CHAPTER III

AGRARIAN QUESTION AND MASS MEDIA: THE ROLE OF PRINT MEDIA IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF KERALA (1934-1971)

Media serves the vital function of Communication in human societies. Social formation is impossible without communication. The nature and development of the technologies of communication often denote the stage of development achieved by the human society of a particular era. The development of print media was an epoch making development in human history. It has changed the history beyond recognition and brought changes to a degree unprecedented.

The impact of the mass media in the politics has been theorized in various ways. Media theorists like Marshal Mc Luhan and Harold Innis credited the media with the evolution of democracy and nation state itself. They have assigned the media such a central place in their analysis that they have even overlooked the role of capitalism and the larger social process in the formation of nation states.
This technological determinism gave way to a more balanced view in Benedict Anderson where he has assigned print media a major role in the construction of nation states as imagined communities\textsuperscript{1}. The roles which print media play in determining the political process can hardly be overemphasized.

In history, media plays a double role. Firstly as a factor of direct intervention in the construction of history by influencing the course of events; secondly as a raw material for accessing the stories of the past aiding significantly in the development of history as a discipline. Most of the movements which had come up after the emergence of printing press as a mass media, could never keep themselves aloof from coming under the influence of Mass media\textsuperscript{2}. The characterization they acquired in the mass media was crucial in deciding their public acceptance. The movements themselves have sought the help of the mass media in taking their voice and carrying out their propaganda among the people. Thus it has become a natural practice for any movement to start its own organ.

The emergence and growth of the nationalist media is a crucial facet of the history of Indian Struggle for Independence. The newspapers had to fight the draconian policies of the colonial administration which constantly tried to curb the free spirit of the media. Yet the newspapers representing the nationalist ideals enjoyed widespread popularity and were held in high esteem.


\textsuperscript{2} Natarajan, J. History of Indian Journalism, pp.190-197, Publication Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 2000.
The History of Malayalam Media

The advent of mass media started with the advent of the press in Kerala. The printing press and the technological advances helped the publication of a number of periodicals and newspapers. The history of Malayalam media is dotted with the stories of innumerable newspapers coming to the stage and disappearing. There has been a mind-boggling number of publications out of which only a few have survived till this date. But all of them have made veritable contributions to the progress of history. All of them had their own political agenda. Some were visibly anti establishment. Some were entertainers. But there were strong ideological divisions amongst them.

The print media serve as a tool of political mobilization. The newspapers of the bourgeoisie and working class and the peasantry helped their own classes in respectively achieving their political goals by galvanizing the masses to their respective causes. It has been observed that the print media has done yeomen service to the growth of radical democratic movements in the state. Many of the newspapers which were started initially by social reformers had to face state repression in their fight for civil rights and freedom of speech and expression.3

Efforts of the Westerners

The pioneers of newspaper publishing were the missionaries of Kerala who have brought out newspapers as part of their religious activities.

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Jnananikshepam from Kottayam in 1840 was the first newspaper in Kerala⁴. The first newspaper⁵ from the missionaries was started by Dr. Herman Gundert which was named as Rajya Samacharam in June 1847 from Illikunnu near Tellicherry. The paper was published till December 1850 and it had forty-two issues all together⁶. The next journal on the line was Paschimodayam, which came out in October, 1847, Fr.Muller was its editor. It continued to be published until August 1851. Sathyanada Kahalam was another journal which started its publication from Kunammavu, Ernakulum in 1867⁷. There were some newspapers both in Malayalam and English started by the Westerners who were in Kerala. The most important among the newspapers were the Western Star, Paschima Tharaka, Travancore Herald and Sanghistavadi.

The Western Star was one of the first non-missionary newspapers published from Kerala and it was in English language published from Cochin in 1860. Paschima Tharaka, Malayalam edition of the Western Star, was published from the same press in Cochin. The newspaper was edited by T.J.Paily. W.H. Moore started the Travancore Herald, an English paper from C.M.S. Press, Kottayam, in 1867. He also started the Sanghistavadi in Malayalam⁸.

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The Indian Pioneers

There were many newspapers started by Indians as well. Kerala Deepakam, In 1878, was started by Kathru Saji Bappu from Cochin. West Coast Spectator, the English weekly printed by Vakil Poovadan Raman from the Spectator Press, started publication in 1879 from Kozhikode. It was edited by an Englishman, Dr. Keys. Later on, its name was changed into Malabar Spectator. In 1881, Vidyavilasini, the first literary monthly, was published from Kerala Press, Trivandrum. S. Ramarayer was the publisher of this monthly. Malayalamithram was published in 1878. Thiruvithankoor Abhimani was released from Nagarcoil. In 1879, P. Govinda Pillai launched Kerala Chandrika from Kerala Press, Trivandrum. On New Year day of 1881, Devji Bhimji, started Kerala Mithram, the first systematic newspaper in Malayalam, from the Kerala Mithram press. Kandathil Varghees Mappila was also associated with this press.

