INTRODUCTION

NEWSPAPERS in their early years of evolution knew little about their readers as to who they were, what interested them and what they read. Such a situation doesn't exist now. A flurry of readership research and dozens of decades-long experience has made editors know more about their readers in great detail. Aware of the fact that newspapers are the primary source of information for the readers, editors' programme news to meet the perceived information needs of the readers. In that they plan, collect, select and present a variety of news in multi-various styles. In doing so, they give varying importance to all news stories.

From among thousands of news stories reaching the editorial desk, only a few are selected for the day's edition. Of these, a handful are chosen for front page display and the rest are spread across inner pages, often grouped under heads such as local, national, international, trade/commerce, sports and so on. At the same time, using appropriate design elements, the editors strive to enhance the noticeability and thereby the readership of the content.

The resulting product with its design elements often connotes something more than the meaning of the words. Such connotations may range from telling the readers which story is significant and serious, to those which emphasize a light hearted, tongue-in-cheek reading fare.

Such editorial practices are often modified in tune with readers changing needs and expectations. No matter how well editors try to provide a news fare suiting to readers information needs, the reader-editor gap continues to exist. A primary reason for the reader-editor gap is the high selectivity that readers' exercise while reading. In a well developed society like USA, the readers read no more than 10,000 words each day regardless of the total offered by the newspapers.\footnote{Ruth Clarke, 'Changing Needs of Changing Readers', Journal of American Society of Newspaper Editors., January 1979, p 35.} In fact, most readers look for a reward as Wilbur Schramm has pointed out: "leaving out chance, conflicting mental sets and the qualities of presentation which call attention to one
item over others or make one item easier to read than others, we can hypothesize that a person chooses the item which he thinks are likely to give greater reward”.\(^2\)

As a result, readers of newspapers are “less willing than before to let editors make their reading decisions for them”.\(^3\) Such assertions stem from the existence of selective exposure, attention, reading and recall at the level of the readers. That being the case, editors do not assume that everyone out there is panting to read every word they print. Therefore, they consciously try to improve their news presentation styles to ensure a greater readership of the content. Nonetheless, the reader-editor gap exists reminding of the need for a better understanding of the readers’ content preferences. It is in this context that this study is envisaged to examine the news programming practices and readers’ content preferences with specific reference to Malayalam dailies.

News programming is a complex process involving a large number of professionals ranging from stringers, staff reporters, special correspondents, and columnists to news agencies, to copy editors, photo editors and editors of newspapers. These professionals in carrying out the first task of selecting the news for and on behalf of the readers and others act as gatekeepers. Their decision to select certain news stories and reject others for an edition rests primarily on the news values and editorial policies of their organizations. Needless to say, they do not give equal importance to all selected content. While some are given prominence in their display on pages, some other content is tucked away as fillers. With such practices, editors tell readers not only ‘what to think’ but also ‘what to think about’. This perspective which is central to the agenda setting function of the mass media has an important role in the news programming practices of the newspapers and by implication affects the reading preferences of the readers.

As a necessary background to the present study, the concept of gatekeeping, news values which form the basis of routine editorial judgments and the agenda setting


prepositions are discussed in the succeeding sections of this chapter. Also, outlined in this chapter is a brief history of the Malayalam press and their editorial activities directed to meet readers’ perceived needs.

GATEKEEPING

Gatekeeping is the process through which ideas and information are filtered for publication or broadcasting. This concept was formulated by Lewin in 1947. While studying the processes of decision making with regard to household food purchases, he observed that information always flows along certain channels, which contain ‘gate areas’, where decisions are made. This idea was taken up in 1950 by White. He studied the processing of information by telegraph wire editors in American newspapers, whose decisions to discard news items coming over the wire were seen as the most significant gatekeeping activity. In 1969, the theory was revisited by Bass, who differentiated among different gate keeping roles. He explained that the most important gatekeeping activity occurs within the news organ. Involved in the news making process are two groups of professionals – news gatherers and news processors. These two professional groups transform occurrences into news, which Tuchman (1978) describes as an act of reconstructing the reality. This is a multistage activity of bestowing newsworthiness on a few events. In the first stage, reporters/correspondents of newspapers and news agencies select a few events and issues while leaving out certain other aspects of reality. The second stage of gatekeeping occurs at the level of individual media units where a battery of professionals – news editors, copy editors, sub editors, translators and the like – select certain reports for presentation as news of the day (Lewin 1947, White 1950, Breed 1955, McQuail 1969).

