CHAPTER II

LEFT POLITICAL FORMATION AND
THE MAKING OF ITS CULTURAL BASE

The cultural life of modern Kerala came into being through a long historical process of the synthesis of various cultural forms and of the conflicts of opposing social forces. The different cultural forms that had been at work in the formation of Kerala culture were that of the primitive tribal societies in Kerala, other south Indian societies and religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The plough-agricultural village system that emerged out of the disruption of the primitive tribal social system, the formation of feudal society, the re-organization of the feudal system as a regionalized community of culture, the emergence of democratic forces fighting against the feudal-colonial domination, the appearance of organized working class that took up the task of carrying forward the struggle for democracy – these are the different phases with which the conflicting social forces in the process of Kerala history have been connected and through which the cultural life of modern Kerala took shape.

The Kerala culture thus attaining identity has got its own peculiar traits which mark it off from all other Indian regional cultures. The Malayalam language, the life style of the Malayali, the arts and the literature, the faiths and the political consciousness make Kerala a different cultural region that set itself apart as much from the north Indian cultures as from the other south Indian cultures. But at the same time, the Kerala culture is an essential part of the Indian culture which is nothing but that which came into being through the development of the various regional cultures.
Socio-Cultural Milieu of Kerala

The society in Kerala during the second half of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century was caste stratified. But the varna system which was prevalent in all other Indian village societies had never been in existence in Kerala in the same pattern. There are no such groups of people in Kerala which include themselves perfectly in the four-fold division of Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. If there is any section of people in Kerala which fully satisfies the concepts of varna division, it is Brahmanas. Originally there is no separate section of people in Kerala which practiced the varna-dharma of Kshatriya and Sudras. The gaps of these two varnas came to be filled by the Nair castes. A section that functioned as the third caste Vaisya is totally absent in Kerala. How did this disagreement between theory and practice happen in Kerala? The only clear answer which is irresistible in this background is that in the pre-Aryan primitive tribes in Kerala the division of labour had not reached such an advanced stage as to divide itself to be fit in the four-fold division of varna system. The absence of a trader caste in the Kerala model varna system is highly significant against the background of the minute division of castes and sub-castes for each minor occupation.

In Kerala, the castes were broadly classified into, the Savarnas, the Avarnas and the non-Hindus. The Brahmins and Nairs comprised the Savarnas, referred to the caste Hindus, who were treated as high class, and the Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayars and others comprised the Avarnas, referred to as the non caste Hindus, who were treated as low class. The Christian and the Muslims constituted the non-Hindus.
The most notable characteristic of the caste system in Kerala is the practice of untouchability which figures even the upper castes as untouchables. Usually the Brahmanas elsewhere in India do not observe untouchability except towards castes outside the varnas, yet in Kerala the Brahmanas observe a form of untouchability towards the caste even inside the varna system.²

The Travancore Census Commissioner of 1931, who himself was a Nair says: “Kerala is generally considered to be the most caste-ridden part in India. This inference is generally drawn by outside observers from the prevalence in a more accentuated form in Kerala, than elsewhere, of ‘touch’ and ‘distance’ pollution, between higher and lower castes and from the denial to the polluting castes of the right of entering into and worship in the Hindu temple.”³ The rigid caste system kept the lower castes in permanent bondage and ignorance. The biggest social evil manifested by the rigid caste system all over India was untouchability. In Kerala, apart from untouchability, unseability and unapproachability also existed in a dreadful manner. Unapproachability was practiced mainly between the upper castes and lower castes whereas untouchability was practiced within the upper castes as well as the lower castes.⁴

The practice of unapproachability was based on the belief that a man or a thing gets polluted if a lower caste man approaches within a particular specified distance. A strict schedule of distance at which members of castes below the Brahmins had to stand with respect to the higher castes was evolved. The primary condition necessary for the existence of any modern society is the freedom of the people to move, associate, and co-habitat themselves at their will. But in the case of Kerala even these primary conditions
for the existence of a civil society had to be attained only through fierce struggles. The strict observance of untouchability prevailed in the caste system of Kerala forcefully maintained the separation of the people who lived within the limits of the caste without mutual contacts. Not only this much, but even the possibility of mingling together within the same caste was also hindered, because the caste system of Kerala itself was based on the mechanism of the caste within the caste. All the castes in Kerala were divided into sub-castes devoid of inter-marriage and inter-dining. The low caste men were not allowed to entry into public buildings, public streets and temples.

The early decades of the 20th century witnessed the beginning of powerful social reform movements led by Vaikunda Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, Chattambi Swamikal, Ayyankali, and others. A number of caste organizations were also formed in Kerala. This resulted in a number of movements against the untouchability and for temple entry in Kerala. E.M.S. Namboodiripad observed that: “It is however, a historical fact that one of the first forms in which the peasant masses rose in struggle against feudalism was in the form of caste organisations.”

The economic disabilities imposed on the lower caste people, were, however, more severe than their social humiliations. The economy of Kerala was based on agriculture and therefore, the land was the most important factor for production. A major portion of the agricultural land was owned by the upper castes like Namboodiris and Nairs. The land ownership in Kerala was based on Jenmi-Kudiyam system and power and prosperity were the exclusive monopoly of the jenmis. It was the exclusive privilege of the higher castes to be the jenmis.
The elements responsible for the peculiarities of the Kerala culture took shape under this feudal set up in Kerala. Hence, the structure of feudalism in Kerala had been different from that of north India as well as of south. The land relations, the political set up, the caste system, man-woman relationships, modes of succession, the forms of worship and rituals, the language, art and literature and the dress – in all these Kerala feudal society had its own peculiar forms.

In Kerala, five elements can be seen as the social forms of feudalism. They are: the caste hegemony of the *savarnas*, *Jenmi*-landlord system, *Naduvazhi* rule, powers on temple-priesthood beliefs and male domination. The monopoly over the wealth held by the *Jenmi* system, laid a strong base for the caste divisions. Further, the *Naduvazhi* political structure gave all supports to this caste-*Jenmi* hegemony prevailed in the socio-economic situations. E.M.S. Namboodiripad termed this three tire system of hegemony as “caste-*Jenmi*-Naduvazhitham”, in which caste system dominates in social sphere, *Jenmi* system dominates in the production sphere and *Naduvazhi* system dominates in the political fields.⁸

This peculiar nature of land relations in Kerala, because of its theocratic nature, determined the position and role of the *Naduvazhis*. The king in Kerala was not a sovereign, whose power was unconditional and total over the land and people within the reach of his reign. He was only one among the other traditional landholders having certain duties to dispense according to custom. He was denominated as *koil adhikarikal*, or *koyma*, the supervisor of the temple which is self explaining of his duties and position. So the king in the feudal political structure of Kerala was not one who occupied the
highest position in the power hierarchy, not having tamed the priestly class so as to make use of the religious ideology as a state apparatus.  

Though the Naduvazhis gradually became powerful and power conflicts between the Naduvazhis and the Namboodiris were progressively at work, as William Logan states, the Hindu religion being a determining factor in the production relation and the core of which being the priestly class, the Namboodiris in the feudal system of Kerala had a different role. In short, in the Kerala feudal society the kings were not a centre of power exercised from above; the priestly class were not mere ideologues of the ruling section; and the peasant slaves were considered as if they were the natural extension of the land. Thus the feudal society in Kerala, where the economic life and civil society, the private and public existence of individuals had been identified into one structure and where the undemocratic stratification of the society attained a general consensus as if it simply manifests a natural truth, had been similar to the same elsewhere in the world in basic aspects. But empirically it had a different existence.

In the cultural history of Kerala the period from the sixteenth to the close of the eighteenth century stands out for its complexity and change of momentum. This is the span of time which is marked out by the coming of the Portuguese on the one end and the takeover of the political power by the English on the other. And this is the period in which the feudal society in Kerala had integrated as a regionalized community of culture. Though the disintegrating elements of castes and sub-castes continued to be vital, it was in this period that in the realm of art and literature cultural streams which transcended the social sections took shape. And it was at this period that the political power of the petty
chieftains had been crushed and the small principalities began to be integrated into large kingdoms. It was under the British colonial rule that a basic change took place in the life of Kerala. It was a period of break from the continuity of the past. The colonial rule shattered the old stubborn structure of economy. Though the production for local consumption had been gradually giving way to the production for market, it was only during the British rule that Kerala has been integrated to the world market. This change deeply affected the feudal structure and subsequently the social and cultural life.