Kerala Patrika from Calicut under the editorship of Chengalath Kunhirama Menon made noted contributions in the field journalism in Kerala. Kerarala Sanchari was started by Poovadan Raman Vakil from Calicut on October 7, 1888. From 27 February, 1897 onwards Moorkkoth Kumaran was its editor. The Kerala Mahayana Sabha, Calicut, published from the Victoria press, a fortnightly, Manorama, in 1891. Sujananandini was started from Keralaabhushanam press, in Travancore, by Paravoor Kesavan Asan from Quilon in 1891. Udayavarma

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started *Genaranjini*, a literary magazine from Nadapuram in 1892. *Saraswathy* was published from Thalassery by Moorkkoth Kumaran. *Kerala Chinthamani* was a journal published from Thrissur under the management of Pallathu Ekkoran Krishnan in 1906. V.C. Balakrishna Panicker was the editor of *Kerala Chinthamani*. *Kavana Kaumudi*, a fortnightly, was published from Pandalam under the patronage of Pandalanth Kerala Varma Thampuran from 16th Nov. 1904. P.V. Krishna Varier published *Kavana Kaumudi* from Kottakkal in 1904. Another magazine of him, *Lakshmi Vilasm*, covered the economical affairs of the society.12 *Janmi*, monthly journal from Kottakkal was started in 1912 with Ramacha Nedungadi as the printer and publisher. In its first page they gave the caption: the only monthly that voices the problems of Janmis. Definitions of different land tax and land relations were formulated by janmi to protect the interest of the landlords.13

E.V. Ramanunnithan started a weekly, *Sree Vazhumcode*. When Dewan Watts introduced the press regulation, *Sree Vazhumcode* was released from Thankassery in Kollam. *Bhajee Keralam* was started in Ernakulam in 1921. M.Mathuni and Sankarathil Sankara Pillai launched *Bhaje Bharatham* from central Travancore. It was a political journal released from Chengannoor in Alappuzha. *Gomathy* was released in 1930 from Thrissur. It was printed from the *Vidhyavinodini* press, Thrissur and Kunnath Janardhana Menon was the founder

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13 *Janmi*, March, 1912.
M.M. Varkey started *Yuva Bharathi* on Nov. 12, 1934. Kauvelithara K.M. Chacli published the *Pauradhavani* from Kottayam from 1939 as a daily. Later on, he released *Paura Kahalam* from Trivandrum. Both journals supported the Travancore State Congress agitation. A.C. Kannan Nair released a handwritten magazine, *Sakthi*, from Kanhangad. He received the wholehearted support and assistance from another freedom-loving man, K.T. Kumaran Nambar. In September 1929, *Sakthi* was printed at A.V. Press, Cannanore, and circulated mainly in North Malabar. P.K. Deever started *Dharmakahalam*. Later on, in 1934, he started *Veerakesari* which was devoted to analytical articles on the political issues in Kerala. *Purasakthi* was started from Calicut by the National War Front. B.G. Varghese, Varghese Kalathil and K.A. Damodara Menon served as its editor on different occasions. *Panjajanyam* from Trissur covered the international issues in different manner. During the first part of the Second World War they set apart a lot of space for describing the news of the victory of Nazis.\(^\text{15}\)

*Kerala Bhushanam* was launched from Kottayam as a daily in 1944. K.K. Kuruvila was the founder-editor of the same. He published *Kerala Bhushanam* as a morning daily and *Kerala Dhwani* as an evening paper. Thangal Kunju Musaliyar started *Prabhatham* weekly from Quilon in 1944. It was converted into a daily. A Krishnan started *Express* from Thrissur in 1944. He was a nationalist and upheld socialist ideas throughout the journal. Kunnath Janardhana Menon

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\(^{15}\) *Panjajanyam*, 27\(^{th}\) February 1941.
was the founder editor. Chithradesam, published from Thiruvananthapuram, came out with a number of articles on reforms in administration.\footnote{Chithradesam, 2nd September 1953}

Meanwhile, joint stock Company named Malayala Manorama was established in 1888 at Kottayam. Malayala Manorama, one of the largest regional newspapers in the country started publication in the year 1890. It was the first private joint stock company of Kerala\footnote{Mathew, K.M. Ettamathe Mothiram, p.495, DC Books, Kottayam, 2009.}. Sir C P Ramaswamy Iyer imposed gag orders against Malayala Manorama; but it survived all such attempts and grew up in to one of the biggest media tycoons and business houses in the whole of India. Malayala manorama overtly reflected the interest of the emerging bourgeoisie of the Kerala society which constituted the capitalist farmers and the emerging business men. The newspaper was managed by the Kandathil family and the paper had close connections with the Orthodox Syrian Church from the days of its inception. Malayala Manorama Company also launched Bhashaposhini in 1897 as the official organ of Bhashaphoshini Sabha. Along with the paper, Malayala Manorama weekly was started in 1939. E.V.Krishna Pillai was in charge of the weekly.

