express the aspirations and fundamental
problems of toiling masses and ultimately help in the formation of a socialist society. By
securing an upper hand in the Association, the Communists made the elite class writers to
become the sympathizers of the poor peasants and working class. The Communists
wisely sought the assistance of these writers in their efforts to attract the masses towards
the Party and ideology. The Party not only provided a platform to the writers but also
provided them with an insight into the stark realities of society.

In the third phase of the Left struggle, the Communists tried to foist ideological
and Party domination over the Writers’ Association. Though it was vehemently criticized
by most of the non-Communist writers and some of the fellow travellers of the Party, the
then political situation of the Left, marked by armed agitations, made such a maneuver politically imperative. In their struggle for ideological domination, they advocated strict socialist realism and exhorted the writers to take part in the revolutionary movements led by the Left. Through this the Communists, made an effort to ensure the support of intellectuals for their struggle for political hegemony. Though it resulted in the breakup of the progressive writers’ movement, the leftists benefited from this as they came to power in the state at the first general elections held in 1957.

While, through literary movement, the Communists tried to capture the imaginations of the elite intelligentsia and some sections of peasants and workers to some extent, with the theatre movement they directly addressed the poor peasants and working class people. Theatre was the only medium then to attract the illiterate masses. From *Pattabakki* to the *Ningalenne Communistakki* and after, the Communists initiated political plays and depicted the Communist ideology and Party as an asylum for the oppressed and exploited masses. The party was the only medium to liberate themselves from the all-pervading poverty and miserable life. On the Stage, calls for revolution echoed through the rustic countryside. While the stage performance of the play *Ningalenne Communistakki* was enacted, the audience punctuated each curtain fall with revolutionary slogans and the same occurred at the end of the Play.

Through cultural activism, the Left in Kerala wisely devised Culture as a powerful propaganda medium. At first it was used for the Left ideological dissemination, then for political mobilization and finally to build a cultural and political hegemony. The role played by literary and artistic persons in the propagation of a new culture during the progress of the mass movements led by the Communist Party in Kerala was thus very
significant. Writers, especially poets, actors and singers played the same role in the mobilization of peasants and workers like a full time Party activist.

In this sense, the Left cultural activism could use everything as a potential resource. This is a more savvy resistance which makes our society to develop new forms of actions that are ever shifting, mutating and always one stepahead of those who want to co-opt and restrain the need for change. Giving people long sermons on the need for them to get involved in change can often be patronizing and disempowering. Traditional campaigning tends to attract people with facts and fiery speeches. Cultural activism tends to move away from one-sided monologues, speeches and propaganda into porous forms that use dialogue and interaction.

Instrumentalism or propaganda, however, was not the sole perspective of the Left cultural movement. Transformation of the existing cultural consciousness was also its avowed objective. Through its interventions, the Leftists created a new democratic culture in Kerala. They altered the hegemony of Sanskrit cultural versions and its implications, and placed the common man at the centre of cultural activity. They also borrowed the art forms, connected with temples and gave popularity to them by popularizing and revolutionizing.

Progressive literature and theatre also played a part in upsetting traditional structures and values in society. Through their cultural interventions, the Leftists indirectly brought some changes in the social system of Kerala by disseminating the Marxian notion of class. Marx and Engels taught the proletariat to be conscious of its own strength, to be conscious of its class interests and to unite for a determined struggle
against the bourgeoisie. Marx and Engels discovered the laws of development of capitalist society and proved scientifically that the development of capitalist society and the class struggle going on within it, must inevitably lead to the fall of capitalism, to the victory of the proletariat, to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In Marxist theory, class is the most important social group in the capitalist society and the major social configurations are class cultures. The classes are organized depending on the mode of production that determines a concrete set of relations of production: bourgeoisie - proletariat. These classes are all the time in conflict and negotiation because one of them is dominant and the other subordinate. In their attempt to generate a counter hegemonic political culture the Marxist scholars converted the subject matter of their literary work to basic Marxist themes, such as class struggle, or the progression of society through various historical stages, such as, the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism. They explained the nature of a whole literary genre in terms of the social period which ‘produced’ it and politicized the literary form.

