Kumaran Asan had his early education in Malaysia in a local primary school. A teacher of the same school initiated him to his preliminary lessons in English. He learned Sanskrit first from a private school. Later, he also sought the help of some private tutors. This was the educational milieu in which Asan grew up. As a young man, he was much devoted to the voice of a priest in a temple. Meanwhile he taught boys in the neighborhood, Sanskrit. This work earned him the name Asan, (Preceptor) a name that became later very dear to all lovers of Malaysian literature.

The devotional life of Kumaran Asan gradually brought him to close contact with the contemporary saint-philosopher Sri Narayana Guru. This association was mainly responsible for his future career and greatness. The prophetic eyes of the guru divined the greatness of his disciple and arranged
for his higher education in Sanskrit. Consequently he went
first to Nager and then to Calcutta. He spent about five
years in both places together and pursued college education.
He was not lucky to complete it in either place. Those years,
incidentally, were the formative years of his literary career.

Kumaran Asan had his early education in Malayalam in
a local primary school. A teacher of the same school
initiated him to his preliminary lessons in English. He
learned Sanskrit first from a private school. Later, he also
sought the help of some private tutors. This was the educational
milieu in which Asan grew up. As a young man, he was much
devoted to God. He even served some time as a priest in a
temple. Meanwhile he taught boys in the neighbourhood, Sanskrit
art and letters, in science and religion. This quickened Asan's
esthetic sensibilities and reformative zeal. The supreme
came later very dear to all lovers of Malayalam literature.
artist of the age, Rabindranath Tagore, the great social
reformer Raja Rammohun Roy and the Philosopher-Saint Swami

The devotional life of Kumaran Asan gradually brought
hinkumantha were all the ascent lights of his chosen path.
him to close contact with the contemporary saint-philosopher
Sree Narayana Guru. This association was mainly responsible

from Calcutta. Kumaran Asan became the Secretary
for his future career and greatness. The prophetic eyes
of an organization founded by Sri Narayana Guru. Spiritment
of the Guru divined the greatness of his disciple and arranged
and redemption of the depressed classes, and the eradication of

".........picked up English, made wonderful progress.........
devoted day and night to studies. "Friends used to call me a
bookworm........." (From an unpublished life-sketch, left by the
poet)."
For his higher education in Sanskrit. Consequently he went first to Mysore, and then to Calcutta. He spent about five years in both places together and pursued college education. He was not lucky to complete it in either place. These years, incidentally, were the formative years of his literary career.

In Mysore and Calcutta Asan sedulously continued his English studies. At Calcutta he was a regular reader of the English monthly Tit-Bits. He had also occasions to take part in public meetings in the company of his great teacher Kamakya Tharaka Vaggesan. This expanded the sphere of his social contacts.

Knowledge of English gave Asan a new life and vigour. The Bengal of these days was full of the glow of a new spirit in Art and Letters, in Science and Religions. It quickened Asan's aesthetic sensibilities and reformatory zeal. The supreme artist of the age, Rabindranath Tagore, the great social reformer Raja Rammohan Roy and the Philosopher-Saint Swami Vivekananda were all the beacon lights of his chosen path.

Back from Calcutta, Kumaran Asan became the secretary of an organisation founded by Sri Narayanan Guru Upliftment and redemption of the depressed classes, and the eradication of education.

1. "......picked up English, made wonderful progress............ devoted day and night to studies. Friends used to call me a book-worm....." (From an unpublished life-sketch, left by the poet).
books that influenced the poetic revolution, age-old social inequalities and other evils were its aims.

The activities of this organisation at once unleashed in Kerala a social renaissance. Asan became the bellwether of this to carefully go through the books, diaries and papers left great movement. No great poet has ever been deaf to the by this great poet, and unearth much useful materials hitherto 'still sad music of humanity'.

This period of social reform coincided with the most fruitful period of Asan's literary activities. Side by side with his incessant social activities, he also gave the trumpet call for a poetic revolution. The publication of 'Yeena Poovu' was a great event in the history of Malayalam poetry. It was followed by other works like Nalini, Leela, Puravastha, Chandala Shikshakuku and Karuna. Each work in its way blazed a new trail in poetry. In them Asan broke away from the conventional poetic techniques. The 'Khanda Kavya' style became popular with him.

In 1919 during his visit to Madras, His Royal Highness His works were also experiments in new themes, style and the Prince of Wales met at the Senate Hall, a gathering of diction. Malayalam poetry became in Kuwaran Asan's hand a University students, Welfare and jailed Indian scholars, 'trumpet', 'whence he blew soul-animating strains'. It voiced Pride for literary excellence were given at the meeting and simultaneously the ideas of not only a new social renaissance but also of a poetic revolution. His was indeed the 'trumpet' the recipients. After this function Asan toured all over the voice' of the New Age that opened with the influence of English South of India visiting the famous temples there. Here is a education.

portion of the diary relating to this visit. "...........

The gigantic Kanchi temple gave me a beauteous impression of Reverence, devotion and antiquity. I turned next to Chidam-
Books that influenced the poetic revolution.

In connection with this thesis it was my privilege to carefully go through the books, diaries and papers left by this great poet, and unearth much useful materials hitherto unknown to the lovers of Malayalam literature. Yet another quotation which forms part of an unpublished prior life-narrative by the poet himself: "...worked hard, stood criticism patiently and brought to the Yogan..."

Asan's diary is a record of both his private and public life. The first thing that strikes one is the simple and chaste style of English in which it is written. In the absence of a regular education in English, nothing but wide reading of books and institutions, picturesque landscapes and materials could have given the poet a faultless and elegant way of expression. To support this observation certain portions of this diary shall be quoted here.

It is obvious from the diary that the poet's social and literary work was intimately connected. At a true

In 1922, during his visit to Madras, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales met at the Senate Hall, a gathering of University students, Fellows and eminent Indian scholars.