Print Media Raising the Voices of the Various Communities

At the initial stages there were many journals and news papers who explicitly declared their goals of advancing the interests of their particular community. Their name itself reflected the nature and direction of their content. Nasrani Deepika was one among this category. Nasrani Deepika was first
published by St. Joseph’s press, Mannaanam near Kottayam, on April 15, 1887. Nidheerikkal Manikkathanar, was the founder editor of this newspaper. The paper continued to be published as a paper of the catholics of Kerala.  

*Mangalodhayam* was a monthly from Desamangalam Mana, one of the most well-known and influential Brahmin families in Malabar. Appan Thampuran and Kodungallor Kunhikuttan Thampuran took the initiative for it.  

Kainikara Govinda Pillai started a monthly, *Nair*, in 1902 and a daily *Subhashini*. Through this monthly *Nair*, he highlighted the customs and manners, cultural contributions and history of the Nairs in Kerala.

*Chandrika* started publication from Tellicherry as a weekly in 1934. It was the official organ of the Muslim League. T. Muhammed was the first editor. From 1939, it was changed into a daily under the editorship of K.K.Muhammemd Shafi. The newspaper was hostile to progressive movements. Vishnubhartheeyan remarks that the newspapers like *Chandrika*, used to publish articles ridiculing the peasant movement of the time.  

*Al Islah*, an Arabic Malayalam weekly, and *Al Irgad*, a monthly were released from Kondungallor during this time. Moidu Moulavy was the editor of the above journals. *Abhinava Buddhan* was a monthly published from Cherthala, Alappuzha by the Vela Maha Yogam, which comprised

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of the Velas, Thandan and Parayas of Cherthala, in 1922. *Abhinava Buddhyan* demanded the need for a political and social forum for the welfare of the communities.\(^\text{22}\)

**Promoter of Social Reform and National Struggle for Independence**

A large number of newspapers in Kerala were published with the aim of changing social realities and customs. Some of them were focusing on social reforms. Some others on political independence and freedom of the country. Many of these newspapers were started by community organisations or political formations. But several of them were started by individual journalists who were motivated by higher ideals and goals. Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam started a monthly, *Vivekodayam*, in April 1904 from Trivandrum. Kumaranasan, the great poet, was its editor. The monthly helped air the message of social reformation to its readers. It served to spread awareness about the activities and ideals of the Yogam among the masses and common people. *Vivekodayam* published articles supporting the fight against untouchability. In 1917, *Vivekodayam* carried an editorial by Kumaranasan supporting 'social feasting'.\(^\text{23}\)

On 19\(^\text{th}\) January 1905 *Swadeshbhimani*, a periodic journal, was started by Vakkom Abdulkhader Maulavi. *Swadesabhumani* was first published from Vakkom and later on shifted to Trivandrum. K.Ramakrishna Pillai assumed the


editorship of the paper on 17 January 1906. *Swadeshahimani* Ramakrishnapillai put up a brilliant fight against the autocracy of the Travancore monarchy. The attempts of *Swadeshahimani* to oppose the highhandedness of the Dewan resulted in the newspaper being banned and he himself had to face an exile from Travancore\(^{24}\). His deep interest in the life of Karl Marx prompted him to write the first biography of Karl Marx in any Indian language. Marxism could be said to have a great influence on deciding the political ideals which Pillai strived for. He also launched *Vidyarthi*, a magazine for students. *Malayali*, an official organ of the Malayali Social Reform League, was started under the editorship of Pottayil Raman Pillai Asan, in 1886 from Trivandrum, as a monthly.

*Kerala Kaumudi Weekly* was started in February, 1911, from the Suvarna Prakasam Press, Mayyanad in Kollam. The first editor of the paper was the poet Mulur S. Padmanabha Panikkar. *Kerala Kaumudi* was first shifted to Quilon and then to Trivandrum. It became a full-fledged daily in 1940 with C.V. Kunhiraman as the chief editor and his son K. Sukumaran as the managing editor. Kerala Kaumudi has played a formidable role in the social and political history of Kerala. *Deshabhiman* was started jointly by T.K.Madhavan and K.P.Kayyalakkal. The former was the manager and the latter, the co-manager. A noted writer and journalist, T.K.Narayanan, was the printer, publisher and the first editor of *Deshabhimani*.\(^{25}\) K. Ayyappan a graduate lawyer, who was closely associated