The selection process at each of the above two gatekeeping stages gets influenced by a set of factors which could be grouped under three heads: (i) journalists’ socio-cultural background (ii) professional conditioning tempered by the ubiquitous ‘news

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values’ and (iii) organisation policies and priorities vis-à-vis news issues, sources and societal concerns.

The third and the last stage of gatekeeping occurs at the level of the media audience. They too selectively attend to media messages, based on what they selectively read, listen to and watch, they form pictures of the world in their mind and act up on them in varying ways.

NEWS VALUES

The reconstruction of reality at the level of the news gatherers and news processors is a complex process. According to Gans (1979, 87) information on unfolding events and issues is first refined and altered by journalists in order to make news suitable for their audience. The ‘story importance’ is judged by journalists according to four main criteria: rank in government; impact on the nation and national interest; impact on the number of people and; significance for past and future.

The ‘story importance’ is however gets determined by the news value decisions of the editors. In practice, such decisions are made informally by the editors on the basis of their experience and intuition. A landmark classification of news values was given by two Norwegian scholars Galtung and Ruge in 1965. The news values identified by them are the following.  

1. **Threshold**: a big story is one which has an extreme effect on a larger number of people. Where the immediate effect of an event is more subtle, the threshold may be determined by the amount of money involved.

2. **Frequency**: Events which occur suddenly and fit well with news organization’s schedule are more likely to be reported than those which occur gradually or at convenient times of day or night. Long term trends are not likely to receive much coverage.

3. **Negativity**: Bad is more exciting than good news. Bad news receives more attention because it shocks us and creates confusion.

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4. **Unexpectedness:** If an event is out of the ordinary it will have a greater effect than some thing which is an everyday occurrence. If a dog bites a man, that’s not news. But if a man bites a dog that’s news!

5. **Unambiguity:** Events whose implications are clear make for better copy than those which are open to more than one interpretation, or when any understanding of the implications depends on first understanding the complex background in which the events take place.

6. **Personification:** Events which can be portrayed as the actions of individuals will be more attractive than one in which there is no such “human interest”.

7. **Meaningfulness:** This relates to the sense of identification the audience has with the topic. Stories concerned with people who speak the same language, look the same, and share the pre-occupations as the audience receive more coverage than those concerned with people who speak different language, look different and have different pre-occupations.

8. **Reference to elite nations:** Stories concerned with global powers receive more attention than those concerned with less influential nations.

9. **Reference to elite persons:** Stories concerned with the rich, powerful, famous and infamous get more coverage.

10. **Consonance:** Stories which fit the media’s expectations receive more coverage than those which defy them (and for which they are thus unprepared).

11. **Continuity:** A story which is already in the news gathers a kind of inertia. This is partly because the media organizations are already in place to report the story, and partly because previous reportage may have made the story more accessible to the public.

12. **Proximity:** If the event happened nearby, it may be more interesting to the reader’s than it would be if it happened in another country.

13. **Oddity:** Unusual events merit attention in the news. e.g.; a thirty pound tomato. Events that are firsts or lasts, and therefore historic also may be unusual and gets attention in newspapers.
Seldom does a news event qualify for inclusion in the newspaper on all of these accounts. The editor weighs each story to determine if it has one or more of these values. If the story does, there is a good chance that it will be printed, otherwise it gets rejected. It is these news values that generally guide editors in selection and display of news implying varying importance. The importance implied is at the centre of the agenda setting function of the press which again is important in the news programming practices of the newspapers.

AGENDA-SETTING

It is generally held that mass media do not necessarily tell us how or what to think, instead they provide a frame of reference and tell us, implicitly what topics to think about. Media theorists term this as the ‘agenda setting’ function of mass media.

In our newspapers, certain matters are given more prominence than others, and this phenomenon provides us with a scale of importance that also has social and political implications. As McCombs and Shaw (1976), two prominent agenda-setting theorists have written, "audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters from the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the media put on it". Further, they showed that the agenda set by the media goes to constitute the public agenda.

Dearing and Rogers (1996) define the process of agenda setting as ‘an ongoing competition among issue protagonists to gain the attention of media professionals, the public and policy elites. Also, they offered several generalizations about agenda setting. One is that different media do tend to agree about the relative salience of a set of issues. Secondly media agendas do not closely match ‘real world' indicators. It is not the absolute significance of an issue that counts but the relative strength of sources and people trying to define and promote an issue. Finally, the ‘position of an issue on the media agenda importantly determines that issue’s salience in the public agendas.