Prizes for literary eminence were given at the meeting and Asan and Vallthol Narayana Menon from Kerala were among the recipients. After this function Asan toured all over the South of India visiting the famous temples there. Here is a portion of the diary relating to this visit: ".........The gigantic Kanjeevaram temple gave me a bewildering impression of reverence, devotion and antiquity. I turned next to Chidam-
baram and saw the shrine there in an evening. What an inspir-
ing and holy temple. The sanctuary is full of immortals
Dvayagata and Chandalingh Mendsu adorned the clien of his
adorned with a rare abundance of precious stones

Yet another quotation which forms part of an
unpublished brief life-sketch by the poet himself. "...worked
hard, stood criticism patiently and brought to the Yogam
better recognition of the public in the course of an year or
so...........visited several parts of Bengal and Mysore during
my sojourn and also Ceylon and acquainted myself with the
Buddhist institutions, picturesque landscapes and waterfalls
there....."

It is obvious from the diaries that the poet's social
and literary activities were intimately connected. As a true
devotee of the saint and social reformer Sri Narayana Guru,
Asan accepted the secretaryship of the 'Yogam'. It worked
for the social, educational and industrial advancement of all
depressed classes in general and in particular of the most
numerous community of Ezhavas (Thiyyas) in Kerala. In this
copy of one thousand and one game of English Halma; included

J. Diary - 1922 - 13th January. 'Spoke about the sufferings of
2. 1922, Diary, dated 13th January.
crusade, both inside and outside the Assembly Asan wielded the English language with easy fluency. The twin compositions Duravastha and Chandala Bhikshuki marked the climax of his championing of social reforms. Vivekodayam was the mouthpiece of the S.N.D.P. Yogam. Asan was its chief editor. A glance at the old numbers of this monthly revealed that they contained profuse quotations from eminent English writers like Shakespeare, Cowper, Ruskin, Blake, Shelley, Keats, Browning, Tennyson and others. These showed in what direction the poet’s affinity lay.

The diary reveals that Asan was in correspondence in English with some official dignitaries like Professor K.V. Rangaswamy Iyengar, Diwan P. Raja Gopalschari and Sir N. Krishnan Nair from whom he received constant encouragement in his literary activities. He was also a regular subscriber to ‘To be or not to be’ the advice of Polonius to his son Learns several English magazines like The Indian Review and Tit Bits. On his setting forth, Hamlet’s words of farewell are notably: It was thus that he kept in touch with current English.

The funeral orations of Brutus and Antony in Julius Caesar, the lines that describe the conflict of mind in Macbeth before the act.

A notable book found in Asan’s personal library is a copy of One Thousand and One Gems of English Poetry, selected

3. Diary - 1922 - 13th January. 'Spoke about the sufferings of Kshavas and other depressed classes'. Speeches made in English have been recorded in the Assembly proceedings.
and arranged by Charles Mackay, giving a panoramic view of
the masterpieces in English poetry. It was a present to the
poet from one of his friends as a token of his extreme admiration
for Asen’s poetic genius. Complete works of Shakespeare,
Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Tennyson were also regularly
used by the poet. These books contain a lot of marginal notes
and markings in the poet’s own handwriting making it clear that
he had perused them with close attention. Selections from
Chaucer, Ben Jonson, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Goldsmith, Thomas
Gray, Robert Burns, Matthew Arnold, Browning and Edwin Arnold
also certainly engaged the poet’s rapt attention and study.
This is clear from his copy of One Thousand and One Game of
English Poetry.

In Shakespeare, some of the purple passages that seem
to have stirred the poet’s imagination are Hamlet’s soliloquy:

‘To be or not to be’ the advice of Polonius to his son Laertes
on his setting forth, Hamlet’s words of esteem for Horatio,
the funeral orations of Brutus and Antony in Julius Caesar,
the lines that describe the conflict of mind in Macbeth before
the murder of Duncan, the picture of the visionary dagger;

4. Hamlet, I. iii. ll. 59-60
5. Macbeth, II. i. ll. 35-60
the remorse of the murderer at the knocking at the gate,
Cordelia's emotions on hearing her sister's cruelty, feelings
of King Lear during the storm, Shylock's remonstrance with
Antonio, Portia's speech on mercy and the outbursts of
Othello in his jealousy. These passages are seen marked
by the poet in his personal copies.

The works of the Romantic and Victorian poets were
also found among the personal possessions of Kumaran Asan.
A scrutiny of them revealed that he had made an intimate
study of the masterpieces of Wordsworth; Adonais, Epipsychidion,
and Ode to the West Wind of Shelley; the odes and narrative
poems of Keats; In Memoriam, Maud, and Idylls of
Tennyson and the famous dramatic monologues of Robert Browning.

Certain lines marked by the poet in his copy of An
Introduction to the Study of Literature by William Hudson are
quoted below. They throw ample light on the poet's own literary

---

6. King Lear, III. i.
7. The Merchant of Venice, IV. i.
8. Othello, III, iii.

---

9. K. Kumaran, Kumaran Asan p. 49. See Original Text. No. 97
10. Translation of Original Text at the end, No. 6.
As life changes itself in the mind of the investigator. It is outlook. "......A great book grows directly out of life. It is fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language". "......A great book is born of the brain and heart of its author." "......Art is life seen through a temperament, for the mirror which the artist holds up to the world about him is of necessity the mirror of his own personality".

Asan was a regular and painstaking student of poetry, and it is not a negligible characteristic with many poets. With him it was almost the story of his life. Compare what Mrs. Asan has said about her husband's art, with the quotations given above. She remarks: "He is introspective by nature. Before he starts a great work he could be seen for several days reserved and pensive. He never used to keep elaborate notes. The whole scheme of composition would be formed and preserved in his mind. Once he starts writing he does not like to change the original plan. He believed that it is the absence of premeditation that necessitates frequent changes".

Matthew Arnold's much discussed definition of Literature as a criticism of life is also seen underlined in the same book along with the following sentences. "Literature is at bottom an expression of life......or an interpretation of life

as life shapes itself in the mind of the interpreter. It is almost this idea that is reflected in the oft-quoted lines from Leela.