with Sree Narayana Guru and SNDP Yogam, published *Sahodaran*, a monthly, from Palliport in Paravur, in October, 1917. It was the organ of the Sahodara Prasthanam. K. Ayyappan launched *Velakkaran* from Cherayi in 1933. It was the organ of the Adi Vypin Thozhilali Sangham. Velakkaran was modeled after the British newspaper, *Daily Worker*. It was for the workers and its price was one fourth of an *Anna* and it came out three days in a week. Ayyappan also edited *Yuktivadi and sthree*.\(^{26}\) In Travancore, Barrister A.K. Pillai launched *Swarat*, a fortnightly in 1921 from Quilon. *Swarat* was the first full-fledged nationalist newspaper in Kerala\(^ {27} \).

*Mitavadi* by C Krishnan was one such newspaper which took a strong position against casteism and related issues. Sivasankaran and Moorkkoth Kumaran were associated with the launching of *Mitavadi* from the Vidyavilasam Press, Tellicherry in 1907. It supported the moderates of Congress led by Gopal Krishna Gokhale. *Mitavadi* has the distinction of publishing the poem *Veenapoovu* of Kumaran Asan. It should be noted that *Mitavadi* welcomed and supported the October Revolution of Russia and wrote an editorial about the Russian Revolution.\(^ {28} \) But at the same time C. Krishnan was criticised by the different sections of the society because of his stand regarding Mahatma Gandhi.\(^ {29} \)


Mathrubhumi was a nationalist newspaper which extended support to the National Movement of that time. It was started on 17th March 1923 and continues its interventions in Kerala society till this date. Mathrubhumi was one among the most prominent nationalist dailies of the time and it enjoyed widespread popularity. Mathrubhumi was published as a daily from 6th April 1930. K Kellapan was the editor at that time.

Mathrubhoomi covered news items of various activities and found space for the news items of agrarian problems and peasant movements. The formation of Kerala Socialist Party was reported by Mathrubhumi on June 11, 1934. Mathrubhumi carried the reports of the March held by peasants at Aluva under the banner of Karshakasangham led by Vishnubharatheeyan. Mathrubhumi carried the letter by Chandroth Kunhiraman Nair who urged that the peasants should undertake enough propaganda work through organizing agitations and passing resolutions in favour of the bill declaring a moratorium on debts. Mathrubhumi carried a report of the meeting of Abhinva Bharat Yuva Sangham of Karivelloor where the meeting was addressed by Vagbhatananda.

The speech made by P.M. Kunhiraman Nambiar at the Bakkalam conference was reported by Mathrubhumi. The speech went on thus: The freedom should be the freedom for the starving millions from poverty. The

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31 Ibid. p. 216.
32 Mathrubhumi, 9th October 1937.
33 Mathrubhumi, 15th December 1937
34 Mathrubhumi, 17th January 1939.
Congress should not stand for the interests of the higher class. The higher class can protect their interests even under the British rule\textsuperscript{35}. The news of the socialists Ashok Mehta and Massani resigning from CSP was reported by Mathrubhumi on 2\textsuperscript{nd} July 1939.

Mathrubhumi carried reports about the protests at various parts of Malabar. The police brutalities at Morazha after the 15\textsuperscript{th} September protests were reported by Mathrubhumi on 22\textsuperscript{nd} October, 1940, once Krishnapillai used his influence. It gave some respite to the police brutality in these regions\textsuperscript{36}. But the editorial about this incident was not favourable to the peasants. This reports vividly show their commitment to the right wing of the congress at that time.

On 21\textsuperscript{st} August, 1959, Mathrubhumi carried news of the parliament approving the presidential order of the dismissal of Kerala government on its first page. But on this page no space for the explanation of the communist party was given. The reports of Mathrubhumi during January 1970, was largely in favour of the ruling class. The paper on 29\textsuperscript{th} Jan. 1970, carried a report on the resolution of Swatantra party. It was given a prominent place and the headline was that the fixation of ceiling will ruin the country. The report carried the arguments of the Swatantra party that the attempt of the government to fix the ceiling will result in statism. The report goes on to say that it is the duty of the state to enable the farmers to increase production through more and more cultivation.

\textsuperscript{35} Mathrubhumi, 16\textsuperscript{th} May 1939.