Thus, from the above brief discussion it is evident that gatekeeping, news values and the agenda setting process are a part of the whole, i.e., the news programming

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practices. The chapter now focuses on Indian language press system with special emphasis on Malayalam press as it forms the focus of the study.

**INDIAN LANGUAGE PRESS**

The fabric of Indian Press consists of two streams – the Indian Language press and the English press. Though evolved during the colonial period, their growth was not uniform. After independence, the English press grew faster than the language press as the latter failed to impress both the readers and the advertisers. This was mainly due to the lack of managerial entrepreneurship, facelessness in production values and editorial character.  

With the re-organization of the states on linguistic basis and the subsequent development of the languages in the 1950s, the language press began to move away from stagnancy. By early 1960s, while the metropolitan press enhanced its readership within the metropolis, the language press captured the readership outside. Thereafter, the growth of language press was rapid. In 2005, the Indian language press constituted about 80 per cent of Indian press community accounting for 78 per cent of the total circulation. "They are attractively designed and written in easily understood prose and they sought local people as dear subjects as well as advertisers and general readers".

The technological change in the form of the personal computer and offset press revolutionized the newspaper industry in the latter part of the 1990's. The circulation of daily newspapers in all languages trebled between 1976 and 1992 – from 9.3 million to 28.1 million and the dailies per thousand people doubled from 15 daily newspapers per 10,000 people to 32 per 10,000.

Among the language newspapers, the Hindi press is at the top both in terms of publication and circulation with 24,017 newspapers accounting for a circulation of 18.8 million copies. This constituted 37 per cent of the total circulation of the Indian press. Following Hindi is the English Press with 8768 publications commanding a

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circulation of 8.6 million copies. The Malayalam press stands third with 1037 publications commanding a circulation of 6.35 million copies.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{THE MALAYALAM PRESS}

Under the British, the Malayalam speaking region of Kerala had frozen into three socio-political divisions. North of Kerala, the Malabar region was under the sprawling Madras presidency, directly ruled by the British. The southern part of today's Kerala was divided between two princely states of Cochin and Travancore.

From 1920 when Gandhi reorganized the provincial units of Indian national Congress on linguistic lines, modest pressures had grown for common Malayali institutions, including single state of Kerala. In the 1940s Nationalist newspapers from Kerala like \textit{Mathrubhumi} supported such demands, which were met in two stages, first, with the unification of Travancore and Cochin in 1949 and then with the formation of Kerala state, under the far-reaching re-organization of India's states, in 1956.\textsuperscript{12}

Kerala by the late 1970s stood out among other Indian states for its unusual milieu. Its falling birth rate and high levels of literacy generated the label ‘Kerala Model' to describe its puzzling economic and social development. Its heavy migration of workers to the Gulf brought foreign exchange that made Kerala an eager purchaser of consumer goods. That provided a new opportunity for advertisers. To attract advertising, newspapers had to enhance their circulations. To attract new readers, each newspaper had to either get the paper into new areas or win readers from other newspapers. They did that and reached out to even remote areas. Today Malayalam newspapers are in a commanding position as far as circulation and readership are concerned.


\textsuperscript{12} George T.J.S., \textit{The Provincial Press in India}, Press Institute of India, New Delhi, 1967. pp 24-25.
To “identify with the masses” they programmed more of local news. New printing technologies allowed launch of district wise editions. But to move a newspaper closer to local readers demanded that the whole locality must become the focus of the local pages. To maximize readership every newspaper vied to cover every social group - not merely in bits but in greater detail. In theory, this might mean that individuals come to know more about themselves and their neighbors than ever before and that the newspaper habit creates or reinforces a sense of shared geography and related customs. Thus to expand circulation, it was necessary to localize a newspaper’s geographical coverage and broaden its social coverage. When this happened in Kerala, Malayali population lapped up the fare boosting newspaper circulation and made the Malayalam press the most dynamic one in terms of its reach and, enhancing the diffusion rate to 99 dailies per 1000 people as against the UNESCO minimum of 100 copies per 1000 people.  

Before going into the details of the study, it is appropriate here to have a bird’s eye view of the story of the Malayalam press and its editorial shifts and changes so as to meet readers’ information needs.  