Since the consolidation of the agricultural village system, without any fundamental change except the proliferation of sub-castes caused by the development of division of labour till the advent of the modern democratic struggle, this caste mechanism functioned as a political structure. This mechanism was able to perform different functions according to the different phases of history and thus could survive the changes in history. If it once functioned as a political structure of an economic base which combined the relations of slavery and feudalism, at another phase it functioned as a clever device of the feudal-colonial exploitation.

The economy of colonial exploitation was one that hindered the development of Kerala as a modern society which was lying shackled in the old feudal relations. The colonial economic policy resisted the internal development of productive forces. Actually the colonial rulers were making use of the external forms of the old structure as a less expensive tool for exploitation. They made the kings the chieftains and the landlords their servile mediators. As for the former ruling section they were given back the formal status and privileges and as for the jenmis they were made owners of the land, in the modern
sense, and all of them in return accepted the supremacy of the British ultimately at the loss of the freedom of the people. Thus the colonial rulers retained feudal disposition as a form devoid of content to make the exploitation more smooth.\textsuperscript{13} Hence this period of feudal-colonial exploitation in which old customs and faiths were used as ideological state apparatus to exploit the people with their own consent, is the most complex and grotesque one in the history of Kerala.

With the advent of colonialism, capitalist interventions emerged in the agricultural sector. The growth of exports and the increased need for the cash crops resulted in the emergence of plantations owned by feudal lords. Meanwhile, capitalist relations also emerged in the village handicraft industries like the coir sector. In the early period, the life of the coir factory workers was extremely miserable. The capitalists devised the government, caste, religion and feudal customs to exploit them. In the early 1940s a custom of surrendering the wife of a newly married labourer to the \textit{jenmi} for 90 days prevailed in the regions of Chertala taluk.\textsuperscript{14} In the rural factories, the workers were landless tenants of the factory owners and any tussle between the workers and the owner resulted in the loss of employment and eviction from the land.\textsuperscript{15} This system and the advance payment given to the workers by the employers, resulted in the emergence of bounded labour in the coir factories in rural areas. P. Kesava Dev, former secretary of the Travancore Labour Association and a leading Malayalam writer recollects that: “besides the factory owners, in between the owners and workers there were labour contractors and \textit{Mooppans}, who also exploited the workers.”\textsuperscript{16}
Therefore anti-feudalist movements and anti-capitalist movements were simultaneously emerged in Kerala. The Communist Party provided them with a platform from which they could not only ventilate their grievances, but could challenge those who had caused them. It was the first great threat that feudalism faced in the area.

**Formation of the Communist Party in Kerala**

The Communist movement in Kerala has continuity over seventy years with a humble origin in 1930s. Many of the leaders, who led a radical leftist movement in Kerala, came under the influence of Marxian ideology in the thirties, particularly after the termination of Civil Disobedience Movement. Communist leaders like P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, A.K. Gopalan and many others participated in the mainstream of national movement as the followers of the Indian National Congress. However, gradually they shifted their ideological commitment to Marxism-Leninism.

There was no effort in Kerala to organize the left prior to 1930. However, the first proto-Marxist organization was the tiny Trivandrum based Communist League of 1931 organized by N.P. Kurukkal, Sivasankara Pillai, Ponnara G. Sreedhar, N.C. Sekhar and others. N.P. Kurukkal, as the organizing secretary, published a handbill – ‘The Indian Communist Party’. The handbill published called for action directed towards a revolution to establish a socialist society. The Government reacted sharply, invoked Section 26 of the police Regulation of 1920 and prevented its printing and dissemination in Travancore. Though the Communist League did not develop into the Communist Party, one of the founders of the League-N.C. Sekhar later became one of the founders of the Communist Party in 1937. Thus a connection between the League and the Communist
Party can be seen. Moreover the leaders of the League were responsible to translate and publish secretly some portions of *The Communist Manifesto* which they got from K.N. Jogelkar of Bombay.\(^{20}\)

The 1930-32 struggles were started at a time when new forces had already appeared on the political horizon. The student and youth movements in that had come into being in the rest of India began to spread in Kerala. The self-sacrificing revolutionary ardor of Bhagat Singh and his comrades inspired the Kerala youth. Vague ideas of socialism and Communism, stories of what happened and what was taking place in the Soviet Union, had started catching the imagination of the people.\(^{21}\) Rank and file congressmen in Kerala came into close contact with the national left leaders of the Congress like Nehru, Bose as well as revolutionaries from Bengal, Bihar, UP and Punjab, many of whom were lodged in the various jails of Madras Presidency.

All this led to the development of a well defined group of revolutionary congressmen, who though organizationally within the congress, were ideologically outside the Gandhian leadership. The result was that, by the time of the abandonment of mass civil disobedience and the adoption of the council entry programme, the majority of rank and file congressmen in Kerala, had already taken a definite turn to the Left. Leftists had a majority in the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee that came to be organized in 1934. These leftist congressmen declared themselves socialists and organized the Communist Socialist Party (CSP) in 2\(^{nd}\) May 1934.\(^{22}\) A meeting was held in Calicut for this purpose with K. Kelappan in the chair and a committee of seven members was appointed for propaganda and to draw up a programme. P. Krishna Pillai was chosen as
secretary and C.K. Govindan Nair as president. It was later stated by Krishna Pillai, one of the founders of the CSP and later the Communist Party in Kerala, in an article in 1939, that “at the time of its formation none of the members had a clear idea of what socialism meant or how it should be attained.”

After the organizational formation, the CSP activists tried to capture the peasant and trade union movements, which were started before its formation. It was in 1915, the Malabar Tenancy Association, which later became the *Kerala Karshaka Sangham* (Kerala Farmers Association) in 1933 was formed. Later, peasant unions were formed in most of the parts of Kerala and began to function as ‘protection squads’ which intervened in cases of eviction or demands for feudal levies. Street rallies and *jathas* (processions) were organized to demonstrate against unpopular measures and participation. Like this, the first trade union was established in Kerala in 1920 and the first attempt to organize the labourers in Kerala industrial sector and the first trade union were both in coir industry. The first ever labour meeting in Kerala convened on 31st March 1922 at Alleppey gave birth to the labour union which, after a few months transformed itself into the Travancore Labour Association (TLA). The TLA held its first annual conference in 1924, two years after its formation. By 1928 more branches of the Association were established at Alleppey, Muhamma and Cherthalai.

Through systematical ideological propaganda and in the intervention of peasant-working class issues, the Communists emerged as the leaders of these movements. They gave a revolutionary vigor to the working class movements and they politicized the peasants and workers. It was in 1934, the first general strike of the coir factory workers
was organized by the TLA at Alleppey. The workers organized a procession, went round the town and shouted the slogans such as ‘Inquilab Zindabad’, and ‘Workers of the World Unite’. Due to the emerging working class mobilization, on 24 July 1938, the Government implemented the Trade Union Act. Then the TLA was registered under a new name Travancore Coir Factory Workers Union (TCFWU) and all its branches were also separately registered as Coir Factory Workers Union.

In 1935, a Radical Conference was held at Calicut under the auspices of the CSP. The conference adopted a comprehensive programme of work which was presented by Keraleeyan. Among them, the important points were: 1) Fight for increase in workers’ wages and reduction in working hours along with propaganda among workers on the nature of capitalist-state collaboration and repression; 2) movement of peasants based on demands for abolition of landlordism, removal of indebtedness, improvement of working conditions of agricultural labourers; 3) removing ministerialists and other moderates and making Congress into a real people’s organization; 4) setting up of Yuvajana Sanghams (Youth Leagues) and clubs and propagandizing through them full independence and the course of struggle to achieve it; 5) opposing imperialist-inspired wars and making all efforts to strengthen the anti-imperialist struggle to gain independence. It was with such an anti-feudal, anti-imperialist programme based on workers, peasants and youth that the CSP hoped to convert the Congress into a revolutionary movement. The first effort of the CSP radicals was to organize the working class in the towns.

