INTRODUCTION

Culture has decisive significance in political affairs, both for the cementing of power structure and for altering it. It cannot be separated from the socio-political movements. It is noticeable that the concept of culture is being given considerable importance in contemporary political analysis. It is not just that the politics of culture itself is being investigated from a number of different perspectives, but the cultural context of social and political processes in general is also being considered much more seriously than it was earlier. It is felt that the analysis of the cultural context can help us to understand the framework of meaning within which political processes take place. Further, the actions and responses of people also may be understood in terms of cultural codes and meanings.

The concept of culture is central to much of the political discourse in India today. There is frequent reference in the press and in statements by politicians, to such concepts as cultural communities, majority and minority cultures, indigenous and alien cultures and issues of cultural identity. In some respects the importance given to culture in recent years is to be welcomed as it compensates for the neglect of cultural factors in the understanding and strategies of the Left and liberal forces in the country in the decades after independence. Thus culture has turned into an emblem of social and political reaction, so that the questions about culture very often lead to questions of sociology and politics and a study of the aesthetic function of a text naturally depends upon the socio-political context in which the text has originated and developed.
The awareness that culture occupies an important place in any revolutionary political strategy has spawned various counter-cultural groups and movements, mostly as the result of initiatives taken by political formations of the Left. In fact, radical Leftist politics often shaped and determined the evolution of such cultural movements.

The Left cultural intervention is fundamentally political in character. It generally follows two approaches: instrumentalist and transformatory, and through these it, takes conscious efforts to build the Left cultural hegemony as a way to attain political domination. The instrumentalist approach is primarily influenced by immediate political needs, particularly its mobilizational strategies; hence the cultural initiatives were utilized as a propaganda medium. In this perspective culture is a vehicle to communicate political message. The cultural fronts organized by the communist movement in the 1930s and 1940s unambiguously expressed this political intent. Both the Progressive Writers’ Association and the Indian People's Theatre Association underlined this dimension. Instrumentalism is easier to practice and likely to yield quick political rewards. As a result, instrumentalist approach became quite dominant during the early phase of the progressive cultural movement. Influenced by this perspective, cultural productions did not look beyond injecting new content into existing forms in order to convey the message of radical politics to larger sections of the population. The transformative perspective is concerned with the transformation of the existing cultural consciousness into a radical democratic consciousness. Culture cannot help advance radical politics unless it reaches out and transforms new areas in the existing consciousness. In other words, the success of the Left cultural practice partly depends upon its ability to claim new cultural areas and
imbue them with new meanings. Like the Left politics, it is essentially concerned with the creation of consciousness which would enable a radical transformation of society.

It should be evident that the instrumentalist and transformatory dimensions of the Left cultural engagement are closely interlinked and consciously done, which aims at the creation of a counter cultural hegemony. In a class society, culture is an important locus of domination and resistance. Cultural impositions and cultural exclusion are part of the ruling class strategies to ensure and perpetuate domination. While the former is ideological, the latter is oppressive. The people develop their own culture outside this privileged and exclusive domain which is not only their source of pleasure but also forms a part of their armory of resistance. These different forms and practices based on class division do not remain forever sharply demarcated; long history of enculturation results in blurring the barriers. The Left cultural movements can be viewed as a part of this revolutionary tendency. The Leftists hold the view that a democratic culture is not given, but has to be created through a conscious process which would enable the participation of different classes in common cultural endeavors. Hence the Left cultural activism can be seen as a struggle for cultural hegemony and a part of political hegemony.

The present study, *History of the Left Intervention in the Cultural Scenario of Kerala* assesses and analyses the struggle of the Left-oriented cultural movements in creating a new cultural consciousness in Kerala.

The term, ‘Left’ in the historiography of the national movement and current political discourse has come to be defined as essentially the assemblage of all elements that owed allegiance to the socialist world-outlook. The term can encompass a number of
ideologies, including Progressivism, Social liberalism, Social democracy, Left-libertarianism, Socialism, Syndicalism, Marxism, Communism, and mainstream Anarchism. In the present title, the term ‘Left’ is used to denote both the Left ideologies and the Left political parties, in which the ideology of Marxism and the Communist Party respectively bears an upper hand.

As the cultural arena is wider because of its wide usages of the term ‘culture’ to different aspects, the present study focuses on the two apparent realms of culture, i.e. literature and theatre. Thus the study focuses on the Left sponsored progressive literary and theatre movements in Kerala region.