**Early Years of Malayalam Press**  
The history of Malayalam journalism is over hundred and fifty years old. Its genealogy is often traced to Christian missionaries who brought out books and periodicals for the propagation of religion. The first Malayalam book *Samkshepa Vedartham* was printed in Rome, by Fr. Clement Piyanas in 1772. The first Malayalam book to be printed on Indian soil was a translation of the *New Testament* in 1418 at Courier Press, Bombay. In 1811, the *New Testament* in Malayalam was printed here. Philippose Rampan did its translation. It was the first book in Malayalam printed in Indian soil.  

It was Benjamin Bailey who started printing from Kottayam in 1821. Using the types given by Fort St. George College of Madras, he printed the first book *Cherupaithangal* in 1824. Not satisfied with the types, he designed a new set of Malayalam types in 1829 and used them for printing the *New Testament.*  

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Chapter - I

It was in 1845, that a litho press was set up in Malabar at Illikkunnu near Thalasseri by Rev. Herman Gundert of the Basal Mission. It was here that Gundert made history in June 1847, by launching *Rajyasamacharam*, the first newspaper in Malayalam. It had eight cyclostyled sheets in demy octave. Reading matter was spread across the pages without columns and cross heads to break the monotony. Neither the masthead nor the print line featured the Editor’s name. The reading matter was exclusively of religious nature. By the time it ceased publication in late 1850, forty-two issues had seen the light of the day.

In October 1847 Gundert started another publication called the *Paschimodayam*. That too was cyclostyled, but it carried articles on geography, history, natural science and astrology. Edited by Mr. F.Muller, its annual subscription was one Rupee. It ceased publication in 1851.

The scene now shifts to Central Travancore from where early in 1848 came out a printed magazine in Malayalam called *Jnananikshepam*, the treasure of Knowledge. The eight-page magazine was printed at Kottayam based C.M.S. Press set up in 1821 by Arch. Deacon Koshy and Rev. George Mathan. The paper, apart from proselytizing Christianity, dealt with articles on science and information.

Another periodical, from Kottayam to make its appearance around this time was the *Vidyasamgraham*. This magazine started publication in 1864 and went on till 1867.14

During 1860s efforts were underway to start a “newspaper”. Ironically, the first of this genre to be published from Kerala was in the English. That was *Western Star* brought out by Charles Lawson from Cochin in 1860.

Four years later, a Malayalam edition of the *Western Star* started publication from Cochin under the banner *Paschimatharaka*. T.J. Paily edited it in the first instance and later it was edited by Kaloor Oommen Philippose. Later, another publication, *Keralapatrika* appeared from Cochin in 1870.

In 1867, two papers made their debut at Kottayam. One was in Malayalam titled *Santishtawadi* and the other was *Travancore Herald* in English. The *Santishtawadi*, an outspoken critic of the rulers soon fell out with the Travancore Government,

which ordered its closure. Thus, *Santishtawadi* became the first martyr in the cause of freedom of the press.

The next in the line was the *Satyanadakahalam* that started publication modestly as a fortnightly from Kunammavu in October 1876. Published under the auspices of the Italian Carmelite Mission, Rev. Candidus was its first editor. This 16-page fortnightly featured a range of topics in its columns, from international affairs to local news and Government pronouncements and court proceedings to mission news. Four years later it was converted into a weekly. Change in format was introduced and the *Satyanadam* joined the early rank of “illustrated weeklies”. *The Keralam* (1886), *Malayalamitram*, *Thiruvithancore Abhimani*, *Kerala Deepakam* (all 1878) and *Keralachandrika* fall in this category. Another magazine *Keralapakari* published from Malabar had the distinction of being the first one to be printed from this area. Incidentally the *Keralopakari* was printed from the Basal Mission Press located at Mangalore. Most of these journals were fired with the zeal of the Christian missionaries.

A good number of these early publications were short-lived. Besides being not ‘newspapers’ in the strict sense of the word, their emphasis was more on literary and religious topics. Their periodicity was yet another factor which detracted them from their intrinsic relevance and importance as newspapers.