The CSP played a significant role in integrating the anti-Jenmi peasant struggle with the National Movement. Another section organized by the CSP activists was of the
educated unemployed. Committees of the unemployed were formed in Kathiroor (Malabar). A *Pattini Jatha* (Hunger Strike) was held to the Tellicherry Divisional Office and one from Kalliyasserry to Koothuparamba under the leadership of A.K. Gopalan and K.P.R. Gopalan. Similar *jathas* were held in different parts of Malabar highlighting the causes of hunger and unemployment. In July 1936 another *Pattini Jatha* to Madras evoked massive support and wide coverage from the Malayalam Press. Over 500 meetings were held all over Kerala. K.P.R. Gopalan took charge of the cultural group comprising singers while A.K. Gopalan was the *jatha* “Director”. Such *jathas* were held all over Kerala, *pattini* songs reverberating all around. *Jathas* of unemployed were held in North Malabar too on October, 1936.

The second CSP conference in January 1936 had not only endorsed the proposition that Marxism alone can guide the anti-imperial forces to their ultimate destiny but had also agreed to admit Communists as members in recognition of the CPI’s switch to the united front line. The CSP recognized the need to use the national movement to advance socialism, not in the expectation of converting Congress but of splitting it into progressive and reactionary wings. The leftists within the Congress Socialist group, found the Gandhian technique of *Satyagraha* and protest unsuitable in the fight against British imperialism. They decided to implement the revolutionary plan of action chalked out in the document, *The Proletarian Path*. Their intention was to mobilize the entire people by building up a militant movement through general strikes and peasant struggles.
In the meantime, the Congress Socialists in Kerala began to show their leaning towards Communism openly. In fact most of the CSP leaders in Kerala were Communists working under the umbrella of the Congress as early as from 1935. About the same time, members of the Kerala CSP began attending conference of the national CSP and there met Communist veterans of the Meerut Conspiracy Case like P.C. Joshi and S.A. Dange. Early in 1937, the CPI apparently sent S.V. Ghate, a Bombay Communist based in Madras, to Malabar to link up with the Communist-inclined leftists. This resulted in the formation of the nucleus of a Communist group in Kerala consisting of Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N.C. Sekhar and K. Damodaran. However, no satisfactory work had been done in Kerala for promoting the formation of a Communist Party at that time. They still continued as Congress Socialists.

In October 1938, labourers under the leadership of TCFWU, started indefinite strike with thirty demands. They exhorted that: “Even if all our economic demands were sanctioned, we will not stop the strike if full responsible government based on the adult suffrage is not given.” The CSP leader P. Krishna Pillai, who lead the strike, invited Communist leader S.V. Ghate to Alleppey. This strike was the culmination of the twin process of deteriorating industrial relations and growing political involvement of the workers. This was the time when the labour movement passed into the strong hands of the Communist Party. The entire labour movement in Travancore was very much on the Communist lines even before the formation of the Communist Party in Kerala.

The coir factory workers of Alleppey were ready to receive the newly formed Communist Party. Even in 1938, P.G. Padmanabhan, the secretary of the Coir Factory
Labour Strike Committee of Alleppey circulated printed leaflet entitled “Governmentum Muthalalimarum Sookshikkuka” (Government and Capitalists, Beware), which containing Communist ideas. Organization and propaganda among tenants were increasingly sophisticated and dwelt on the necessity of creating class consciousness and secret cadres were capable for maintaining the movement even if it were banned. Working class, peasant and youth organizations were established and an increasing amount of left-wing literature was made available in Malayalam.

In December 1939, a crucial and secret meeting of some 90 prominent workers of Kerala CSP was held at Pinarayi Parappuram, a village some 8 km away from Tellicherry to consider the formation of Communist Party in Kerala. They decided for such a transformation and to link up the popular agrarian and working class struggles against economic crisis and suffering brought by the war, with the fight for national independence. K.P. Gopalan presided over the confabulation which was hosted by a tapper Vatavothe Apputty. The participants included: P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, A.K. Gopalan, P. Narayanan Nair, K.P.R. Gopalan, N.E. Balaram, E.P. Gopalan, C.H. Kanaran, Chandroth Kunjiraman Nair, Moyarath Sankaran Nambiar, M.K. Kelu, A.V. Kunhambu, George Chatayanmuri, P.V. Kunjunni Nair, William Snelex, Janardhanan Shenoy, P. Ganagadharan, P.K. Balakrishnan, T.K. Raju, N.C. Sekhar, T.V. Achuthan Nair and K.A. Keraleeyan. The formation of the Party was declared through the writings in tar, on the walls, such as ‘Victory to Revolution’, ‘Destroy Imperialism’, ‘Communist Party Zindabad’, etc., on 26th January 1940. The prominent leaders went underground to organize the Party as it was under the ban. The first job of the Party was
to mobilize the people and bring peasant organizations and trade unions together for a
united action against the Government.

The lineage of the CPI in Kerala can be traced to the Left tendencies within the
CSP. A stage was set for the emergence of Communism by the Congress Socialism. The
Communists in Kerala were successful in linking their class and mass organizations with
the national movement and emerged as the unquestionable leaders of the national
movement during the post-war revolutionary upsurge. The prestige so gained laid a firm
basis for the phenomenal expansion of the Communist Party’s influence in the first
decade after independence.

The Early Propaganda Mediums

The period from 1934 to 1940 are enormously significant in the history of the
peasant movement, marking the rise of workers’ and peasants’ organizations consequent
to the formation of the CSP, growth of the revolutionary ideology of scientific socialism
in Kerala soil, and the first generation of revolutionary cadres and leadership. The Left,
then, was able to enlist the services of almost all the sources of “diffusion of linguistic
innovations in the tradition and of a national linguistic conformism in the broad national
masses” that Gramsci mentions, like the education system, newspapers, artistic writers
and popular writers, theatre, public meetings and the ‘relations of conversation’ between
the more educated and less educated strata of the population.\(^{40}\)

Kerala was the most literate region of India. In 1931, 34 percent of the population
was literate in Cochin, 29 percent in Travancore and 14 percent in Malabar District. In
India as a whole, literacy was 8 percent. The spread of the ‘word’ had to contend with a whole host of issues. Despite, Kerala having a history of a better record of the dissemination of education than most other states of India, traditionally caste and class have played a role in skewed patterns of education. Literacy programme, therefore, was an area that was crucial to the Party’s agenda of cultural and ideological penetration.

In Kerala, the Communist ideological propaganda has mainly done through the print media, study classes and public meetings. The Party schools, study classes and other propaganda exercises conducted by the Communist Party were substantial in all parts of the region. The socialist ideas and the Russian Revolution of 1917 were two inspiring factors, which promoted anti-establishment and radical thinking in Kerala. Ever since the radicals came under the influence of Marxist doctrine, popularization of socialism and Communism became a regular feature. During its evolutionary period the Communists adopted a policy of ideological propaganda and utilized every available medium to propagate Communism, Marxism and socialism. Newspapers catering specially to the interests of the working class were started. The methods of mobilization, the nature of the dissemination of Communist ideas and the emphasis on cultural activities reveal the specific characteristics of the new fellowship emerged among the working class.

The period from 1920 witnessed the spread of Communist literature throughout the country. For instance, Communist Manifesto was published in Bengali and Marathi in 1920. As early as 1921, S.A. Dange brought out an ideological critique entitled Gandhi and Lenin. Left nationalist journals like Atmasakthi and Dhumketu in Calcutta, Independent in Allahabad and Navayuga in Guntur had started publishing eulogistic articles on Lenin and Russia. From August 1922, Dange brought out the weekly Socialist
from Bombay. It is considered as the first definitely Communist journal to be published in India. In 1921, Phani Ghosh, a political worker, published a Bengali booklet *Lenin*, in which he compared the Russian leader with Gandhi and observed that “on the whole the aims of Gandhi and Lenin are the same-to uproot all injustice from the society, especially to end the poverty of the oppressed masses and to utterly destroy the oppressors.” The first biography of Lenin in Kannada by Veerappa came in 1922. Around this time appeared the *Inquilab* (1922) an Urdu weekly from Lahore edited by Ghulam Hussain.

The First Communist Conference met in Kanpur in 1925 and the Labour Swaraj Party was also formed that year. It brought out a weekly magazine entitled *Langal* (The Plough). It was a short lived journal and was soon replaced by *Ganabani* (People’s Voice) from August 1926. In Punjab a similar group published a journal *Kirty*. A Marathi journal *Kranti* (1927) was published by the Workers Peasants Party. When socialist and Communist ideas penetrated into the Youth Congress they started separate publishing organs to propagate their ideology. The Congress Socialists Party started publishing their organ-*The Congress Socialist*, English weekly, the Communists had *The National Front* and *People’s War* both in English and M.N. Roy differing from the official Communists edited the *Independent India*, an English weekly.