\textsuperscript{36} Mohandas, P. Morazha (Mal.), p.57, Cultural Centre, Morazha, 1993.
On 9th February, 1970, the front page of *Mathrubhumi* carried news which was completely in favour of the government justifying the statements of Chief Minister and home minister. *Mathrubhumi* also published with great importance, the statement by T Narayanan Nambiar, who formed a new Samastha Kerala Bhoovudama Karshaka Sanghatana which argued that the ceiling limit will result in decline of production and giving one acre to each will not solve poverty.37 When the hutments built on the surplus land by the labourers and peasants were forcibly destroyed. *Mathrubhumi* reported the incident with explicit indifference to it or in a vein supporting the government. The struggle was depicted as an attempt by the Marxist party to capture the land for their favorites. The headline was: “Nearly a thousand ‘Marxist’ hutments dismantled by the police.” *Mathrubhumi* could not see the fact that those who occupied the land were poor landless labourers and peasants. While referring to the way in which *Mathrubhumi* responded to the workers strike, a report in *Prabhatam* notes that most of the newspapers took up a position which amounted to the strengthening of the positions adopted by the vested interests and the regime in power. Some of the major newspapers were trying to generate the confusion that the strike was induced by some Malabar diasporas and Bolsheviks.38

Newspapers like *Mathrubhumi*, though taking an anti British position were careful not to invite their wrath by lending open support to the movements of the peasants. Moreover, once it was clear that the peasants were being mobilized under the communist party; their neutrality was often betrayed by the distortion

38 *Prabhatam*, 7th November 1938.
they made while reporting the peasant agitations and their unwillingness to report
the repression unleashed by the police and authorities on the struggling
peasants. As stated by Achyuta Menon, “it was impossible for the revolutionary
workers of those times to keep a written record of their sojourn in jails after jails
and free periods in between two jail terms for almost half a century. If there are
bits and pieces of information available on this, that will be only from the old
annals of Mathrubhumi. But the reports of Mathrubhumi cannot be trusted as a
whole. When Bharatheeyan and others were Congress activists, Mathrubhumi
used to adopt a friendly approach to them; but later when they became left
Congressmen and Karshakasangham activists the newspaper used to adopt a
hostile attitude. So the reports in Mathrubhumi newspaper were often good only
to defame the history of Karshaka Sangham. Thus the only reliable source of
history of the peasant struggle is the memory of those who were part of these
struggles.”

The Congress leader Mohammed Abdul Rahman Sahib started publishing
Al-Ameen from 12 October, 1924 in Calicut. It was one of the prominent
newspapers of its time aiming for social reformation. When it became a daily in
1930, the printing press was confiscated by the government. In 1939 the
newspaper was again banned in the name of an editorial which was published in
the newspaper. After India achieved independence, the newspaper started

39 Menon, C. Achyutha. Introduction in Adimakalengane Utamakalayi, p.11, Prabhatham,
Thiruvananthapuram, 1980.

publication as an evening daily.\footnote{Thomas, M. V. Bharatheeya Pathra Charitram, p.194, State Institute of languages, Thiruvananthapuram, 2005.}

Amsi Narayana Pillai edited *Mahatma* from Trissur. P. Kesava Dev, a writer with a sharp pen, was also associated with the *Mahatma*. It was a newspaper which gave immense contributions to the struggle for independence. The presence of Amsi Narayananpillai and P Kesavadev equipped the newspaper intellectually. The *Bhaje Keralam* was started by Paliyathu Cheria Kunhuni Achan in Cochin as the organ of the Congress in Cochin. *Malayala Rajyam*, a nationalist weekly, was published by K.G.Sankar, a Congress youth leader, who gave up his studies to join the non-cooperation movement. Due to the resignation of Sankar his brother Parameswaran become the editor. He reversed the nationalist posture and the paper became supportive of the policies of the Dewan. This led the people to characterize this paper as C.P. Gazette’. *Malayalarajyam* was a newspaper which enjoyed widespread popularity in the Travancore region. It had great influence in the political sphere but it kept a leniency to the upper class. *Malayalarajyam* of 1957, December 22, carried the title that “the ruling party says the KARB is revolutionary, not enough revolutionary says opposition”\footnote{*Malayalarajyam*, 22 December 1957}.

T.R.Krishnaswami Aiyer published *Yuva Bharatham* weekly. *Yuva Bharatham* published a poem written by T.S. Thirumumbu, challenging the British paramountcy in India. The poem was titled, Kazhinja Dharmayudhathinte Oru Nireekshanam (A review of the finished Battle of Dharma). On 8\textsuperscript{th} November, 1931, T.R. Krishna Swami Iyer and T.Subramanian Thirumumbu were arrested.
under charges of sedition and they were sentenced to 9 months' rigorous imprisonment. Yogakshemam and Unninamboodiri was published from Thrissur by the sponsorship of Yogakshema Sabha. In those days, Kaahalam weekly used to be published from Farok by Vagbhatananda. It used to contain detailed articles about the Guruvayoor Temple entry Jatha and its necessity. The trumpet of this Kaahalam for justice, used to reverberate across Kerala. Vagbhatananda and Raghavan used to give good publicity to this paper.  