Located at the southwestern tip of the Indian peninsula, the present-day state of Kerala came into existence on 1 November, 1956 by unifying the three administrative regions of Malabar, Travancore and Cochin. Malabar was directly under the British colonial rule whereas the latter two were princely states which were nominally sovereign. Kerala is one of the regions were the Left politics and ideology had percolated to the grass roots through the nationalist movement since the 1930s. Through its continuous struggle for the proletarian cause and its progressive interventions in the socio-cultural life of the people, the Left won mass support in Kerala. This helped the Communist Party to capture state political power in the general elections, which were held for the first time in 1957. Hence, the vibrant period of the Left political and socio-cultural activism – from the Left ideological formation to the Communist’s capture of political power (1934-1957) – has been taken as the period of my study. For a complete evaluation of the impact of the Leftist cultural movements, literary and theatrical productions up to the Communist Party’s first split, i.e. 1964 are included.
Emergence of the Communist movement and its achievement in Kerala has been widely studied by indigenous and foreign scholars. A majority of these works concentrate on the political movements led by the Communist Party and focus on the Party’s capture of political power and its aftermath. While considering the literature on the Left initiated cultural movements in Kerala and its impacts, it remains as an untouched area and no authentic study has so far been conducted. Yet, the available scattered literature can be grouped into three distinct but related areas.

First, are the theoretical works on the Left cultural activism, especially of Marxist theories on culture, literature and art. The ostensible purpose of these theoretical literature is to provide a conceptual frame work by which the Left cultural movements can be understood. The body of these theoretical writings is so large and complex with its interpretations on the basic Communist literatures. In his book *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (first published in 1958 by the Columbia University Press, New York), Raymond Williams made serious efforts to analyze the different usages of the term ‘culture’. Further, it gives his account of the materialistic interpretation of culture. Phillip Smith, in his book, *Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (Blackwell Publishing Limited, Malden, 2001) and Andrew Milner and Jeff Broit, in *Contemporary Cultural Theory* (Rutledge, New York, 1994) deals with different ideological frame works on culture and enables the reader to understand cultural theories in general and Marxist Cultural theories in particular. The book *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci’s Political and Cultural Theory* (University of California Press, London, 1980) authored by Walter L. Adamson, gives an account of Gramsci’s theory of ‘hegemony’ and sheds light on its practice in political and cultural areas.
Second category consists of literature, which provide information on the Left
cultural movements at the national level and this is relatively few in number. The Left
cultural movements in Kerala are closely linked with the progressive literary and theatre
movements, which emerged at all India level. Hence, it provides an idea on the national
background of the movements and its impact on regional levels. The most important book
on this is the documents of All India Progressive Writers’ Association and Indian
People’s Theatre Association, which was edited by Sudhi Pradhan, entitled *Marxist
Cultural Movements in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-47)*, published by Santhi
Pradhan from Calcutta in 1979. This book contains the memories of the leaders of the
AIPWA and IPTA, documents of its first meeting and speeches and the resolutions
adopted in the various conferences of these associations. Though this book gives valuable
accounts on the beginning of all India level Marxist cultural movements, it does not take
into its regional activism. Another important work in this respect is edited by Carlo
Coppola, entitled *Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature* (Chanakya Publications,
New Delhi, 1988). In his book *Culture, ideology, Hegemony, Intellectuals and Social
Consciousness in Colonial India*, (Tulika Publications, New Delhi, 1995) K.N. Panikkar,
gives a great insight into various aspects of ideology and hegemony, both inherited and
imposed. A detailed note is given on the cultural and ideological struggles in colonial
India, expressed through a variety of socio-cultural movements and individual initiatives.
It explores the interconnections between culture, ideology and hegemony and is an effort
to explain how Indians, under colonial subjection negotiated their past and present and
envisioned a future for the society in which they lived.
The third category consists of the literature on progressive literary and theatre movements in Kerala and most of them were written by the Communist leaders and Party followers. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, in his book *Marxisavum Malayala Sahityavum* (Chintha Publications, Trivandrum, 1974) gives an account of the Marxist ideological influence on Malayalam literature and its outcome. Through this work, he gives the Communist point of view regarding literature and art, and also gives a historical account of the progressive writers’ movement in Malayalam. E.K. Nayanar’s *Purogamana Sahitya Chinthakal* (SPCS, Kottayam, 1990), M.S. Devadas’ *Purogamana Sahityathinte Pariprekshyam* and Andalatt’s *Purogamana Sahityavum Communistukarum* hold the Communist account of the progressive literary movement in Malayalam. Regarding the theatre movement, Vallikkavu Mohandas in his book *KPAC yude Charithram*, published by KPAC, Kayamkulam in 2002 narrates the story of the Communist sponsored Kerala People’s Arts Club and its dramas. The books of this category lack authenticity because of its exaggerative narrations and its subjective approach to the topic.