Diverse are the ways of human life,
That vary from man to man.
Poets tell the tale of this life
A new feel at every turn it brings.10

The Preface to Lyrical Ballads with profuse marginal notes and markings is another valuable record found in Asen's library. It is evident from a glance at this work that the poet had assimilated its contents greedily. It is a historical document of abiding importance in English poetry. In its 'Advertisement' Wordsworth requests the public to consider the poems included in the Volume as mere experiments. The shy young genius is in fact throwing his work at the world with a truly 'take it or leave it air'. Yet the truth is that the Lyrical Ballads contained poems of such outstanding importance that they were experiments imperative in the development of English poetry.

To understand how this work influenced Asen, it is worthwhile to learn the aims of its authors.

The Lyrical Ballads of Wordsworth and Coleridge were

Thus Wordsworth and his friend awakened the stern's attention to the language and the subject matter of poetry. Both poets subscribed to both the experiments. While these poets were composing, there was much injustice in the world. Philanthropists groped their way forward with individual acts of kindness and the passing of Bills in Parliament. Wordsworth and Coleridge—

To whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest. 11

now stung by indignation, now melted by compassion wrote poems in which they expressed the sufferings of those they saw suffer. 'The Idiot Boy', 'The Dungeon', 'The Mad Mother' and 'The Convict' are poems which take their place side by side with other parliamentary reforms. No 18th Century poet had ever before thought that such themes were suitable for treatment in poetry.

Fortunately it was not only grief and injustice which roused these poets—the true and the beautiful wherever they found them on earth, sky, or sea, by the murmuring brook, in the flowery hedge-row, in the wind, in a corn field, or in wild daffodils nodding along the margin of a lake—were all equally capable of raising in them an intensity of love which made them embrace not only human beings and donkeys as brothers but even mountains and waterfalls, daisies and running hares.

11. The fall of Hyperion. - A Dream, Keats.
Thus Wordsworth and his friend awakened the mind's attention
every element of language have not only enriched English
from the lethargy of custom and directed it to the loveliness
literature but left a splendid example to his successors
and wonders of the world.

The second experiment was in the language of poetry
Kumaran Asan started his poetic career with a strong
and it was no less timely and important. The plea made was
foundation in Sanskrit. Naturally like his contemporaries
that poetry should be written in a simpler vocabulary and a
Valmiki and Ulladu, Asan was also for some time in the
more natural sentence construction than were used by poets
illusory atmosphere of neo-classicism. Unlike them he broke
at the end of the 18th Century. But Wordsworth modified his
easy much sooner from this tradition because of his close
practice and the poems he wrote in the Lyrical Ballads
seldom opened with the kind of crude diction he stood for.

Wordsworth's language is so lucid and ordinary, quite
often, that such instances as the Lucy Poems touch the heart
by their simplicity of expression and gentle pathos:

The critical pronouncements of A.N. Vajraja Varma added an
impetus to the movement. She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Besides the springs of Dove
A maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love.

There is certainly more in his poems than a casual eye
would detect. His narratives of humble country life 'Michael'
and 'Resolution and Independence' are simple and pathetic and
they have never been equalled. The admirable appropriateness
and purity of his style, his facile and faultless command over
every element of language have not only enriched English
literature but left a splendid example to his successors
for all time.

Kumaran Asan started his poetic career with a strong
foundation in Sanskrit. Naturally like his contemporaries
About Vallathol and Ulloor he broke into Malayalam
illusory atmosphere of neo-classicism. Unlike them he broke
poetry through the introduction of western style of
away much sooner from the tradition because of his close
acquaintance with English literature and the literary move-
ments in Bengal.

Inspired by similar ideals in the literature of
novel creation, she is different from the epic character. She
other countries known to him, Asan brought about revolutionary
changes in theme, form and technique in Malayalam poetry.

The critical pronouncements of A. K. Raja Raja Varma added an
impetus to the poet's attempt at this renovation.

First he made a significant deviation from the prevailing
incidents and situations from ordinary life. In almost all
his famous poems he handled new themes which none till his
day had dared to use in Malayalam poetry. Thus Chandala
Bhikshuki deals with the story of an outcaste maiden
'whom there were none to praise, and very few to love'. In Duravasthe the poet narrates the sensational theme of an orthodox Brahmin girl, Savithri's union with Chathan, an untouchable. The etherealised type of love that brings Divakaran and Nalini together is also a new to Malayalam poetry. About Veena poovu his great contemporary poet Ulloor writes: "In this poem Asan opened a new line in Malayalam poetry through the introduction of the western style of narration". Prorodanam is like Adonis an elegy fulfilling almost all qualities of the traditional type. The independence and will-power revealed by Leela in the constancy of her love for Madanan are quite new. Asan's 'sita' is yet another novel creation. She is different from the epic character. She is more an earthly being. Her moral indignation at her husband's cruel desertion is only human. The deviation Asan made in the creation of Sita is comparable to Shelley's recreation of Prometheus in his lyrical drama Prometheus Unbound. Prometheus in the original drama of Aeschylus is a tragic character whereas Shelley's hero is defiant and triumphant.

13. Prometheus Bound, a tragedy by the Greek dramatist Aeschylus.
We see in Asan a type of piety and nobility of purpose combined with a rapturous love of Nature and a deep interest in humanity. The character of his poetry is as pure as his own life — the life of him uttered nothing base. The new characters he introduced in his poems (as against the usual lifeless classical specimens) — the untouchable Matsangi, the courtesan Vasavadatha, the forlorn Brahamin girl Savithri, the love-lorn Leela, the innocent Nalini, the most humble Chathan, and the chief Buddhist disciples Upagupta and Ananda — all appeal to everything that is high and holy in man and are everywhere directed towards those surroundings of theirs which are pure and useful and always ennobling. Though them Asan elevated the tone of Malayalam poetry, never celebrating erotic love on any level.

His bold experiments in theme had their natural impact on form as well. He abandoned the convention of long poem and literary decorations. Through Veenapovu he gave a new power and dignity to the style of the short lyric poems in Malayalam Poetry. In English poetry, Thomas Wyatt was the pioneer in this respect. It was his visit to Italy that gave him the impulse for this reform. Similarly it was Asan's visit to the renaissant Bengal and the various movements there, backed by English culture and language that fired the
which give the impression of a poem starting in its middle.
poet's reformist zeal.
The treatment is quick and effective breaking the traditional
methods such as invocation etc.