The Deenabandhu started publication on January 26, 1941 as a weekly from Thrissur. It was the official organ of the Cochin Prajamandalam and flashed the news and plans of the political movements in Cochin State. V.R.Krishnan Ezhuthachan was the editor of the same. The paper highlighted the Gandhian ideas and freedom struggle news. The Kerala Kesari was started by the freedom fighter, Mooyarathu Sankaran, from Vadakara in 1924. It published the news of the Vaikom Satyagraha, the Congress movements in Malabar, etc. Mooyarathu Sankaran was the editor of the same up to 1930. He had worked for the Englishman, a paper published from Calcutta. A.K. Kunhikrishan Nambiar edited Swabhimani which supported the Congress movement in Malabar. The Swanthanthra Bharatham was a another noted paper in this period and noted intellectuals, like S.K.Pottakad associated with this. Deepam, an illustrated weekly was edited by Thomas Paul from Ernakulam in 1931. Moorkoth Kumaran, Kunnath Janardhana Menon, T. Thomas, Thomas Cherian and others served as

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the editors. Deepam also had to suffer the displeasure of the Government. Vishnu Bharatheeyan says in his memoirs that he met the editor of Deepam News paper, Krishnan Kutty Nair in jail\(^45\).

**In Support of the Workers and Peasants: The Radicalization of Print Media.**

There were a number of newspapers who were actively supporting the struggles of the peasants and workers around them. These newspapers unlike many of their counterparts chose to adopt a different path. They adopted a radical path and they offered strength and support to the movements which were going on at that time. Kesari Balakrishnapillai was another shining name in the annals of progressive journalism in Kerala. He took radical positions in his newspaper and another noted journal, the *Samadarsi*, commenced publication from Kamalayalam Book Depot, Trivandrum, in 1918. They published various articles and editorials on Malabar tenancy and the Gandhian path of national movement\(^46\). A Balakrishna Pillai alias Kesari Balakrishna Pillai assumed the charge of the editor of the *Samadarsi* in May 1922\(^47\). Balakrishna Pillai joined as the editor only after getting an assurance for non-interference from any quarter in his editorial rights and responses. After four years, A Balakrishna Pillai started a new periodical, *Prabodhakan*, on July 4, 1930. A Balakrishna Pillai soon

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\(^{46}\) *Samadarshi*, 26\(^{th}\) Agust 1924.

launched the *Kesari*, another newspaper under his editorship on every Wednesday, from September 17, 1930.\(^\text{48}\)

*Thozhilali*, an organ of the Travancore coir workers union, spread the spirit of freedom for the nation through this reports\(^\text{49}\). It was banned by the government before one month when the first political strike of workers started in Travancore.\(^\text{50}\)

Anirudhan started *Visalakeralam* from Tiruvananthapuram, M.N.Kuruup also associated with the press. Other papers like *Navayugam* and *Viswakeralam*, from this same region also made great contribution to the society\(^\text{51}\). *Yuvakeralam* started from Kollam as an organ of Congress in 1946 with KK.Chelappan Pilla was the publisher in 1940s. It was inspired by *Iskra*, revolutionary news paper from Russia, and the paper tried to organise the people through the contact.\(^\text{52}\)

The newspaper *Navajeewan* was started on 21\(^\text{st}\) December 1953 in Thrissur as it was felt that there was a need for a newspaper which would advance the views of progressive ideology. Joseph Mundassery was its editor. It commanded considerable readership from leftist supporters\(^\text{53}\). The police and

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\(^\text{48}\) Thomas M V, Bharatheeya Pathra Charitram, p 192, State Institute of languages, Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram , 2005.


\(^\text{51}\) Govindapilla, P., Mulkray muthal Pavan Vare (Mal.), Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, p.111.

\(^\text{52}\) Puthuppaly Ragavan, Viplavasmarakal(Mal.),P.718, Vol. 1, Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society,Kottayam,2009

landlords fired at the peasant rally in Andhra, Navajeevan reported the demand by AKG for an emergency resolution in the Parliament. The newspaper gave good follow up to the event in a touching manner with news from Vijayawada and the slogans of the peasants movement became the headers. The news item registers the hope that all the regressive forces will be defeated before the popular upheaval. The Navalokam also strongly supported the tenants and workers for their right. Theeppori, started from Travoncore under the leadership of M N Govindan Nair and KC.George. Keralaboomi from Alapuzha was the organ of the district committee of CPI and it was started in 1957.