**The ‘Real’ Newspaper**

It fell to a Gujarathi’s lot to launch the first systematic “newspaper” in Malayalam. Devji Bhimji started a printing press at Cochin in 1865 under the name the Keralamitram Press. In running the press Devji Bhimji faced heavy odds. Everything was discouraging including the unhelpful attitude of the authorities. In an unprecedented move, the Police authorities slapped an order on Devji Bhimji requiring him to surrender all matter meant for printing for prior scrutiny and approval of the authorities. Later, the authorities forced the closure of the establishment. But Devji Bhimji was steadfast in his perseverance. After a year-and-a-half the British Resident prevailed upon the authorities to withdraw their orders and Devji Bhimji launched *Keralamitram* on the new year day of 1881.¹⁵

In a number of respects the *Keralamitram* can be hailed as the first “newspaper” in Malayalam language. In the initial stages, it was issued thrice a week, and later on, it was published as a weekly. The paper provided a wide range of reading matter, which by contemporary accounts maintained an exceptionally high standard. Due weight was also given to literature, criticism, and articles on general topics of public welfare. *Keralamitram* is first editor was none other than Kandathil Varghese Mappilai who later founded the *Malayala Manorama*. Devji Bhimji also tried his hand at running a Marathi magazine entitled *Keralakokil* from Cochin.

The pattern of development and growth of journalism in Malabar area was more or less similar in nature, with the difference that journalistic ventures were more profuse. An English weekly *West Coast Spectator* started publication in 1879 from Kozhikode. Vakil Poovadan Raman printed the weekly from the Spectator Press. An Englishman, Dr. Keys, edited it. In later years this was rechristened as the *Malabar Spectator* and was quite popular locally.

**Keralapatrika’s Arrival**

A significant turning point in Malayalam journalism was the publication of *Keralapatrika* weekly from Kozhikode in 1884. Chengalathu Kunhirama Menon, a freedom fighter, conceived the idea of a weekly, possibly after attending a conference of the National Movement in Calcutta in 1864. Kunhirama Menon himself claimed that *Keralapatrika* was the first real newspaper of Malayalam in the Malabar district. It was printed from Vidyavilasam press and had active backing of a number of prominent personalities of the day.

With its editor Chengalathu Kunhirama Menon wielding a powerful pen *Keralapatrika* emerged as a pace setter in Malayalam journalism. The weekly featured news on international affairs, politics and other local occurrences. Literature and literary criticism received their due share in *Keralapatrika*’s columns. An instance has been recorded where the great literary icon of that era, Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran took exception to the severe criticism of some of his works in the columns of the weekly. However, the maharaja of Travancore was so impressed by
the crusading spirit of the *Keralapatrika* that he subscribed for 200 copies distributing among the officials of his administration.\(^{16}\)

Running a newspaper, especially in the regional Malayalam language was not easy. The elite preferred English and thought it inappropriate to be seen browsing through a Malayalam newspaper. Advertisement support was just not available, an unbelievable factor. Powerful patronage especially from royalty could not be spurned. But when it comes to principles Kunhirama Menon, the father of Malayalam Journalism, was not the one to compromise.

The management of *Kealapatrika* changed hands in 1938 some times after the death of Kunhirama Menon. Among the editors of this period include Sanjayan and Koyippallil Parameswara Kurup.

The Spectator Press of Kozhikode came out in 1886 with a Malayalam periodical entitled the *Keralasanchari*. It was edited by Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar otherwise well known by his Pen name “Kesari”. The sharp humour and wit which were the characteristic of the new periodical marked a turning point in Malayalam journalism.

The year 1886 stands out in history of Malayalam Journalism as it saw the birth of the *Malayali* from Thiruvananthapuram. This was the official organ of the Malayali Social Reforms League. In Pettayil Raman Asan the new magazine found an able editor. In due course, his mantle fell upon C.V. Raman Pillai, yet another literary giant. Though the sheet anchor of the magazine was social reforms, it spear headed the crusade for political and civil rights with zest.

Newspapers from Travancore

The second oldest existing newspaper in Malayalam - the Deepika-was launched from Kottayam in 1887 under the banner Nasrani Deepika. Its periodicity underwent a number of changes over the years to emerge finally in 1938 as a full-fledged daily newspaper. Change in periodicity also coincided with an abbreviation of its name to the Deepika.