Veena Poovu and Prarodanam have close resemblance
to English odes and elegies respectively in their form and
theme. Sita is a dramatic monologue. The sad and pensive
heroine on the eve of death, condensing the long trial of her
past into a comprehensive soliloquy is certainly in the
Browningesque tradition.

or again Keats opens the story of Isabella.
The dramatic and abrupt opening of poems popular in
English poetry was first imitated by Asan in Malayalam poetry.
For example see the beginning of Leela where Madhavi, the
girl-friend of Leela consoles the disappointed and frustrated
heroine:

Awake, Awake O! the love-lorn girl,
For, there in the yonder land,
You have a lover dear. 

These lines are comparable with the following lines
from Keat's The Eve of St. Agnes.

Awake! Awake! my love, and fearless be,
For o'er the Southern moors, I have a home for thee.

14. Translation. cf. the Original Text at the end. No. 9.
The lines suggest more than what they present. Sita
which give the impression of a poem starting in its middle.
and suggests a whole gamut of emotions as she sits there. To
The treatment is quick and effective breaking the tradi-
make one realize that the full force of her intense feelings
tional methods such as invocation etc.
even packed as much meaning as he can into an extremely
small space.

Browning begins 'Andrea del Sarto' with a pathetic
plea from the artist to his wife Lucrezia:

But do not let us quarrel any more,
No my Lucrezia, bear with me for once.
or again Keats opens the story of Isabella:

Fair, Isabel, poor simple Isabel!
Lorenzo, a young palmer in love's eye.
The three common words viz., fair, poor and simple sum up
the tragedy of the heroine's life. A dramatic beginning
indeed!

Kumaran Asan's 'Sita' has a similar impressive and
dramatic opening. The sage Valmiki is away in Ayodhya, with
his grand children Lava and Kusa. Sita is alone in the
hermitage garden plunged in thoughts:

Rapt in thought, Sita sat in twilight
In a garden near the hermitage,
The sage had gone and the sons with him
To distant Ayodhya, and she all alone. 15.

15. Translation. cf. the Original Text at the end, No. 10.
The lines suggest more than what they present. Sita undergoes a whole gamut of emotions as she sits there. To make the reader feel the full force of her intense feelings the poet packs as much meaning as he can into an extremely small space.

As a poet Asan always presented what he preached. His attempts at renovation, in language of poetry also. He recreated the Malayalam prosody by giving back to the verse the fluidity and grace it had lost since the days of Kunchan Nambiar, and extending the range of its achievement. He created a new Malayalam poetic diction by lifting it from stiffness and conventionalism, excelling whether in the simple or the ornate, widening its scope, but at the same time never failing to give it ease and flexibility, so that language became to him a willing instrument to voice all shades of mood or fancy. He believed that style is only a medium of expression for man. A writer should not subordinate his theme to style. The poet gives expression to this principle in the 54th stanza of his elegy Prarodanam. There he says more or less that "words are like leaves, where they most abound, much fruit of sense is seldom found".

As we pass from Asan's early works like Veena Poovu, Nalini and Prarodanam to Puravastha, Chandala Bhikshuki and Karuna, we see a smooth switch over from the highly

16. See the Original Text at the end, No. 11.
sanskritized style to the simpler and chaster Malayalam idiom. This also corresponds to a change in metre and a change in subject matter from the spiritual to the more materialistic.

As a poet Asan always practised what he preached. His poems have sweetness, spontaneity, a freshness of simple language and to this we may add the dignity of a man of learning and culture. The simplicity of style in the short lyrics like Pookkalam is any day comparable with the simplicity of expression in the Lucy poems.

In another lyric called he personifies a bird and a Personification of Nature and her objects is something fresh in Malayalam poetry. This is certainly the result of the contact with Romantic poets. Wordsworth and Shelley made personal communication between man and Nature possible through new and vivid images. Shelley's 'Cloud' is an outstanding example of myth-making. He does not give us a picture of the cloud as a person as Francis Thompson personified the 'Desert' or Collins the 'Evening'. Shelley reveals the cloud as a person living and moving in a world of his own. We see her as she goes about her appointed tasks,

17. A poem on the Spring Season. 'A flower' - Translation of Vega's Poem.
20. Cf. the original text at the end, p. 12.
The poet in all these instances communicates with watering flowers, giving shade to leaves and shaking drops of dew to refresh the birds. There are other beings to share her doings with her as colossal as herself - the lightning, the Sanguine sun and the peeping stars. Asan and other poets of the New Age also used this device freely. In Veena Poovu Asan communicates his thoughts to a withered flower, attributing to it the qualities of a living being:

Ah, lovely bloom, once thou didst shine High like a queen. 19.

In another lyric Kunnal, he personifies a bird and a hermit is depicted as consoling the sad bird. Its opening lines are comparable to the following lines of Wordsworth's 'To the Skylark':

Ethereal ministrel! Pilgrim of the sky! Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound? 20

Summing up the character of spring season in Poookalam the poet requests the season not to disappear so soon with the joys of the world, and the season replies after a pause that she shall obey only her master.

20. Cf. the Original Text at the end, No. 12.
The poet in all these instances communicates with Nature and finds joy. This in fact is a kind of pantheism which we often come across in English Nature poetry. Man and Nature are linked together by an indwelling spirit. Between this spirit of Nature and the mind of man there is a pre-arranged harmony which enables Nature to communicate its thoughts to Man and man to reflect upon Nature until absolute union between them is established.

Above all, Asan is an artist. In his hand the poetic art reached the standard of craftsmanship that had not been previously attained by anybody. A study of his technique shows an apt sense of the right word in the right place and an intense desire 'to load every rift with ore'. About this technique Asan writes: "I don't write a number of poems; but whatever I write, I write with extreme care. I review the technical and artistic side and omit whatever is unnecessary and accept whatever is necessary. Without deep meditation and background preparation I never attempt any versification" 21. By means of a rich, simple and varied style fully expressive of his idealism he has exercised a spell that has been potent on the succeeding generation of poets.