A collection of authoritative books on Soviet Russia written by the famous Bolshevik leaders, books published by the Communist International and the other books on Communism and socialism are made available for sale through the Socialist Book Shop of Cawnpore from 1925 onwards. The printed list no.1 of this book shop listed such books *The A.B.C. of Communism*, *The Soviet Constitution*, two books of Lenin and the official Communist International publications. In a circular, the Manager of the Book
Shop claimed that “these books have been brought out for the first time to this country, where they were unknown and rare to the general public before.”

**Swadesabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai and his Biography of Karl Marx**

In the development of modern Malayalam literature in the first half of the 20th century, an evolutionary pattern of a progressive, radical stand is discernible. In the first week of August, 1912, about five years before the Socialist Revolution in Russia, *Swadesabhimani* Ramakrishna Pillai had written and published a biography of Karl Marx entitled *Karl Marx* in Malayalam. He was the first author in any Indian language to attempt a biography of Karl Marx. At that time it was nearly impossible in India to have any reading material on Socialism or Karl Marx. The passionate language in which he presents Karl Marx, his family and their hardships for the cause of *Coolikkar* (wage labourers) is an expression of Ramakrishna Pillai’s emotional involvement in the ideas of Marxism. It is equally significant that it was the Communists in Kerala who recovered this work and published it in 1946. Prominent Communist leader K. Damodaran wrote the introduction to the 1946 edition.

In the foreword to the biography of Karl Marx, Ramakrishna Pillai wrote: “Greatest among mortals are those who have devoted themselves to the betterment of the world, sacrificing all they have on the altar of humanity. The biographies of those great men guide and inspire us in our path of life. Peoples of all countries must be familiar with such biographies. We do not have enough of such biographies in Malayalam…. Should this work inspire other men, this effort would be successful in itself.” Ramakrishna Pillai correctly observes that social evils like poverty, slavery and social conflicts are the
result of private ownership of land and in other spheres and that there would be no private property under Communism. He also points out that “the system of sale and purchase exists only in a society that distinguishes between ‘your’ and ‘mine’; it has no reason to exist in a society that takes it for granted, ‘nothing is mine, everything belongs to the society’. Hence it becomes clear that once we do away with private property the need for money disappears”.49 He also quoted a passage from The Communist Manifesto to explain how hostile classes – the oppressor and the oppressed – carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, in different periods of the history. He approvingly quotes even the Marxist view that “these class conflicts are the motive forces of the change in the world”. He also quoted the popular and inspiring words of Marx like “Those who wish to come out from the chain of bondage must try themselves to achieve that aim” and “Unite the Workers of Entire World”.50

Soviet Model Propaganda

It is generally accepted that the European socialist ideas and the Russian Revolution of 1917 gave a new impetus to the national movement in India. The sensitivity reflected in the response of various sections and individuals towards the Russian Revolution is quite significant in the development of radical movement. The early Communists of Kerala used Soviet propaganda as an alternative to the socialist ideology. They posted Soviet Union as a model nation and Soviet propaganda was an important agenda of their ideological propagation. E.M.S. Namboodiripad one of the pioneering leaders of the Communist Party has given two factors which decisively effected the evolution of the Congress Socialist Party to the Communist Party in Kerala.
One is the emotional attachment to the Soviet Union and the other is the organization of class organizations to the fight for the interest of the people. This attachment to the Soviet Union is acknowledged by other prominent Communist leaders like N.E. Balaram, N.C. Sekhar and K.A. Keraleeyan etc, who were in the party during its evolution. This Soviet Union factor has been again and again stressed by E.M.S. in several times. K.C. George who was to become the first President of the Travancore Communist Party relates his ‘conversion’ to Communism through his admiration for the Russian socialist society.

The socialists’ work during 1931-1934 was twofold: explanation of the socialist goal by pointing out the model of socialist construction of Soviet Union and the organization of workers and peasants. The “Soviet model” had a great propaganda value. Besides personal explanation to individual workers and peasants, organized attempts were made to project the Soviet model among the people. E.M.S. Namboodiripad rightly pointed out “We had not much theoretical grasp about socialist principles; but we realized that Soviet Union was its living, corporeal form.” Apart from these, the anti-caste campaign was an important element of the Left nationalist agenda and an important element of the mobilization strategy, as in the case of agricultural labourers in Kuttanad. By the eve of independence the left had risen to the leadership of the national movement in Malabar.

Since the beginning of 1934, organized attempt was made by the young socialists- E.M.S., K.A Keraleeyan, P. Krishna Pillai, K.P. Gopalan, K. Damodaran and others to project Russia as a model country, where they conceived everything was ideally done. Extolling every aspect of Soviet life and society articles were written and published by
these young socialists through every medium available. As part of this projection of Soviet Union as a ‘model’, the socialists published dozens of articles in Malayalam. In Mathrubhoomi Daily alone about three dozens of articles were published during the single year, 1934. In this they were assisted by P. Narayanan Nair, a Congress Socialist who had become the editor of Mathrubhoomi at that time. On 21<sup>st</sup> January 1934 Narayanan Nair wrote an editorial entitled “the Progress of Russia”. On 18<sup>th</sup> March an article extolling Lenin was published. On 30<sup>th</sup> March an article giving colourful picture of the “excellent” condition in Soviet Jail was written by P. Krishna Pillai. On 21<sup>st</sup> April an article on the “Eradication of Prostitution in Russia” appeared. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June P. Krishna Pillai wrote another article on the “Success of Five Year Plans in Russia”. On 16<sup>th</sup> June “Protection of Children in Russia” by K.A. Keraleeyan appeared. Several such articles appeared in Mathrubhoomi subsequently with projected Russia as model country.

P. Kesava Dev was one of the early protagonists of the Russian Revolution in Travancore. He was acquainted with workers’ rights and privileges through the books he read on Russian Revolution. He wrote “It was the inspiration of my life. Revolutionaries are born only from the depths of love for humanity. I read a number of works on the Revolution. Ten Days That Shook the World by John Reed was an important work among them. There was no Communist Party in Kerala at that time. But I used to walk 10 to 20 miles a day for the propagation of my version of Communism. I told them everything that I read about Russian Revolution. But I did not know what Marxism was”. In another article Dev detailed the various stages of the Russian Revolution. The land committees which carried out the land distribution, the land decrees of Lenin, Bolshevik policies, etc., are mentioned.
As early as December 1917, *Mitavadi* (the Moderate), a Malabar monthly, published by a Tiyya teacher, Murkothu Kumaran, welcomed the Russian Revolution. In an article in *Mitavadi* he states “when you look at conditions in Russia and conditions here, what a difference! No one knows the power of people”. The publication of Satyavarda Swamikal – *Navajeevan* also helped very much in spreading socialist ideas among the labourers of Alleppey and Cherthalai. Articles of socialism, the biography of Lenin, studies about Soviet Union, etc., regularly appeared in the *Navajeevan*.

**K. Ayyappan and Sahodaran**

K. Ayyappan, the prominent non-sanyasi disciple of Sree Narayana Guru, the pioneer social reformer of Kerala, started the *Sahodaran* journal in 1917 and it lasted till 1956. Before the birth of Communist movement in Kerala, the *Sahodaran* was the chief spokesman of socialism. M.K. Sanu, the biographer of Sahodaran Ayyappan, says that the ordinary people of Kerala learnt about Russia and Russian Revolution through this newspaper. Ayyappan’s *Ezhavodbodhanam*, written in 1918, was the first work which deals with the Russian Revolution in Malayalam. The biographer of Sahodaran Ayyappan also points out that, the term *Sakhav* (Comrade) was probably used for the first time in Malayalam through this poem.