The Malayala Manorama started publication from Kottayam in 1890, initially as a weekly. A joint stock company floated the paper, perhaps for the first time in India. Its first editor was Kandathil Varghese Mappilai who brought with him the experience of his previous association with the Keralamitram of Cochin. At the beginning, the weekly was predominantly literary in its character. Its transition to a newspaper of general interest followed quickly. It was converted into a daily in 1928. In many instances the Malayala Manorama actually gave the lead to mass movements of the period.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was uneventful for Malayalam journalism in the sense that no newspaper other than those mentioned above commenced publication during this period. But this period was marked by the launch of a memorable crop of literary magazines. Sujanandini came out in 1892 from Kollam. Kandathil Varghese Mappilai and Bhashaposhini Sabha joined hands to launch Bhashaposhini in 1897 as the official organ of the Bhashaposhini Sabha. The same year saw the publication of Saraswathi from Thalasseri under the able editorship of Moorkoth Kumaran.

A significant episode in the history of Malayalam journalism was the launch of Swadeshabhimani from Thiruvananthapuram in 1905. Ramakrishna Pillai who had made a mark as a brilliant columnist and literary critic was inducted as its first editor. He drew his powerful pen to expose palace politics and corruption and favouritism.
rampant in the corridors of power. For that bold journalistic move, he was deported and the press was confiscated. But he could not be subdued. He launched his next journalistic venture Atmaposhini from Kunnukulam in Cochin state. He edited this organ for two years till 1915. He also authored a book on Journalism, the first of its kind in Malayalam. Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai died in exile at Kannur in 1928.  

The appearance of Mitavadi from Thalasseri in 1907 marks an important milestone in the history of the press in Kerala. Moorkoth Kumaran, who had already tried his hand successfully at other journalistic ventures, occupied the editor’s chair. The Mitavadi gained in stature within a short span of time as a literary magazine of fine quality.

Mahakavi Kumaran Asan’s Veenapoove was first published in the Mitavadi in 1913. The Mitavadi published a daily newsheet during the World War I featuring the latest news from the War front.

The origins of Kerala Kaumudi, one among the leading newspapers in present day Kerala, can be traced back to 1911. Its founder C.V. Kunhiraman was a multi-faceted personality – a poet, a brilliant prose writer, historian and a journalist. The paper initially started publication from Mayyandu. Later it was shifted to Kollam and then to Thiruvananthapuram. It was converted into a full-fledged daily in 1940.

The Samadarshi that commenced publication from Thiruvananthapuram in 1918 was a powerful and popular vehicle of public opinion. A. Balakrishna Pillai joined the paper in 1923 as editor. He riveted his attention on the corrupt bureaucracy of Travancore. The devastating criticism in the Samadarshi was aimed at the authorities that in turn made things difficult for the running of the paper. The notorious Travancore Newspaper Regulations of 1926 were an offshoot of Balakrishna Pillai’s incisive criticisms. The management of the paper was not prepared to the official displeasure and Balakrishna Pillai had to resign in 1926.

Balakrishna Pillai had in the meanwhile launched a new periodical Probodhakan. Within six month of its appearance, the government of Travancore banned it.

Balakrishna Pillai now started the *Kesari*, which made an indelible imprint in Malayalam journalism. Scathing criticism of the authorities was taken up with an added zeal in the columns of the new publication. The newspaper regulations of 1926 took shape in this backdrop. He sought to mobilize public opinion against the government’s repressive measures. Sensing that the situation would get out of their hands, the authorities clamped a ban order on *Kesari*. Though *Kesari* was short lived, its impact on public opinion and development of Malayalam Journalism was tremendous, and out of proportion to its longevity.\(^1\)

The *Malayalarajyam* made a triumphant entry into Malayalam Journalism in 1929, featuring in its columns API and Reuter dispatches and news pictures of foreign photo agencies. It was published from Kollam. An organized network distribution of this daily was soon built up. Modern printing equipments gave the new daily a new outlook in appearance and content. *Malayalarajyam* was the first daily to go in for a rotary press.

*The Illustrated Malayalarajyam* weekly was a prestigious publication of the time. The daily was edited by K.G. Sanker, who was forced to resign from *Malayali* over a controversial editorial criticizing the Travancore government. He continued his pro nationalist stance in the *Malayalarajyam*. A number of leading writers were persuaded to contribute regular columns. In a short span of time *Malayalarajyam* became well known and read as Kerala's leading nationalist daily. With Sanker relinquishing control on ill health, the daily fell on bad days.