21. From Asan's reply to Vallathol's criticism on Praroganan. Cf Original Text at the end No.96.
Two Kindred Spirits.

Asan is not deeply indebted to any particular English poet or thinker for his ideas. Yet if we compare the poetic art of Asan and Shelley, we can trace a broad kinship between them; particularly in their revolutionary themes, in the etherealised concept of love used in their poems, in their philosophic bent of mind and in their fidelity to the poetic creeds they preached. This relationship is not the result of any study by Shelley of the Indian and other systems of Oriental philosophy as in the case of Sir Edwin Arnold. Shelley's Oriental ideas came to him by sheer intuition and inspiration and their ideological similarity is a matter of chance.

The reformatory tendencies:

Democratic idealism was a life principle for all Romantic poets. Wordsworth through his poems like TheIdiot Boy and The Mad Mother enlarged the sympathy and widened the mental horizon of his readers. Byron loved liberty and died for it in Greece. Shelley was the child of revolution. Even from his boyhood he saw the ugly realities of life and the practice of sham religions and morals prevailing in society. As a result
he became a rebel against custom and tradition, old conventions and institutions. He stated in his *Defence of Poetry* that our social and moral development lags dangerously behind our social and material accomplishment. Unable to make any headway in the creation of a certain world of his own liking he sought to embody his revolutionary doctrines in his works. Thus we have *Queen Mab*, *The Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound*, where freedom as a literary ideal finds its full expression—an ideal that came to him through the gates of birth and not as an outside affair. His poems have, therefore, the true lyrical rapture.

In *Queen Mab* Shelley presents a true picture of the world as he saw it and condemns the evils practised in the name of religions, morals and God. The Fairy, *Queen Mab* carries off in her celestial chariot the spirit of the innocent and beautiful maiden Lanthe, and shows her the past history of the world and explains to her the causes of its miserable state. The poet inveighs through her mouth against 'Kings, priests and statesmen', human institutions such as marriage and commerce and the Christian religion. The fairy finally reveals the future state of a regenerate world when all things are re-created and the flame of consentaneous love inspires all life.
The Revolt of Islam is a symbolic narrative poem, illustrating 'the growth and progress of an individual, aspiring after excellence and devoted to the love of mankind and its impatience at all the oppressions that are done under the sun'. It is an allegorical depiction of the poet's own feelings of fury at the oppressions that prevailed in the age. The hero of the poem Laon, is a youth nourished in dreams of liberty with some of his actions in direct opposition to the opinions of the world, but animated with a deep love of virtue and a resolution to confer the boons of political and intellectual freedom on his fellow human beings. Cythna, the heroine, is devoted to the liberation of her sex, struggles in company with the hero, right till the last moment of her life, and at last they both meet with their death. The whole poem is meant to put into the mind of the reader, through indirect suggestions, the glory of liberty and its well-deserving cause.

Prometheus Unbound is a fine lyrical drama, singing the hopes of man, the glory of love and the beauty of nature. Prometheus, the Titan, is the champion of mankind. He is enchained to a rock and is subjected to perpetual torture, and is seen struggling for perfection. Jupiter (Zeus) is the embodiment of traditional beliefs and institutions, the

be a mere sinner's utterance for freedom than the famous
dominating evil in the whole of the world. Characterised by
courage and majesty and a firm and practical opposition to
Omnipotent force; and exempt from the taints of ambition,
envy and revenge, instinct also with the spirit of force,
PROMETHEUS remains unyielding to the threats of Jupiter. He
is supported by Earth, his mother, and the thought of Asia,
his bride and the spirit of Nature. At the appointed hour,
Demogorgon, the Primal Power of the World drives Jupiter from
his throne, which means the dethronement of Christianity by
the spirit of Christ. Hercules who unbinds Prometheus is
symbolic of reason and knowledge with whose help 'man' can
attain 'liberty'. The reign of love follows. Shelley's hero
in the poem is different from his Greek prototype in so far
as he is a successful rebel against Jupiter.

Like Shelley Kumaran Asan also used some of his poems
to serve the cause of liberty for human society. He was a
great champion of freedom, deeply annoyed at the injustices in
the contemporary society as casteism and religious intolerance.
He wanted the degenerate world to go and to usher in a new
world. It was the sincere and devoted disciple of Sri
Narayana Guru that he undertook a holy crusade against social
inequalities. If Godwin was the spiritual force behind
Shelley, for Kumaran Asan it was Sri Narayana Guru. There cannot
be a more sincere utterance for freedom than the famous
With the same reformist zeal Asan denounced the lavish stanza in Oru Udodharam (An Exhortation) struck from the veena of the poet's heart experience.

Freedom is ambrosia,
The sap that sustains human life.
Serfdom, for honourable men
More worse than death, and is dreaded most.

These lines are warmth our precious heritage today. As in Shelley’s Masque of Anarchy, in Udodharam Asan criticises the social exploitation of the privileged class could be heard in the lyrical Udodharam (Ode to Liberty). As in Shelley’s, the lines rise to the top.

It is in a similar vein that Shelley denounces in Queen Mab 'obedience' which meant to him slavery.

Vivekodayam, a monthly publication was Asan’s chief mouthpiece in the fight for social liberty. In one of its numbers, on the birthday of the then ruling prince Sir George Mulam, he quoted the following lines from Shelley’s Song to The Men of England.

Men of England wherefore ye plough
For the lords who lay ye low
Wherefore weave with toil and care
The rich robes your tyrants wear.

1. Translation. cf. the Original Text at the end, No.15.
With the same reformist zeal Asan denounces the slavish mentality of his fellow men in Duravastha. "These men", he says, "are born to till, sow, reap and work in the fields for others; they are like cattle and could, if you like, be used for farm work as well."

More outbursts of impatience at the social exploitation of the privileged class could be heard in the lyrics Simha Nadam (The Lion's Roar) and Swathenthrya Gatha (An Ode to Liberty). As in Shelley's Masque of Anarchy, in Simha Nadam Asan gives a clarion call to the tillers of the land, 'to rise like lions after slumber' against the exploiters at the top.