Sahodaran Ayyappan through his *Ezhavodbodhanam* and *Ranisandesam*, introduced a revolutionary vigor in Malayalam poetry. In *Ezhavodbodhanam*, he raised his revolutionary voice like:

“For the ideological blunders and dirty rituals
The Kerala land has been polluted utterly
Guide its life path towards a new one
You the tireless brave men
As you, the young men, for a long time
Abandoned their life for the struggle without any interval
Got result in Russia land, which fell under servitude
Became independent
Write here! You the Comrades
If you hearing those exciting histories^65

Ayyappan also wrote songs to exhort the workers for a united movement against
the oppression. He exhorted the workers:

“Be United Brothers!
If you the majority get united
What is there that cannot be achieved
The mightiest are the rulers and
The weak become ruled
No one has reached his rights
Without his own strength
Rather the kindness of others.”^66

Russia continuously finds a place in the columns of Ayyappan’s journal. The
titles of such articles are self explanatory. “On Russia” is an article which speaks about
the main fold achievements of Russia since the revolution. Similarly another editorial
was titled “The Only Country without Any Unemployed”. This editorial based on the
work of Mrs. and Mr. Sydney Webb’s visit to Russia, which details the achievements of
Russia in the post revolutionary phase. Ayyappan, also countered the criticism rose
against the Soviet system and the role of the Communist Party and commented “Russia
succeeding in overcoming the greatest tragedy that is poverty. This is no mean
achievement...” He concludes by saying that we should also try to welcome it rather than attribute negative meaning to “Communism and Bolshevism”. The same message is found in a poem written in a special issue of Sahodaran in 1926.

“Our do not claim that we know how the poverty of our country can be removed. The wind from the distant North-West may be saying something about a new path, since it is heard that some activity is going on there, O! New Year! Please bring that message of relief to the poor people.”

In 1930, Sahodaran published a series of articles on the biography of Lenin. Ayyappan also took initiative to organize labourers and Vaipin Adi Thozhilali Sangham (the First Worker’s Union of Vaipin) was organized with his initiative. The Union published the Sahodaran newspaper three days in a week. In the newspaper office, framed photographs of Karl Marx, Lenin and Stalin were placed. The emblem of the Union was, “an agro labourer holding a spade at the centre of the globe”.

More than these writings, Sahodaran Ayyappan also engaged in a rigorous campaign through his speeches. His innumerable pro-Soviet speeches had their own impact upon the common Ezhava masses and that did make the Ezhavas sympathizers of Communism is a matter beyond doubt. In 1924 at a labour meeting in Cherthalai, which was held in support of the Vaikkom Satyagraha, K. Ayyappan gave the following call to the workers; “…strike and get liberated like the Russians who liberated themselves by slaying the royal family. Never mind the gun of the army, the batten of the police and even the Maharaja.” The Government of Travancore took the call seriously and
prohibited Ayyappan from making speeches in Travancore. It made Dewan Raghavayya to state; “here, the Communist ideology has started spreading”.  

Like P. Kesava Dev and Ayyappan, the Communist leaders also wrote several articles portraying the achievements of Soviet Union and the idea of socialism. P. Krishna Pillai wrote a number of articles during the period, highlighting the merits of the Soviet Socialist society.  

**Thozhilali and the Working Class Mobilization**

At the early stage, the main attempt was to indoctrinate rural labourers with radical Communist ideology and to create in them motivation to bring about radical change in the traditional pattern of labour-cultivator relations. It was during this time, the Travancore Labour Association (TLA), the first labour organization in the state emerged. The first annual meeting of the TLA was held on April 6 and 7, 1922 at Bhagavathi Vilasam Theatre at Alappuzha. Nearly thousand workers attended this. It also conducted an arts festival of the workers with competition for elocution, hand writing and public reading as well as music and drawing. K.C. Govindan remembers that this conference was presided over by C.V. Kunjiraman and Changanassery Parameswaran Pillai on the first and second day respectively. K.K. Kuruvila spoke on labour movements.  

The major activities of labour association were humanitarian and fellowship concerns of the workers. The circulation of leaflets, propagating the importance of labour unions was an important activity. In order to spread the ideals and the activities of the association, a newspaper named *Thozhilali* was started in 1924. Through this newspaper, intense propaganda was given to show how vital it was to make the government to
implement modern labour laws. It also prepared the workers for a general strike. In 1924, the TLA started a library and literary class for the workers. There, lessons of the ‘dignity of labour’, ‘value of knowledge’, ‘women emancipation’, ‘abstention from liquor’, etc., were taught.  

The news paper *Thozhilali* came out fairly regularly throughout the 1930s. It published a wide range of poems, articles and polemics, educating the workers in class solidarity and socialism. It published a lengthy account of Marx’s contribution to worker’s literature and poems like *The Worker’s Hand*, which concluded “This world will see the dawn of revolution: the world sustained by the labour of workers, is seeing the dawn of revolution”. It published features on “Peaceful Path to Socialism in Sweden”, “The beautiful of Moscow”, “Soviet Reclamation and Hydroelectric Projects”, “Growth of Literary Movement in Soviet Union”, “Health Conditions in Alleppey”, “Various Strikes in South India”, “Travancore Labour News”, “Call to Worker-Peasant Solidarity to Achieve Responsible Government in Travancore”, a poem *Give Cash!* about the cry of a beggar, a skit entitled “Public Men”, in which one character tells another “Elder brother! A public organization is not enough. Revolution, that’s what we need. We must put down all notables; we must unite all workers”. 

Each issue of the *Thozhilali* published several articles connected with labour problems and also reported national and international developments in the labour front and elsewhere, thereby enabling the coir workers to develop a broad perspective particularly with regard to labour-management relations, work conditions and living standard. As the mouthpiece of TLA, it regularly published articles about the necessity of unity among the labourers and it regularly published various announcement issued by the
TLA. During 1924-37, the TLA was greatly influenced by extremist leaders like K. Ayyappan, P. Kesava Dev, A. Balakrishna Pillai, E.V. Ramaswami Naikkar and others, who contributed a number of articles to the *Thozhilali*.

Another notable achievement of this period was the formation of “Death Benefit Fund”. Similarly, the association could establish a health care system for the workers. It also opened a reading room for the workers with major newspapers, magazines, and some books. Workers were allowed to take books at home in the evening to study without any fee. Another memorable event of this period was the founding of a night school in the shed adjacent to the union office. Here besides teaching English, Malayalam, and Arithmetic, training was imparted in public speaking. Further, a co-operative society called *Alleppey Thozhilali Paraspara Saharakara Sangham* was formally registered in July 1926. All these activities are definite pointers to the latent potential of the labour association in its early phase.

By the end of thirties, literates among the coir workers were as high as 65.5 percent. Coupled with this, the socio-cultural activities of the TLA like the adult education classes held in their night school and the establishment of reading rooms and libraries for the use of workers and reform-oriented writings of its leaders through their newspaper, *Thozhilali* were very popular among them. By 1933, the circulation of the weekly exceeded 1000 copies which in effect meant that the majority of the workers were regularly exposed to the ideas propagated by *Thozhilali*.

The movement from welfare association to militant union purveying ‘the principles of Communism’, according to the police, “was symbolized in the annual
meeting held in September 1933 under E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, the Tamil atheist, recently returned from the Soviet Union”.  

Moreover, the newly elected general secretary was P. Kesava Dev, a quixotic Marxist, who was to become an outstanding Malayalam novelist. When Kesava Dev took the leadership of the weekly, it became a powerful media for propagating revolutionary and socialist ideas among the workers. P. Kesava Dev was one of the most celebrated progressive writers of Kerala. He was a fiery radical and supported trade union action. Even the Government had banned him from making public speeches. Since Kesava Dev was the editor of Thozhilali, he wrote articles in it and they contained what he really wants to convey through public speeches. These articles recharged the workers who were agitated on the issue of wage reduction. The writings in Thozhilali during this period went to a great extent in providing a psychological climate for the coir factory workers to participate actively in the Communist movement that emerged later. A significant space in the Thozhilali was set aside for news on Soviet Union and its leaders. This was mainly because many articles that appeared in this period were on socialism and Marxism. The weekly also serialized even some parts of the Karl Marx’s Das Capital during the 1932-35 period.

The spread of revolutionary ideas even prepared the workers to a general strike. Kesava Dev, later wrote about the labour strike that, “the important thing was that the owners learned they could no longer dictate terms unopposed, and the workers, for the first time, heard revolutionary slogans”. The strike of January 1934 brought a range of slogans and songs to the lips of the Alleppey workers: “Capitalist! - we want our wages
in money. If we ask for the wages, will you attack us? Capitalist! We want our wages in money.” 90 Others included: “Victory to the Revolution!” and “Workers of all Countries Unite!”

With the adoption of the Red Flag with the insignia of hammer and sickle as its official flag in 1937, the TLA leadership of the association gone into the hands of the CSP, though the influence of the CSP over the TLA had begun in 1934 onwards. CSP leaders like P. Krishna Pillai began to contribute articles on socialism and international Communist movement to Thozhilali. Subsequently, he came over to Alleppey and propagated the ideas of October Revolution in Soviet Russia among the coir workers.