**The Birth of Mathrubhumi**

In the Malabar region the tempo of the political struggle in the early decade of the twentieth century was quicker than the socio-economic reform movements. The All Kerala Political Conference at Ottappalam in April 1921 marked the beginning of the move for a united Kerala, which became a reality in terms of law thirty-five years later. At the time of this conference, Gandhian movement of non-co operation was in full swing and had a great impact on Kerala. In this milieu the *Mathrubhumi*, made

its debut from Kozhikode in 1923.\(^{19}\) A band of dedicated workers floated a public limited company to launch *Mathrubhumi* thrice a week beginning on March 18, 1923, with K. P. Kesava Menon as its editor.

The baptism by fire for the *Mathrubhumi* came soon with the Vaikkom Satyagraha. The demand was for the grant of right of passage to the untouchables along the approach roads of the temple. The moving spirit of the Satyagraha was T.K. Madhavan, himself a renowned journalist. In the forefront of the enlightened leaders of the forward communities who actively participated in the struggle was K.P. Kesava Menon. The *Mathrubhumi* too was in the thick of the fight as it joined in every phase of the national struggle.

At the peak of the civil disobedience movement, in April 1930, the *Mathrubhumi* started issuing as a daily. As practically the only source of information for the people in Malabar about the developments in the national movements, its circulation base gradually grew extending to remote villages.\(^{20}\) But close on the heels of increasing circulation and influence come official harassment too. Following a critical editorial on incarceration of a political worker without trial, the government swooped down the paper demanding a security of Rs. 2000. The *Mathrubhumi* furnished the security amount in the interest of the continued publication, but as a measure of silent protest left its editorial columns blank for a month to come.

An article by Sanjayan, a well-known humorist, criticized the high handedness of the British army personnel at Cochin. This provoked the government and banned the daily altogether. A state wide agitation was started and the government was forced

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to withdraw the punitive order. The Dewan of Travancore, C.P. Ramswamy Iyer refused entry of the paper in the Travancore state.

Another important Kozhikode-based publication of this period was the *Al-Ameen* which first started publication in 1924 and became a daily in 1930. Its founder was Mohammed Abdul Rahman Sahib, a prominent leader of Indian National Congress. Its nationalist stance often infuriated the authorities and on more than one occasion the *Al-Ameen* was discontinued as a result of action by the authorities.

The other noted newspapers of those decades were *Prabhatham, Deenabandhu Lokasakthi, Swaraj, Yuvabharatham* and *Bhaje Bharatham*. Most of these publications survived for brief periods.

The decade proceeding independence was a period of consolidation and revival for the press in Kerala. What was previously a buyers market for news gradually changed into a seller’s market. An element of competition started surfacing, though in rudimentary form. Survival demanded not only adequate resources but a proper entrepreneurial approach.\(^21\)

The press in Kerala is said to have come of age as India achieved independence. It was a far cry from the cyclostyled sheets of 1847 to the full-fledged dailies. Growth was no longer haphazard. It was deliberately planned. The aim now was to consolidate and expand in a field which was becoming more and more competitive.

Today, the average urban adult spends 44 minutes per day reading dailies and magazines. And what do they read? The NRS reports that apart from news and politics, sports is the topic of interest among readers. While the level of interest among urban audiences is predictably higher than among rural audiences, it is remarkable that urban and rural up-market readers exhibit similar reading patterns.\(^22\)


THE MALAYALAM PRESS TODAY

The Malayalam press today presents a diverse and impressive picture. The report of the Registrar of Newspapers says that at the end of 2005, there were 1037 newspapers comprising of 159 dailies, 145 weeklies, 128 fortnightlies, 548 monthlies, 35 quarterlies, 6 annuals and the remaining 16 of different periodicity.23

These publications together commanded a circulation of 6.35 million copies, the third highest in Indian press system. This indeed is an impressive achievement in view of the fact that the Malayalam speaking population constitutes only 3.17 per cent of the total population.24 Among the 159 dailies there are four dailies which account for 70 per cent of the total circulation of dailies in Kerala. These four dailies are: Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi, Kerala Kaumudi and Deshabhimani. According to ABC report July - December 2005, Malayala Manorama topped the circulation chart with 13,95,191 copies followed by Mathrubhumi 10,40,183, Deshabhimani 2,45,751 and Kerala Kaumudi, 1,47,128 copies.25

Such an impressive circulation indicates to their popularity among the media-savvy readers. Though there are more than ten regional TV channels and most of them provide round the clock news bulletins, the Malayali populace appear to be depended on their favourite newspapers to tell them what is happening in and around them and how to make the sense of it.