Through their cultural efforts, the Communists campaigned for class consciousness, which indirectly deconstructed the rigidity of caste consciousness at least in the case of the downtrodden sections of society. In the early period, when the party study classes and the library movements were effectively carried out, the working class and peasants irrespective of their sub caste divisions had participated. This was further carried forward in the period of progressive literary and theatre movements. With the emergence of peasant and working class literature and their portrayal on the stage, the Left could build up class consciousness among these castes. This indirectly resulted in the elimination of social barricades, which stood firmly against social gathering of these
groups. Though the Left could not wholly break the sub caste divisions and its strong footings, it could largely eliminate certain taboos which prevailed among the downtrodden sections of society generating an egalitarian social ambience.

It was with this emerging class consciousness, that the Left could build its edifice of peasant and trade union movements in Kerala. Through the literary and theatre movements, it continuously asked the people to join in the unions and fight for their rights. By visualizing the united revolutionary struggles in the literary works, it attempted to raise the necessity of unity among the classes.

Further, the Progressive literary and theatre movements created the ideal of people's art and literature. The ideas of patriotism, nationalism and sympathy for the downtrodden were, of course, not new. What distinguished the new art from the old was the fact that it was a class conscious art and that it was created by the efforts of the Communist Party. In literature, in drama, in ballet and in every sphere of culture, these movements showed a new way and created an alternative culture questioning the cultural monopoly of the sophisticated few. In the process they took cultural activism to the doorsteps of the toiling and struggling masses. They gave a severe shock to the old feudal traditions, moribund forms and effete contents of a bygone age. With a new content, new technique, and new belief they created a new epoch. As a result, the commercial stage also felt a strong urge for a change. It also wanted to create something new and wanted the theatre to reflect the struggle of life with a new conviction.

A study of these movements would also reveal the thematic changes brought about in the content and form of literary creations, an increasing bias towards the
problems of the people, use of spoken dialect in both literary forms and theatre scripts, new genres of literature such as free verse, giving up conventional rules of prosody and metre. The change in form and content and a close collaboration between the Political and Cultural movements necessitated the demands of a popular culture. A new crop of writers, emerged from a different social milieu, from literate sections of middle and lower middle classes and theatre artists, sometimes coming from even the semi-literate and the so-called lower castes and oppressed segments of society. They depicted their experiences through their artistic productions. This is important as it explains the new tone and vigour of the new literary and art forms, modeled on folk tradition, which was totally different from the existing forms.

The progressive literary and theatre movements also comprised of the works that took cognizance of the existence of poor, mute and suffering people of society and sought to give them a position of pride in literature. For the first time, poor people were the central characters in novels and plays. Hopes and aspirations, joys and sorrows, travails and tribulations of the popular classes of society are embodied in vernacular folk literature. The age of old narratives was over and literature was linked with the social movements and became the self-expression of a socially commitment genre. A link between ideology and struggles was clearly established by popularizing literature and theatre when creative writers and artists wrote and spoke in the language of the people, depicting through art forms their basic problems.

While participating in the progressive literary movement, the liberal and progressive men of the upper and intermediate classes were also affected. They empathized with the movement in a most direct and profound way and gradually became
part of the rapidly growing Socialist and Communist movement. It is for this reason that one sees an unmistakable influence of Left political parties and their ideals on many of the early Progressives. The Communist Party was able to stimulate class consciousness and organize the working classes—the peasants, the urban proletariat and the lower middle-classes. As in other sections of the politically conscious element of the Indian population, the Communists had their allies and followers among the writers. Many of the leading members of the PWA were either intrepid or ardent Communists themselves or, at any rate, “fellow travellers” of the Communists. There was a certain doctrinaire layer in the progressive movement which tried to forge an identity between the principles and activities of the PWM and the Communist movement.

Since the 1930s, the official Party line on culture had been based on two elements: a mechanical interpretation of the idea that the art simply ‘reflected’ social reality and strict guidelines for ‘progressive artists’. In this regard, the Communists introduced Socialist realism, the powerful tool for literary and artistic production to the Malayalam writers. Social realism, which gained popularity in the early part of the twentieth century, is characterized by its portrayal of the everyday, the common place and most importantly the poor working class. Social realism, in any medium was used to depict the struggles of the ever-growing lower classes. This was mainly due to the industrial revolution and the growth of slums, rising unemployment, and the ever growing chasm between the affluent and working class population. Social realism was critical of the socio-political environment that created these conditions. Social realism as an art form was used to express the “true” state of being, the hardships and horrors of life on the bottom rungs. This is in direct contradiction to the morale-boosting idealistic use
of socialist realism. Although these works were realistic in their physical representation of land and people, they carried an emotional weight more closely related to idealistic or romantic works.