As a result of the dissemination of radical ideas among the workers of Quilon, Ambalapuzha and Cherthalai taluks were emerging as the most politicized people of Travancore. 91 The spread of such ideas did not rely solely on shouted slogans or the spoken word. Travancore was the most literate area of India (68 percent male literacy in 1941), and one estimate put literacy among factory workers at 75 percent in the late 1930s. 92 About the labourers of Alleppey and Cherthalai, the Sree Moolam Assembly recorded “most of them are able to read and some of them are able to edit newspapers. Most of them are deliver splendid lecturers. Some of them are even able to compose beautiful poems in Malayalam.” 93

The cultural activities became an inevitable part of the working class movement in Ambalapuzha and Cherthala taluks. Echoes of their growing class consciousness began to reflect in the literature produced by them. The literary ferment among the workers produced poets, story tellers and artists from their ranks. Many of those literary creations
were published and their sales enriched the TLA funds. Those vast and scattered literature and art forms represent the first stirrings of a class, realizing its identity. The circulation of *Thozhilali*, which by then was a weekly, almost doubled during that period.\(^94\) The journal got transformed into a radical cultural weapon publishing articles, poems, short stories, etc., touching all aspects of the socio-political life of the workers.

The Government keenly observed the each and every issues of the *Thozhilali* for its anti-Government content and there were a number of references in the Confidential Section Files of this period regarding the enquiry and exam report on the articles published in *Thozhilali* by the Government officials.\(^95\)

The issue of *Thozhilali* on 28\(^{th}\) July 1938 covered different matters of wide attention. An article entitled “*Thozhilalikalum Rashtriya Karyangalum*” (Labourers and Political Affirs) was published as a reply to the debates held at Thiruvithamcore Sree Moolam Assembly, which criticized the working class involvement in the political affairs. The article stated that: “All the government systems of today are working on the capital raised by the common people with their tireless efforts. So it will be a mocking comment that they had no right to intervene in the political matters.”\(^96\) In another article entitled “United Front”, exhorted the necessity of a united front agitation against the Fascism. It published an article entitled “Chora Thilakkattee”, written by Mancherathu Govindan.\(^97\) The Advocate General reported that “it is an exceptionally violent article. It is a direct endeavour to bring the Government into hatred and contempt.”\(^98\) K.C. Govindan, Secretary of the Coir Factory Workers Association and also the Printer and Publisher of the *Thozhilali* along with K. Kesavan arrested on behalf of this. On 8\(^{th}\) September 1938, through a notice issued under Section 5 of the Travancore Newspapers
Regulation V of 1101 as amended by Regulation IV of 1110, the Travancore Government cancelled the license of printing and publishing the *Thozhilali*.99

*Thozhilali*, through its articles contributed very much to the formation of trade unions in different industrial sectors in different parts of Kerala and it contributed to develop class consciousness and unity among the labourers. It was an educator and a source of inspiration to the workers. Through its articles *Thozhilali* filled revolutionary spirit in the minds of labourers and prepared them to fight against class discrimination and fight for the labourers’ welfare.

Another important aspect of the activities of the time was the formation of Alleppey Workers Cultural Centre. P.K. Padmanabhan was its first president and V.L. Thomas its first secretary. This centre staged various art forms, which reflected the problems of workers.100 This centre composed revolutionary songs and made it a practice to sing them during the public meetings. They trained workers in various art forms like drama, dance, *ottam thullal* and *kadhaprasangam* and such art forms were performed in the public meetings of the Party and workers. The chief instructors of the centre were Ramankutty Asan and Kunju Warrier. Many of the songs composed by the centre became widely popular in Travancore during that time. R. Sugathan, Swami Bodheswaran, S.K. Pottakad, et.al., was the most popular lyricists of the time. The cultural activities organized by the cultural centre at Alleppey continued, and it had an important role in the dissemination of Communist ideology in Travancore. The themes of the cultural programmes had variety and it could move the entire audience. More importantly the cultural centre trained the talented workers in cultural activities.
After the formation of CSP in Kerala, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, P. Krishna Pillai and other leaders toured over Kerala to organize CSP units. Apart from this they adopted a policy of Communist-socialist ideological propaganda by the dissemination of pamphlets, newspapers and broadsheet occupies an important place in the Communist plan. Their search for a powerful medium for ideological propaganda led them to start a weekly-Prabhatham.

Prabhatham (The Dawn) was a small paper owned by K.S. Nair and published from Palghat and he had also a small press. The CSP activists purchased the press and started the publication of Prabhatham from Shornur as a weekly. It was considered as the official organ of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party. It was published under the editorship of E.M.S. Namboodiripad and Nedungadi Ramachandran was its manager. The first issue of the paper came out on 9th January 1935. Prabhatham through its powerful articles braved the people to fight against the injustice and atrocities prevailed. It also supported movements in a native States for the establishment of democratic and responsible Government.

After the formation of CSP, the Socialist ideology was disseminated in Kerala mainly through the Prabhatham. Through its columns, the common people of Kerala began to know more about Soviet Union, Karl Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and Communism. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran, P. Krishna Pillai, K.K. Vasu and others were the regular contributors of Prabhatham. They wrote on good numbers of subjects like “Marxian Economics”, “Marxian Philosophy”, “Revolution and State”, “The Communist
International”, “Fascism”, “Gandhism”, “Communist Party of Soviet Union”, etc.

About the problems facing Kerala, the paper used to take an independent stand. In the political field the paper reported the clashes between the Left and Right and clarified the stand of CSP. K.A. Keraleeyan and N.C. Sekhar wrote regularly about the problems of the people.

*Prabhatham* spelled out the aims of the socialists, aims that truly revolutionary in a region where many still revered ritual status above all else: “Why and for whom do we work? For destroying the existing right of the private ownership.... For the poor, the exploited, the oppressed.... For food, unimpeded opportunity and high standard of living to all”.

The CSP leaders in Kerala also took initiatives to publish articles appeared in *The Congress Socialist*—the official organ of the All India Congress Socialist Party. It was published as a weekly first from Calcutta under the editorship of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia and latter from Bombay under the editorship of Ashok Mehta. The articles, which were published in *The Congress Socialist*, were translated into Malayalam and published in *Prabhatham*. Through this the people of Kerala could read the articles of national leaders of CSP like P.C. Joshi, Adhikari, Jayaprakash Narayanan and Z.A. Ahmmed.

An article published in *The Congress Socialist* written by the socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayanan under the caption “Wreck It” was translated into Malayalam and published in *Prabhatham* under the caption *Thakarkkuka*. The theme of the article was the Indian constitution passed by the British Parliament and about to be introduced in India. It so happened that for several years thereafter this word became the key slogan of
the left wing congressmen throughout India. It was through that editorial that the approach of the Congress rightists towards the proposed constitution symbolized by the word “Use” was counted by the word “Wreck”. It was also an indication of the attitude of the left wing towards the constitution of drawn up by the Government.

On the early initiatives of the Prabhatham, E.M.S. Namboodiripad wrote: “As the editor of Prabhatham, I used to have a feature ‘Your Questions Answered’, in running which, I based myself on the Congress Socialist as well as the National Front, together with whatever other material could be gathered for Prabhatham carried articles on the basic theoretical postulates of the CSP/CPI, though our own theoretical education was a very low level. Convey to the comrades whatever you knew- this was what we attempted in these articles and through the columns of Prabhatham”.

The socialist newspaper Prabhatham carried in each issue a column called “Labour World” in which news about the peasant and worker struggles not only from Kerala but also from all over India. There was also significant coverage and discussion of international developments including articles by foreign authors (mainly Russian and Chinese) translated into Malayalam. All of this contributed to going beyond the immediate face-to-face community to an ‘imagined community’ of workers and peasants spread across linguistic and cultural barriers and the beginning of the comprehension of the larger structures of exploitation.

The Prabhatham ceased publication when security was demanded for having published a poem on Bhagat Singh’s martyrdom entitled Atmasandesam (Sound of the Soul), written by Chovvara Prameswaran. The poem directly appealed for a revolution
to end the imperialist domination of the present social order and to achieve independence.
The Government of Madras ordered the publisher to deposit Rs.2000/- as security. But, as the management had no money to deposit, the publication had to be discontinued.\textsuperscript{109} Though it was a victim of infant mortality, the workers behind it had the consolation that during the short period it was alive it did vigorously kick about.