Janayugam has started publishing from Kollam from November, 1953. N Gopinathan Nair, Vaikom Chandrasekharan Nair, Kampisseri Karunakaran and Thengamam Balakrishnan were on the editorial board of the newspaper. The newspaper helped to advance the propaganda of the Communist Party in the Travancore region. Janayugom of 7th April, 1957, has reported the news of EMS Ministry’s accession of power and their future plans which includes the decision of the government to release political prisoners and to implement land reforms. On 12th April 1957, Janayugom, had the header that there is an ordinance preventing evictions. Janayugom describes this as a measure to give immediate...

54 Navajeevan, 14th December, 1954.
55 Navajeevan, 24th December, 1954.
59 Janayugom 7th April 1957
relief to the peasants. Janayugom on 4th April 1958, reported the speech of EMS at the rally of Karshakasangham where he exhorted that the peasants should intensify their fight to get the agrarian relation bills passed\textsuperscript{60}.

The Role of Print Media in Agrarian Question with Special Reference to

\textit{Prabhatham} and \textit{Deshabhimani}

Kerala witnessed the emergence of a large number of newspapers raising their voices for social change. Many of them actively assisted the social political movements of the time. The years from 1934 to 1971 marked a tumultuous period in the history of peasant movement in Kerala. It was the period of a long drawn out struggle starting from peasant agitation against the oppressive practices within landlordism which culminated in the legal abolition of landlordism in the state. It is impossible to make sense of this period without a perusal over the contribution of the print media in theses struggles. For the purposes of the study, we have taken two newspapers, \textit{Prabhatham} and \textit{Deshabhimani} and have done a survey of the nature of their content as intervened in various ways into the peasant struggles. \textit{Prabhatham} has been a consistent supporter of the peasant struggles and as noted earlier it was the organ of the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala. \textit{Deshabhimani} the organ of the communist party could be considered as the true successor of \textit{Prabhatham} and took its position of consistent support to the agrarian movement once \textit{Prabhatham} had to be closed down. We are attempting an in depth analysis of the nature of the interventions of \textit{Prabhatham}, and \textit{Deshabhimani}.

\textsuperscript{60} Janayugom 4th April 1958
**Prabhatham**

The Left leaning congress activists who later became flag bearers of CPI had started a newspaper as early as 1935 which was called *Prabhatham*. It was only natural for the political activists to start a newspaper in Kerala. But it has to be noted that they had to undergo immense hardships to publish a paper with a radical tone and tenor. The name *Prabhatham* itself was not a choice, though the name somehow suited an organ of a left movement striving for social change. In the era of press censorship and absence of guaranteed rights, it was next to impossible for the publishers to get a license in their name. So they bought a newspaper which was closed down due to loss and made it the organ of Congress Socialist Party in Kerala. The paper had to function under constant censorship and control. Within four months of its publication, EMS was summoned by the Collector of Malabar to warn him about the content of an article published in the newspaper. The publication of a poem written by Chovvara Parameswaran titled *Atmanadam* resulted in the displeasure of the government which subsequently imposed a hefty fine on it. The *Prabhatham* had to stop its functioning but it was a great experience for the Communists of that time. *Prabhatham* was the first attempt by the leftists to start a daily and reach out to the people in Kerala.

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62 Ibid.

The paper had to stop its functioning for almost two years due to the government repression. After the assumption of power by the Congress ministries its publication restarted in 1938. *Prabhatham* came at a time when Malabar was again getting into a rebellious mood after a short period of calmness. The exploitation by landlords and the British imperialists had reached its peak. The peasants were reeling under exploitation and they were getting organised into Sanghams. The working class were also getting organised and they started striking for more wages. The students across the country were also getting organised into their own organizations and most of them were anti-imperialist in spirit. Amidst all this *Prabhatham* came up, and published a series of articles on the developments of these mass movements.

*Prabhatham*, it though came out from Malabar, had wide contacts in Travancore and Cochin. It gave genuine attention to the developments in these parts and helped the mass movements of those parts to come up. Thus, as EMS Namboodiripad states in his book, *Prabhatham* became the ‘nucleus of an all-Kerala publication’. A content analysis of the news in *Prabhatham* for a period over two years would naturally see that most of the news was directly related to Kerala. It was quite natural as any newspaper intended for a Malayali readership and working as the organ of the Congress Socialist Party of Kerala would naturally have published news related to Kerala. But a close reading of

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64 *Prabhatham*. 31st October 1938.


66 Ibid. p.20.
*Prabhatham* brings out several differences from that of an ordinary newspaper. The newspaper was different in structure itself.

Most of the reports in *Prabhatham* were written under names like Appan, Karshakan, Mullan etc. which were most probably pseudonyms. A question answer series in the pen name of Surendran was published and was titled as *Njan Parayam* (Let me say). This column used to handle things of local importance to international significance. There were many other articles written under various pen names. There had been a compelling political background which made them adopt these tactics.