Hence, the present study is quite significant and it is the first authentic step towards unraveling a period of progressive cultural movements in Kerala. It is observed that no work has come out so far exclusively on the Left cultural movements in Kerala. Further, it is quiet significant that it searches for the Left cultural activism in a period of radical Left political movements. Thus, it is a modest endeavor to trace out the history of Left sponsored progressive literary and theatre movements in Kerala and their bid for ideological and political hegemony. In other words, the following basic questions are attempted to be answered. How the Left cultural activism did take shape? What were the tactics and methods adopted by the Leftists in creating a new cultural base? How far the
Communists were able to mobilize the intelligentsia under its banner? What were the effects brought about by Marxism on Malayalam Literature? How did the Left win the masses through the popular theatre movement? How far the Left succeeded in their efforts to create a cultural hegemony? How did the symbiotic relationship between the Left politics and cultural activism work out in Kerala?

The present study is mainly based on myriad empirical data available within the movement itself. A large number of Malayalam literary works, written during this period, were studied and many stage performances of the Left political plays were witnessed in order to evaluate its content of revolutionary vigor and its presentation. The method of critical analysis of the document has been done by scrutinizing the archival materials, party documents, official minutes, resolutions and reports of the PWA and KPAC, articles published in the journals, weeklies and newspapers of the period, autobiographies of the persons who were associated with these movements, and several leaflets, pamphlets and song books, which were collected from several local libraries and Communist Party offices. I have also relied on personal interviews with some of the prominent personalities, who were associated with the Left cultural movements in Kerala.

The study is laid out in five chapters excluding the introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter provides an analysis of the Marxist cultural theories and its development through the period under review. It also assesses the international and national background of the Leftist cultural activism and traces out the influencing factors, which shaped the Leftist cultural policies at national and regional levels in India. The chapter identifies the interventions of the Communist International, Communist Party of India and foreign propaganda literature in this regard.
The second chapter analyses the Left ideological formation in Kerala and assesses its initiative to create a political and cultural base. It examines various attempts made by the early Leftists in Kerala to indoctrinate the Communist and socialist ideologies among the people. It offers a discussion on early propaganda literature in Malayalam and its impact.

The third chapter focuses on the Communist endeavors to mobilize the intellectuals of Kerala under the banner of an association and its results. It evaluates the role of the Communists in bringing the *Jeeval Sahitya Samiti* and Progressive Writers’ Association in Malayalam and their efforts to transform and radicalize the literary theory and practice. The chapter gives a profile of these movements, its conferences, debates on various literary issues and achievements. The fourth chapter is completely devoted to analyze the impact of the Left sponsored Progressive Writers’ Movement in Malayalam literature. It examines the literary works which were written under the influence of Marxian literary theories and its impact on the Left political process. On other words, this chapter attempts to bring out the proletarian literature in Malayalam.

The fifth chapter brings to light the political theatre movement initiated by the Communists in Kerala. It evaluates the Left sponsored theatre movement, Kerala People’s Arts Club and its dual role of carrying the Left political propaganda at the grass root level and revolutionizing the performance in Malayalam. The concluding part critically appraises the Left struggle for cultural hegemony and assesses the symbiotic relationship between the Left political and cultural activism, and its impact on the socio-political and cultural scenario of Kerala.
The non-availability of materials in English created many difficulties throughout the writing of this thesis. The materials on progressive literary and theatre movements are in Malayalam and that necessitated its translation into English. While, translating the poetic lines, instead of its line to line translation, more importance is given to its idea and meaning. Other than the areas of literature and theatre, there are cultural realms, in which the Left made tremendous influence. This study is expected to provide hypotheses for further studies ahead in that direction.