The unique contribution of the Marxist cultural movement has been that artistic creation and appreciation are no more confined to the intellectual elite. The monopoly of cultural experience and appreciation confined to the Elite core was deconstructed and brought to the margins of society to savour and consume. A Cultural Revolution was thereby consummated with a new political ethos and praxis. The growth of the organised working class and peasant movement, together with the movement of other marginalised sections of the people, had awakened millions of toilers. This political consciousness had also impacted on their aesthetic sensibilities and creative talents. The worker-peasant artists, dozens and scores of poets, story writers, producers and actors of plays, singers, etc, of Kerala who had risen from the working people ascribe this phenomenon to the indoctrination of the Left. Cultural activities have ceased to be confined to a narrow circle of upper class intellectuals.

The credit for such a wide expansion of cultural activities among the working people should undoubtedly go to the trade unions, Kisan Sabhas and other democratic mass organisations that have rapidly developed in Kerala. It was the awakening of the worker-peasant masses to class consciousness, the militant struggles which they waged for the realisation of their immediate demands and their long-range objectives that created the backdrop for a modern Kerala. In other words, it was the entry of the workers and peasant masses as an independent force into the arena of economic and political struggle that made cultural activity all-pervading and powerful.
It was however, not only in the field of arts but also in the field of natural and social sciences that the growth of the organised working class and peasant movement exerted its influence. One of the earliest and most important activities of the trade unions, Kisan Sabhas and other democratic organisations of the working people was the organisation of night schools, reading rooms and libraries and study classes for imparting the principles of political economy and other social sciences. All of these were intended to stimulate an interest in and facilitate the study of serious subjects which were rarely dealt with in Malayalam literature.

The thirst for knowledge which has been aroused among the common people facilitated the growth of literacy and made it possible for authors and publishers to engage on new subjects and themes and sell their products even to workers and peasants. This has made a fundamental transformation in the publishing world of Kerala so that a publication which once took as much as four or five years to sell is now sold off in less than a year.

It is a curious and important fact that the Communist world is much more aware of the social importance of artists and intellectuals than is the so-called free world. Through these movements, the Left could attract the intelligentsia into their ideology. It was not with the political movements, but with these cultural movements that the progressive minded and forward looking people in the society came into contact with the Communist Party.

The progressive literary and theatre movements took part in the process of revolutionizing the peasants and working class and prepared them for the Communist
political agitations. A number of works were written with the portrayals of working class heroes, his agitations against the oppressors, the brutality of the landlord and capitalists and a final call for revolution. We can see its impact in the Communist led armed struggles in Kerala. The Communists waged direct political struggles and used the cultural capital that they had amassed to assist their political movements. The dynamics of the organization, the radical writings of the leaders and the development of proletarian art and literature provide a lens through which we can analyze the relationship between these political struggles and culture activism at the local level.

The cultural intervention of the Left exists at myriad levels. There are continuing and developing in art, literary and cultural forms, such as the art of banners, flags, hoardings, sloganeering, postering, etc. Political struggle itself takes on variegated cultural forms as is evident in the presentation of cultural programs and street plays as modes of protest and propaganda during party processions and Congresses. The Communist Party also took its counter hegemonic campaign into the realm of scientific studies by forming the Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad in 1962. Further, in order to conduct active discussions on socio-cultural issues and matters which affect human life and environment, the Party organized a group of young people under the banner of Desabhimani Study Circle and a good number of studies were published. The policy of cultural interactions were further carried out by the Communists and in 1980s the PWA was revived by the them and it was termed as Purogamana Kala Sahityam and it is still active with its literary debates. Through these movements, the leftists had aimed at ensuring the support of the majority of the intellectuals of Kerala thereby ensuring the support of civil society in the political domain.