To match readers' expectations, Malayalam newspapers have made considerable changes in the recent times in news gathering and styles of presentations. While not

23 Registrar of Newspapers, Press in India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, 2005, p 100.


reducing space for hard news, they have come to devote substantial space for analytical stories and columns by experts and columnists of national repute. Local news i.e., news covering the region of a given edition has come to occupy significant salience in the newshole. An example of this feature is available from dozens and dozens of obits, matrimonial bits and information on area-specific government schemes and programmes. Panchayath level developmental issues and local body politics too gets great coverage in the local pages of the dailies.

To reach out to the growing number of readers in hinterlands, the dailies have strengthened their circulation networks besides energizing the news gathering networks by appointing an array of local correspondents and stringers.

To make pages visually attractive, Malayalam newspapers whose pages were considered as best designed have adopted several new techniques. Besides using pictures, graphics and other illustrative elements more liberally in an aesthetically pleasing manner, the Malayalam dailies today print both inner and outer pages in colour. Pull outs on various themes are published regularly. Cartoons which for long adorned the front pages are now being displayed on inner pages including the classified pages.

Like their cousins in other parts of the country, the Malayalam dailies too have competed vigorously with each other in boosting their circulation through innovative marketing strategies. In the forefront are the two leading newspapers - Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi.

In the early 1990s both offered insurance schemes to its subscribers. Later Malayala Manorama offered scholarships for subscribers’ children and discount cards, which could be utilized at select outlets to earn a discount on the subscriber’s bills.
Two years ago, *Malayala Manorama* announced its ‘Swarna Thambola’ (Golden Thambola) saying it has earmarked Rs. one crore to be given away as prizes to the winners. At the end of the Thambola, it gave away 2500 sovereigns as prize to the winners.

To stay one step ahead of its archrival, *Mathrubhumi* announced a budget of Rs.1.25 crore for their readers participating in their new ‘programme’. Cashing in on the Mansoon season in Kerala, their bonanza was called ‘Sammana Mazha’ (Rain of Prizes). It proudly advertised that ‘you don’t have to crack your head over numbers to get your prize. You only had to read the paper carefully and keep it safely till the next day’.

True, while one had to match the numbers in the Thambola card for the *Manorama* game, to win the basic prize from *Mathrubhumi* only had to see whether the copy of the paper carried a particular inscription or a catch word which would be announced in the next day's edition. There were hundred prizes to be won every day. A gold coin or a silk sari was the daily prize.

Out of the winners, five got motor bikes in a draw which was held every week. Two cars were given away every month and the luckiest person got a house worth Rs. 22 lakh as gift.

In addition to these marketing strategies, both the dailies have adopted innovative news programming practices. For instance, *Malayala Manorama* in recent years introduced a financial page, a youth page, a health page, a career page, a film page, a service related page and a children’s page on specific days in a week. “Padippura”, an exclusive educational feature page in color focusing on class projects for the school going students published thrice a week, is yet another new feature of *Malayala Manorama*.

To compete with its rival, *Mathrubhumi* too adopted similar methods. It began publishing a financial supplement (*Dhanakaryam*), and a humour related supplement (*Narmabhumi*). Also, it started various columns catering to the different tastes of readers. Some of these are: a career related page, a service page, an agriculture related page, an IT page, a national and overseas employment opportunity page, and an educational colour feature page for school going students.
(Kutty. Com) on specific days in a week. Further, it introduced a bi-weekly column, “Chovvadosham” to review its news contents focusing on its grammatical and stylistic errors. To cater to automobile buffs, “Top Gear” and “Vahanalokam” columns were launched. The other special columns launched recently include an Opp-Ed. feature called “Swakaryam”, which is a reporter’s diary on news behind news; “Ente chora thilakkunnu” (My blood boils) every Monday on page one, which describes the helplessness and apathy of the reader on burning social issues, “Powravartha” citizens news focussing on local issues and “Sunday Stroke”, a Sunday cartoon on the editorial page by Gopikrishnan on political issues.

With such innovative changes in their programming practices, Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi have retained and added to their readership base. But the question that arises is whether the multi-interest content is being read by their readers. In other words whether the news programming practices match with the readers’ content preferences? If so to what extent? These questions have to be answered in respect of the various news categories so as to have an insight into the ubiquitous editor-reader gap in the news programmed and news read. This is the area which forms the focus of the study. The next chapter of the thesis presents a review of studies relating to news programming practices of dailies, readership of news programmed and other related areas.