Asan's immediate interest lay in the removal of inequalities practised within the Hindu society. This he believed to be the first step towards further social improvement. The poet expresses his moral indignation in Simha Nadam at the sin of casteism. "It is surprising that man is unholy for man. This is untouchability. This world is a hell, and there cannot be another damned place like this". Ooru Theeya Kuttiyude Vicharam (Thoughts of a Theeya Boy) high lights the sufferings of a low-caste boy. It is a plea for the restoration when she is homeless and helpless consequent on a forced out-

2. Original Text in the end, No.16.
of all human rights withheld from him by an unjust society.

The revolutionary ideas of the poet found their culmin-ination in the twin poems Duravastha and Chandala Bhikshuki which created a social commotion at their publication. Their themes still have a sting about them and will hold their appeal until this evil is completely eliminated from society.

The background of the narrative poem Duravastha is the Moplah Rebellion that stormed South Malabar in 1921. Against this background the poet presents the age-old agonies and sufferings to which the 'untouchables' of the society are subjected to by the privileged upperclass masters. These 'untouchables' are denied even the insinuable rights of personal safety and freedom. They are the 'meanest of all creatures that even the grass would not make way for them, and they walk so gently with fear in mind that even the earth does not feel their tread'. Chathan is one of these 'tattered battalions'. He is a Harijan. A Nampoothiri Brahmin girl, Savithri, a 'darling' of the privileged upper class seeks refuge in his mud-hut by force of circumstances. It happens when she is homeless and helpless consequent on a Moselem outrage on her 'illum' (home). Chathan has no hesitation to succour her. He gives her food and shelter. Not withstanding
the reversal of fortune, he even treats her with the same respect and decorum, she would have got but for the present misfortune. The sincere care and attention that the strange youth bestowed on her in her hour of trial, overwhelms her. The formal relationship, with which the drama begins gradually gives way to the nobler sentiments of love and affection.

In the climax the powerful barrier of caste that separates them pales into insignificance and Chathan and Savithri become man and wife. It is an impossible event in the time in which it is set. Yet the poet builds up a credible story with such imaginative audacity that he very well achieves his purpose.

The theme of Chandala Bakunati (the Outcaste Sun) is equally revolutionary, though it is based on an episode from the Buddhist lore. Incidentally the poem also underlines the wider scope of his spiritual outlook of a casteless society.

In the preface he requests the world not to distrust the honesty of his intention.

No poet before Asan had dared to use so revolutionary a theme in Malayalam poetry. In simple but imperishable words Asan frames in this narrative the most explosive slogan for the underdogs of his time. He warns the law-makers and tyrants of society to abolish the age-old customs and convention lest they themselves should be eliminated.
Repeal the customs O! Lords, or the customs will repeal you all.

These lines have the true ring of the Shelleyan prophecy. In Ode to the west wind, he is sublimely prophetic when he says that the old world must go and a new world must come laden with sweet and fresh promises for the suffering humanity.

The theme of Chandala BRAHSHUKI (The Untouchable Nun) is equally revolutionary, though it is based on an episode from the Buddhist love. Incidentally the poem also upholds the message of his spiritual Guru of a casteless society.

Matangi is a low-caste girl. One day she casually meets Ananda, one of the greatest and oldest of Buddhist disciples. He quenches his thirst by accepting drinking water from her. Later she realises his identity. Impressed by his spirituality, she repairs to the 'Viharas' with the request to become a devotee. The wish is soon granted and she becomes a nun of the Buddhist order. But her admission into the 'Sanghas' is viewed with extreme hostility by the high-caste men and women. At their instance the King Presanajit

3. Translation. cf. the Original Text at the end, No. 17.
goes to the Lord who through a sermon demonstrates to him that caste has no sanction either in religion or in the codes of social morality. The king returns convinced of the wisdom of the precept and the foolishness of his mission.

These two poems well embody Asan's revolutionary doctrines. They echo the agonised cry of a community which had long suffered from social inequalities. Activities of the Brahma Samaj in Bengal for social equality were the spring-board of Asan's reformist zeal. Asan is also seen in these poems as the champion of the cause of the freedom of women. Most of his heroines are pitted against the rude conventions of society. Leela is not able to marry the man of her heart, Madanan. She is given away in marriage to a rich merchant. Malini has an all-absorbing love for her child-hood play-mate Divakaran. In defiance of the marriage arrangements her parents make, she goes to the Himalayan slopes in search of her lover who had turned a 'Sanyasi' and ends her life there with him. Sita is a deserted wife. She is indignant particularly because she is an expectant mother. Her womanly pride is sorely wounded. In her utter hopelessness she sends her husband Rama to a trial before the court of her mind where her conscience sits in judgement. In each case in her struggles through life, the heroine proves herself to be highly individualistic and freedom-loving.
The main mission of Assan's life was to up-lift the depressed and the down-trodden. His spirit like Shelley's was always haunted by the tragedies and tyrannies of the life, and the underlying spirit, though it reveals its social order which shattered the world of his dreams. His works are the first to show a clear social consciousness in them. And for this, he is considered the harbinger of socialist realism in Modern poetry. He knew the struggle of liberation might be long and taxing, but he wanted the struggle to be kept up, until final victory was achieved. He was confident that God will not betray those who love Him. The poet gives expression to this note of optimism in a popular couplet in Chandale Bhikshuki:

Those who lead a sinless life will realise God in all their ills.

The conception of love:

From his Oxford days onwards Greek literature was Shelley's favourite reading; and for Plato he had a natural affinity of mind. This does not mean that he accepted all the speculations of Plato. He borrowed some of them like the general religious and philosophic ideas, cosmic speculations and the theory of love. Shelley's religion was platonic in its excellences and in its defects, being neither Biblical

---

4. Translation. cf. the Original Text in the end, No. 18.
nor Christian. He believed, of course in a supreme power. He was vividly conscious of the unity of the world and of all life, and the underlying spirit, though it reveals itself in many forms, is everywhere and essentially the same.

The fusion of poetry and philosophy in Plato appealed to a kindred faculty in Shelley himself. Sometimes subtle, sometimes pronounced, it can be seen in Shelley frequently and in unexpected places.