After three years, when the Congress Ministry came to power in Madras province consequent to the 1937 elections its license was restored. And the journal was shifted to Kozhikode in 1938. Then onwards, \textit{Prabhatham} was printed on the model of the \textit{National Friend}, the official organ of the Communist Party of India. Through the paper, slowly but steadily, the Communist ideology began to spread in Kerala. The paper was now fully changed into the organ of the Communist movement in Kerala. Four \textit{anas} was the cost per copy. It continued to intervene in the national movement, which was going on in Kerala and also gave energy and inspired the revolutionary movement in Kerala.

The \textit{Prabhatham} of 31\textsuperscript{st} October 1938, in an article under the caption “Bloody Day in Travancore”, compared Travancore with Russia before the revolution.\textsuperscript{110} The article called upon the public to observe the birthday of the Highness of Travancore as a bloody day because of the \textit{lathi} charge that injured more than 300 labourers. The paper compared the experience of the \textit{jatha} led by Miss. Akkamma Cherian to that of the Russian people who approached the Tsar of Russia under the leadership of Father Gappen to represent their grievances.\textsuperscript{111}

\textit{Prabhatham} encouraged labour movements and popular uprisings that were then making a beginning in Kerala. The copies of \textit{Prabhatham} were circulated the working
class centers of Travancore and Malabar. Through its columns, Prabhatham pointed the necessity of organizations for peasants and workers. Thus it provided the necessary background for peasant organization in Kerala. Prabhatham gives comprehensive coverage of the Left movement among the peasants. It projected each and every work of Karshaka Sangham and gave all supports to its programmes. When the development of Karshaka Sangham reached its peak in the last quarter of 1930, Prabhatham recorded the establishment of different Pradesh Karshaka Sanghams and their works.\textsuperscript{112} Elections to the Sanghams its committee and annual conferences of these Sanghams became the regular feature of Prabhatham. The work reports and articles on ideological questions published in the weekly gave a definite vision and impetus to the socialist movement in Kerala.

Through the works of Karshaka Sangham, the condition of peasants began to change. Prabhatham covered almost all changes occurred in the working class and peasantry during the period. About the changing attitude of the landlords, Prabhatham wrote: “The rising force of the united peasantry compelled many smaller landlords, and some of the bigger ones to make concessions. For instance, in Kuttoor, a small landlord wrote to the local Karshaka Sangham secretary that henceforth he would collect only the actual rent and stop all other customary dues”.\textsuperscript{115}

Prabhatham also highlighted the impact of other revolutionary literary works in Malayalam. It was during this period, Malabar. K. Damodaran wrote his play Pattabakki (Rent Arrears). It was considered as the first political play in Malayalam.\textsuperscript{116} The play portrayed the system of rural usury and other evils in a very realistic manner. It was written and performed to organize the landless agricultural labourers. About this play
*Prabhatham* commented sarcastically: “Time was when one was evicted only if he incurred rent arrears, but now a day’s even if one played “Rent arrears” eviction follows”.

With the outbreak of war in September 1939, *Prabhatham* stopped its publication. Till its closure, *Prabhatham* played the vital role of agitator, enlightener and organizer of the CSP, the trade unions and peasant unions. It was also the mouthpiece of the Marxian ideology in Kerala. *Prabhatham* made some real contribution in the case of getting the immediate demands of the Malabar tenants and linked it with the general demand of the peasant movement in India as a whole. *Prabhatham* also published several articles commenting on the Malabar Tenancy Act, pointing out its shortcomings and suggesting suitable amendments. All these helped the organized worker-peasant movement in the larger politics of the country. The role-played by the *Prabhatham* in the propagation of socialist ideology and the building up of peasant-workers union in Kerala was one of the major forces behind the starting up of *Desabhimani*, in 1942- the official newspaper of the Communist Party in Kerala. *Desabhimani* was later suppressed on 12 April 1948 following the Communist violence in Malabar and reappeared again on 14 December 1951. The *Mathrubhoomi*, the Congress daily, being the spokesmen of the right-wing congressmen, the *Prabhatham* became the vanguard of the left press in Malabar. It is because of its comprehensive coverage of the left movement that it is possible today to analyze the historical development of the peasant struggle of that period.

Apart from these, several books, pamphlets, booklets and notices were issued individually. In 1935, E.M.S. admired Trotsky ‘that world hero’ and published a Malayalam booklet called *1917*, prepared in prison and based on Trotsky’s *History of the
About the book an advertisement in Prabhatham, the Malayalam weekly of the Congress Socialists, asked the readers: “How were the poor able to drive out capitalism from Russia when the capitalist countries were fighting against themselves? These questions are answered in this book.... Do you want to read it?”

The book told readers that “Government by the working classes is the fundamental aim of the Communism and this meant a government runs by factory hands with the support of the poor masses.”

British authorities concluded that since the book ‘does not... directly incite... readers to follow the Russian example’, it need not to be banned.

By 1936, Jayaprakash Narayan’s *Why Socialism?* had also been translated into Malayalam and that “became our guiding document in our day-to-day political activities for quite some time.”

K.C. George writes, “It was the People’s War, published by the Party Committee from Bombay which provided leadership for us and its distribution was also a kind of political work during that time”. The Party collected books and periodicals on Marxism-Leninism and distributed them among the peasants and working class people. When K.C. George returned after a trip to Bombay, he brought a large collection of Soviet publications and about 200 copies of *Comrade KPR*, a biography of K.P.R. Gopalan. When the Party ban had lifted and its office formally opened, the Party took special interest in opening a book stall to sell these books and put it in charge of C.J. Thomas, then a student of the Thiruvananthapuram Law College. This book stall later became the Prabhath Book Stall. The centre took special interest in the sale of Soviet books and literature.

**Vayanasalas and the Literacy Programme**

Another area, the Communists took keen interest was the literacy programme and for this purpose, they started a number of *vayanasalas* or reading rooms/libraries in what was virtually a library movement. Village reading rooms provided the public with access to reading material and a sociality that facilitated the dissemination of news and ideas. By 1937, the network of *vayanasalas* was significant enough to merit a Malabar *Vayanasala* Conference that was held in Calicut.\(^{126}\) Localized initiatives at the work place were instituted to popularize and educate workers in the alternative discourse of rights that the hitherto marginalized section of society could lay claim to. For example the party newspaper, the *Desabhimani*, would be read out at the *beedi* rolling centers. In a group of *beedi* rollers, one of them would be delegated, by rotation, the responsibility of reading the newspaper aloud while the rest of them continued with their task of rolling *beedis*. 
The reader would be provided with his wages as would be normally if he were to be rolling beedis. Socialist ideals were put to verse and sung during agricultural operations. Innovatively work and political education proceeded hand in hand.\textsuperscript{127}

In 1938, one of the pamphlets published by the Chirakkal Taluk Peasant Union spoke of debts and pauperization among agricultural labourers. However, their ultimate sorrow lay in the fact that: Though we struggle, are we able to dress them (the children) even in rags, and put a slate and pencil in their hands.\textsuperscript{128} The socialists tried to exploit the literacy programme, to build up a secular culture which would help transcend particular identities of caste and religion. The CSP at the outset has established an educational centre at Alleppey on the eastern bank of the Commady Bridge. The educational activities staged a substantial progress that there were eight study centers in the area on the eve of the 1938 general strike. Here the workers were given general education so as to enable them to read and write and their by rise their consciousness.\textsuperscript{129}

The growing number of schools and the rise in literacy found expression in the number of reading rooms that were established both in the countryside and in the towns. The names of the reading rooms reflected three successive historical currents. Those set up by caste associations had names which indicated their purpose—the \textit{Gnjanaprakashini} (Light of Knowledge) and the \textit{Vidyabhivardhini} (Promoter of Knowledge) at Kadirur were among the oldest. Then there were those set up by early Congressmen who named them after national figures like Motilal Nehru (Iliparamba) and Sri Harsha (Kalliasseri). Others reflected a national aspiration like the one established by Bharateeyan at Naniyur, which was called \textit{Bharatiya Mandiram} (Temple to India). In later years, the Communists named reading rooms after ‘martyrs’, i.e., those who had died in encounters with the
One such reading room (now a library as well) was the *Abu-Chathukutty*, named after two ‘beedi’ workers who were shot in demonstrations in 1940.\textsuperscript{130}

One of the novelties in the organization of the reading rooms was the communal drinking of tea, as one person read the newspapers and the others listened. Tea and coffee lubricated discussions on the veracity of the news and of political questions, and a new culture emerged around the reading rooms. It was premised on sobriety and knowledge rather than the drunken companionship transcending consciousness which characterized the toddy shops. The importance of tea and coffee lay in the fact that they were recently introduced beverages and did not fit into any taboos regarding what could be shared between castes. The reading rooms became central to socialist organization in the villages, managing to create a space for camaraderie and intellectual discussion. At the first anniversary of the *Thozhilali Yuvajana* (Working Youths) reading room in 1935, the setting up of such institutions in villages was hailed as a vital step in the ‘fight against injustice and oppression’.\textsuperscript{131} However, the Kerala CSP never managed to exercise more than a formal degree of control over these establishments.