Characteristically Platonic is Shelley's apprehension of the soul of the world from the aesthetic side. He loved to contemplate the world-soul primarily under the forms of Love and Beauty.

Shelley's dualism - the idea of the world as a scene in which Good and Evil are contending for mastery - was doubtless suggested by Plato. We see this dualism in the lines that tell of the

... One Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world,
... Torturing the unwilling cross that checks its flights.

A leading characteristic idea of Platonic doctrine and in the allegory of the death-grapple of the Eagle and the Snake in 'The Revolt of Islam'.

7. Style in Intellectual Beauty, stanza ii.

5. Shelley, Adonais, Stanza XL. III.
Plato holds that so long as we are subject to passions and earthly desires, we are not truly awake, but walk about like somnambulists in pursuit of phantoms. Again and again Shelley speaks of this 'unquiet dream of life'. For example we have the following lines from Adonais:

Life, like a dome of many coloured glass Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

Shelley’s idealistic cast of mind at once ethereal and passionate, yielded as if by an irresistible spell to Plato’s theory of love. Like Plato Shelley exalts love based on spiritual affinity over love that is based upon sensuous attraction. He himself has described his philosophy and its all-pervading and transcendental nature in Hymn to Intellectual (Spiritual) Beauty:

Spirit of Beauty that dost consecrate
With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
Of human thought or form.7

Shelley has clothed the Platonic theory of love with a glory and fervour such as no other poet has invested it with. Adonais and Epipsychidion are two good illustrations.

A Leading characteristic idea of Platonic doctrine

6. Shelley, Adonais, Stanza L. II.
7. Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, Stanza II.
of love is the ascending scale of love mounting in progressive
degrees to the vision of the Universal.

The parallelism traced here between Platonism in Shelley
and similar ideas in Asan has nothing to do with blind disciple-
ship. Students of Indian philosophy have already been familiar
with the ideas in Shelley’s poetry. The parallelism is easily
explained if we remember that many of the doctrines of Plato’s
characters of Asanga and Sujata the chief house in Buddhist
literature, and similar ideas in Shelley’s poetry. Dr. S. Radha-
krishnan says that the Indian religions thought and Orphic
and Pythagorean thought are so similar that they are regarded
as expressions of the same view of life.

Asan was a true disciple of the great apostle of Advaita
philosophy, Sri Narayana Guru. This discipleship and his
contact with Sanskrit literature and the reading of Shelley’s
poetry must have all gone to shape Asan’s concept of love.

Hence it is but natural that we find in them parallel ideas.

Religious and philosophical themes are favourites with
Asan. Religion is the instinctive mode of Indian thought it-
particular and with the universal. How this prime of
self and often it is religion that decides the characters and
philosophic poets in the Srilankan Descriptive love as the
extent of any Renaissance in India. Like Shelley, Asan also
had no conventional respect for the established system of
religion. Hindu religion during his time was full of absurd
and abdominal practices and the passion for reforming it possessed him with unceasing intensity. He always dreamt of a world eliminated of all the present evils where the spirit of love should ever reign. Buddhism promised such a life and Asan was naturally drawn to it. Hence Buddhism became a vital force with him. Using themes taken from Buddhist literature he gave shape to his social and love poems. In the noble characters of Ananda and Upagupta, the chief heroes in Buddhist literature, Asan found the sparks fit for a social renaissance.

Another example of his intuitive apprehension of a profound truth is to be found in the following stanza from Lyrical Ballade marked by the poet is relevant here. "Aristotle has said that poetry is the most philosophic of all writings, its object is truth, not individual and local, but general." This is almost identical in meaning to the alliterative lines in Paradise Lost quoted below.

We have in Asan's poems a great number of such philosophical generalisations. In fact his love poems like Nalini, Leela, Chandala Bhikshuk and Karuna begin with the particular and end with the universal. See how this prince of poetic geniuses at least Shelley can be said to have the highest manifestation of universal good and universal truth in a famous couplet in Nalini:

9. Translation. cf. the Original Text in the end, No. 29.
10. Translation. cf. the Original Text in the end, No. 29.

Love is the essence of all this Universe
And Love's essence the only truth.8.
The following line in Shelley's Adonais: "The One remains, of self-purification. In the pluto-eulogy, an exciting the many change and pass" or the line in which the poet affirms his faith that the pure spirit of Keats "shall flow back to the burning fountain whence it came, a portion of the Eternal", is a poetic transmutation of the same principle that finds expression in Asan's Veena Poovu:

For in the fields of Immortality
The born things perish, the elements last,
The Soul will live, the body turns to earth.

Another example of his intuitive apprehension of a profound truth is to be found in the following stanzas from Sita:

The mind is its own place and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.

In his poetic moments at least Shelley is Platonic in his conception of the nature of the soul and its pilgrimage

9. Translation. cf. the Original Text in the end, No. 20
10. Translation. cf. the Original Text in the end, No. 21.
11. Milton, Paradise Lost, Bk. I.
12. cf. the Original Text in the end, No. 22.
of self-purification. In the *Epipsychidion*, an exciting poem dealing with feverish Platonic love, immortalising a beautiful young lady named Emilia Viviani, Shelley turns to imaginative purpose the doctrine of pre-existence in a heavenly state.

For in the fields of Immortality
My spirit should at first have worshipped thine
A divine presence in a place divine.

The consoling words of the spirits of Leela and Madanan to Madhavi, embody approximately the same belief. It is in fact Asan who probes here into the mysteries and secrets of life after death when the spirits say that no body leaves this world when the soul takes leave of the human frame in which it dwells. "We will meet again", the spirits say, "for the cycle of self-regeneration is perennial".

It is evident that Asan believed in the immortality of the soul. But about the type of life after death, he is silent. Life in this world, according to him, is only a preparation for a nobler and richer existence. Ralini, Leela, and Sita end their earthly life in search of a happier life.

---

12. cf. the Original Text in the end, No.22.
Divakaran at the initial stage is of this earth; earthly.

Asan is the greatest love poet among his contemporaries. Leela is passionately devoted to Leela and there is nothing
The theme of love underwent a revolutionary change in his
slightly about it. Vedavasitha's infatuation for the Buddhist
hand, so that it appeared something new and exciting, fit for a
disciple Upagupta is comparable to the deep and unceasing
revival. Behind all his poetry there is the rich conception
vision that Leela had for Protopiliaus in Panditha's poem
of self-less love. In the past, poets delighted in the human
phenomenon. In all the three cases the love-motive is selfish at
elements of sensuousness and carnal satisfaction. Asan broke
the barrier of away from this sterile sentimentalisation of fleshy love,
'Arulil love' their earthly passion is pursued of its base,
based on erotic poets of sanskrit to the Platonic concept.
In the case of Nalini this blessed state is reached on earth
Love, now assumed a unifying spiritual power. Asan saw the
same while Leela and--because of this as a celestial
beauty and delight of all things illuminated by the wonder of
beauty for an individual and for the beauty of all
the spiritual self. He believed that love is at the
same time man's highest moral ideal and the very essence of
universal beauty and the universal good. Asan describes this
Godhood.

Asan lends lyrical melody to the Shelleyan view of love
The poet says that the world is born out of love and progresses
in the philosophic consolation, Divakaran gives to the love-

Shelley's own words:

Even love the world is born
With love it grows and lives
Love, its supreme power - and
Love whose smile kindles the Universe
Love in which all things work and move.13

The Platonic ascending scale of love finds beautiful
expression in Nalini, Leela and Karuna. Nalini's love for

---

13. Shelley, Adonais, Stanza I, IV.
Divakaran at the initial stage is of this earth, earthly. Leela is passionately devoted to Madanan, and there is nothing exotic about it. Vasavadatha's infatuation for the Buddhist disciple Upaguptha is comparable to the deep and ungovernable passion that Laodamia had for Protesilaus in Wordsworth's poem Laodamia. In all the three cases the love-motive is selfish at the beginning. But in course of time in the crucible of 'sublime love' their earthly passion is purged of its dress. In the case of Nalini this blessed state is reached on earth itself while Leela and Madanan attain it only as a celestial couple. The love for an individual and for the beauty of an individual soul lead upward by degrees to the vision of the universal beauty and the universal good. Asan describes this ascending scale of love superbly well in Chandala Bhikshuki. The poet says that the world is born out of love and progresses by it. Love is the divine power, the central energy of God's being, at whose guidance all life treads the love-way.

From love the world is born
With love it grows and lives
Love, its supreme power - and
Love itself will lead to joy.14

These lines have an authentic Shelleyan quality. Shelley also puts forth love as the central force, guiding all activities
of the Universe. Love guides the stars, the planets and all
be different from the egotistical type of love described in Malini,
that is animate and inanimate in existence.

It must be remembered here that the poet's aim is neither to
speak the fervour and intoxication of passion nor to interpret

shelley conceives of the union of lovers in Plato's
manner as 'one spirit within two frames', 'one passion in two
hearts' and 'the fountains of their deepest life are confused
in passion's golden purity'. That is Shelley's last word on
love and is the finale of his greatest love poem Epipsychidion.

One hope within two wills, one will beneath
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death
One Heaven, One Hell, One immortality
And One annihilation.15.

Conclusion.

Asen gives expression to the same idea in the immortal
words of Malini. Addressing her lord, she says that he is
the liberator of the masses from their economic and
her life's hope and joy and that without him she has no
existence.

You are my life, and all my hope,
The only hope of a heavenly life,
O! my Lord, I cease to live
If I miss, thy 'blissful feet'.16.

In his love-lyrics Asen's aim has invariably been to
exalt love and consider it as one of the noblest emotions in
life. It is true that the love treated in Leela and Duraswasthe

15. Shelley, Epipsychidion, II. 584-585.
is different from the ethereal type of love described in Malini. It must be remembered here that the poet's aim is neither to echo the fervour and intoxication of passion nor to interpret love in the light of mystic idealism. His ultimate aim is to give love a moral significance, a place and power among the substantial elements in which rest the dignity of man's being and the greatness of his destiny. The one object of Supreme interest to him is the development of the soul. It is in this type of treatment of love that we find in Asan a close kinship with Shelley.

Conclusion.

The liberation of the masses from their economic and spiritual thraldom was the central objective of politics for both Shelley and Asan. Their poetry is one long cry for freedom—a torrent of pleading song. "Their sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought" because their spirits were alike haunted by tragedies and tyrannies of life which disfigured the beautiful world of their dramas. Both preached the triumph of the spiritual love over the material more eloquently than any of their contemporaries. Both were true to the professions of their poetic principles, and once the
chaff has been winnowed from the grain of their work, there remains an abundance of the rich music of the most exquisite tone. In the end it has to be noted that it was under identical tragic circumstances that the two poets met with their death.

Water in any form, lake, sea or river had an irresistible fascination for Shelley and boating to him was a passion. In a boat called 'Ariel', specially made for him, the poet sailed with two others and they were never seen alive again. A short but violent thunderstorm broke over the bay and they were engulfed. It is said that the mystery of death with drowning as an easy solvent, was a natural and familiar thought with Shelley. These facts give us a new insight into Asia's words in *Prometheus Unbound*.

*My Soul is an enchanted boat
Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float

It seems to float ever, for ever
Upon that many-winding river,

Till one slumber bound
Borne to the ocean, I float down, around,
Into a sea profound, of ever-spaying sound.*

A similar fate fell upon Kumaran Asan as well. It was on the darkest day in January 1924. While the poet was on his
way from Quilon to Alleppey on the ill-fated boat called 'The Redeemer', bound in his slumber, the vessel took him down and down into the depth of the river. In the elegy Prarodhanam the poet welcomes death as a deliverer, as a desirable end that makes earthly life more tempting. The thought of death by drowning may have been in Assan's mind also - at least it so appears when we read in Puravastha the lines that describe Savithri's sense of frustration at the tragedy that has overrun her. She laments of the unfathomable deep - probably the deep that ultimately swallowed the beloved poet:

What to do and where to go
Oh! my God, I know it not,
Dark and deep a well I fell
Down and down that hell I go. 17

17. Translation. cf. the Original Text in the end, No25.