The *Vayanasalas* became the centers for the dissemination of political ideas and also the venue for the meeting of workers, students and rural peasants. Many illiterate adults learned to read and write. The annual celebrations of the reading rooms and libraries were conducted as a cultural festival and on many such occasions political speeches were delivered by the leaders.\textsuperscript{132} The activists of CSP tapped this source and the reading rooms were stocked with newspapers like *Mathrubumi* and later *Prabhatham* as well. *Prabhatham*, the mouthpiece of Kerala CSP was conceived of as a newspaper which would inform as well as act as a centerpiece of discussion. It tried to cater mainly
to workers and peasants. These *Vayanasalas* during 1938-40 became central to socialist organization and by the end of the 30s, peasant unions were formed out of what began as groups of peasants reading together.\(^{133}\)

In the realm of cultural activities also, the period of political awakening saw a spurt in literature. The contribution of committed writers helped the development of class consciousness among the peasants and workers. The powerful lyrics written by K.A. Keraleeyan, T. Subramanian Thirumumpu were effective in creating a sense of commitment among the rural peasantry. The songs, written mostly in rural folk style, were targeted mainly against *jenmis* and imperialists.\(^{134}\) Literary conferences were sponsored by the socialists along with their party meetings and then the writers became more and more conscious of their social responsibility. The CSP leaders brought out several pamphlets criticizing the policy of the Government against the peasants and workers. They also reflected the dissatisfaction and disapproval of the policy of the social and economic oppression by the *jenmis* and high caste groups. The Government considered these pamphlets and songs highly inflammatory and banned them often.\(^{135}\)

After 1940, under the auspices of the Communist Party a publishing house was established for the publication of Soviet works and a number of Russian literary works were translated and were published during this period.\(^{136}\) We can find traces of Russian influence or socialist influence in the many writings of the time. Even the publications which did not have any progressive claims published articles on Russian development.\(^{137}\) This tradition of literary propaganda, gave rise to a number of magazines, weeklies and news papers in the later history Kerala and most of them were initiated by the
The newspaper was not to be the only vehicle of the Party’s engagement with a mass media that was overwhelmingly aligned with the interests of the ruling ideology. Acutely aware of the importance of cultural initiatives towards carving its own discursive space and the uphill task involved in creating its own oppositional language, the Party implicated itself in various cultural/ideological fronts that constituted the mass media. For the Party, the mass media was not just an institution disseminating information in an already historically evolved, naturalized system, but one that disseminated information and oppositional culture of particular kinds ‘that promoted the spread of the movement’.

E.M.S. Namboodiripad, one of the pioneers of the Communist movement in India, in his overview of the six decades of the Communist Party, records the importance and efforts of the Left in the dispersal of the Communist ideology in Kerala: “No mode of publicity, no means of popular agitation and mass education, was left untried.”

The early Communist propaganda literature and the local library movement played an important role in creating the political consciousness among the people and mobilized them to fight against injustice. Through the writings on Communism, Marxism and Soviet Union, it led them to participate in the Communist movement. It also contributed to the formation of trade unions in different industrial sector in different parts of Kerala and it created unity among the labourers. It was an educator and a source of inspiration to the workers and peasants. It was with this strong ideological and cultural basement created by the early Communist propaganda literature, the Communist Party,
made their socio-political and cultural interventions in Kerala, which made them, the ruling party of Kerala.

END NOTES


2. Ibid.


6. The movements against untouchability in Kerala include Vaikkom Satyagraha, Guruvayur Satyagraha, and other temple entry movements.


12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.


19. Ibid.

20. Another view is that the material they published was a part of statement made by the accused in Meerut Conspiracy Case or they published a Malayalam translation of a statement made by the Meerut prisoners embodying Communist ideas. This was acquired by Ponnara G. Sreedhar from Golekar, a prominent Communist, when Sreedhar was in Bombay.


24. Ibid.
25. For a study on this, Vide, P. Gopinathan Pillai, *op.cit.*


29. *Fortnightly Reports*, December 1935, TSA.


34. Vide the details of his meeting with the Kerala Communists in S.V. Ghate, “Remember Krishna Pillai”, *New Age*, 7 April 1957, p.18.


44. Ibid.


49. *Ibid*.

50. *Ibid*.


57. Vide, *Mathrubhoomi Daily* of the dates mentioned. Also Vide, *Mathrubhoomi Daily* of the dates 17.4.34, 27.5.34, 10.06.34, 26.04.34, 26.06.34, 10.07.34, 12.07.34, 05.12.34, 06.12.34, 08.12.34, 22.12.34, etc.

59. P. Kesava Dev, *Ormakalude Lokathil* (Mal), D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1972, pp.56-63. He claims that this article originally written in 1934 is the first authoritative version of Russian Revolution in Malayalam language.


64. Vide a detailed study on the poems of Ayyappan in Sukumar Pottekkatt, “Purogamana Deseya Kavithayude Pithavu” (Mal), *Sahitya Parishd Masika*, Vol.28, December 1959, pp.80-85. In this, the author commented that K. Ayyappan was the first who introduced progressivism in Malayalam and placed him as the guru of P. Kesava Dev, the pioneer figure in the Progressive Writers’ Movement.


80. *Ibid*.


83. Vide the returns of the *Thozhilali* of this period in *File No.D.Dis.50/25, File No.R.Dis.9/31* and *File No.R.Dis.112/34*, Legislative Department, KSA, Thiruvananthapuram.


88. N.E. Balaram, *op.cit.*, n 38, p.87-88.


94. *File No.50/25*, Legislative Department, KSA, Thiruvananthapuram.

95. *File No.1041/35/C.S.*, KSA, Thiruvananthapuram in which Dewan asked to examine the articles published in the *Thozhilali* on 4th July 1935 for its socialist ideological propaganda.

96. A Copy of *Thozhilali* dated 28th July 1938, KSA, Thiruvananthapuram. Vide Appendix VI.

97. *Ibid*.


104. Copy of *Prabhatham*, 26 April 1935, KSA, Thiruvananthapuram.


106. Ibid.


111. Ibid.


113. Vide, A Copy of *Prabhatham*, 10th October 1938, KSA, Thiruvananthapuram.

114. Vide a detailed study on this play in Chapter IV of this study.

115. Vide, A Copy of *Prabhatham*, 22 May 1939, KSA, Thiruvananthapuram.


118. Ibid.

119. Ibid.

120. Ibid.

123. Ibid.
124. K. Ramachandran Nair, op.cit., p.47.
125. N.E. Balaram, op.cit., p.147.
128. Vide, A Copy of Prabhatham, December, 19, 1938, KSA, Thiruvananthapuram.
131. Mathrubhumi, October 24, 1935.
132. Mathrubhumi, 21 April 1938.
133. S. Raimon, et.al., The History of Freedom Movement in Kerala, Kerala State Archives Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 2006, p.313.
134. Interview with Thottathil Apputty of Palazhi on 26.1.2006 quoted in Ibid.
135. G.O.No.238, Dated 3-2-1939, Government of Madras, Public General Department, TSA.
136. Examples are; Vanda Vasciluska, Rainbow, trans., K.P.G. Nambiar, Thrissur, 1121 (M.E), Maxim Gorky and Manushya Puzhukkal, trans., A. Madhavan,

137. Vide example in M. Kalyanikkutty Amma, *Gurunatham*, Parur, 1926. The article titled “Russian Experience in Public Education”.

138. Vide the communications made by the publishers of these works in *File No.14927/49/C.S.*, *File No.19463/49/C.S.*, and *File No.19461/49/C.S.*, KSA, Thiruvananthapuram.

139. Selvyn Jussy, *op.cit.*, p.34.