**The Structural Difference of Prabhatham with other Newspapers.**

**An Activist Role**

Unlike any other bourgeois media, *Prabhatham* used to play an active role as a catalyst for social change. It was openly political and declared its aim as embellished in its motto, “*Victory to revolution*”, loud and high. It had many features which distinguished it from an ordinary newspaper in its structure and content.

**Appeals and Requests by the Leaders**

*Prabhatham* had retained a close connection with those whose lives it sought to improve. So even at its nascent stage, *Prabhatham* served not just as an announcer of party decisions but also gave voice to its readers. *Prabhatham* used to publish complaints raised by the peasants and there was special column
for this.⁶⁷ Such complaints were later taken up by the CSP activists and used to be resolved⁶⁸.

The newspaper helped CSP to carry the message of its leaders to the masses. For example, the Prabhatham of 30th May 1938 contained the request of K Damodaran to assist the general strike of the working class. The importance of the struggle of the working class in Travancore and the repressive attitude of the state government were also explained. The technique applied by Hitler to burn the German Parliament building and putting the blame on the working class for it was adopted by the rulers of Travancore as well, he says.⁶⁹

The News exhorts the working class to be prepared for long drawn out struggle. The first page itself carries the request for helping the working class of Alappuzha. The request goes thus, “The 40000 labourers of Alappuzha who are fighting for a just cause through just means and it is the duty of everybody to assist them in their struggles. Especially the labourers and public should help the working class by organizing meetings in support of their cause and collect money for a collective fund to help them”⁷⁰. Prabhatham also formed a contribution scheme for assisting the strikers.

The appeal of the manager of the Prabhatham, A.K. Gopalan, is printed on the fourth page of the same. AKG appeals thus, “Prabhatham is not

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⁶⁷ Prabhatham, 30th May, 1938.
⁶⁸ Prabhatham, 13th June, 1938.
⁶⁹ Prabhatham, 31st October, 1938.
⁷⁰ Prabhatham, 30th May 1938.
requesting something strenuous from you. The agents of *Prabhatham* should submit the subscription amount regularly to the office. The Friends of *Prabhatham* should try to get at least one more person as the subscriber of *Prabhatham*. The first title of *Prabhatham*, Soviet Nadu should be sold and the amount should be sent to the office of *Prabhatham*. They should try their level best to collect advertisements for *Prabhatham*. If the Friends of *Prabhatham* are paying attention to these details, we will fulfill the promises made earlier about the reforms in *Prabhatham*\(^7\). It reveals the day to day contact maintained by *Prabhatham* with masses.

The approach of the *Prabhatham* towards capital accumulation and revenue collection is notable since it tries to ensure maximum public participation. One might say that they were making virtue out of compulsion but the fact that *Prabhatham* throughout its existence survived because of the support wholeheartedly extended to it by its readers make it different from other publications.

**Announcements of Programmes**

*Prabhatham* served the cause of announcing and dispensing information regarding the functioning of the Congress Socialist Party. On the fourth page of 31\(^{st}\) October, 1938, there is a request by K.A. Keraleeyan who was the general secretary of the Karshaka Sangham to observe 6\(^{th}\) November, 1938, as the Tenancy Reform day under the auspices of Karshaka Sangham by conducting *Jathas* and public meetings and highlight the demands of the peasantry. He said

\(^7\) *Prabhatham* 30\(^{th}\) May 1938.
that the committee will issue the copy of the resolution to be passed in the meetings. He requested the local units to send the reports of the meetings at an early date.\textsuperscript{72}

**Class Perspective**

It was a distinctive feature of *Prabhatham* that in addition to the other major news, special emphasis was given to the news items of the peasants and workers. It allocated separate pages for the news regarding the working class and the news related to the peasantry. It had reserved two pages exclusively for publishing the news related to the peasants titled *Karshaka Lokam*. This feature used to analyse the major agrarian problems and the peasant agitations that occurred across the country. The structure of the news paper demonstrated the political outlook of the publishers.

**Active Titles**

The headers of *Prabhatham* were not passive titles; on the other hand they were exhortations to the masses. The statement by Keraleeyan was published under the header, ‘the peasants of Malabar will definitely approach the government: ‘If not through Collector then through public opinion.’\textsuperscript{73}

**Giving Information about Agrarian Developments**

It contained articles which gives information about acts and bills. Whenever new bills and acts came up *Prabhatham* reported them in detail and

\textsuperscript{72} *Prabhatham*, 31\textsuperscript{st} October, 1938.

\textsuperscript{73} *Prabhatham*, 12\textsuperscript{th} December, 1938.
carried articles which could inform the peasants in detail about the Bills. For Example, *Prabhatham* carries an article about the Debt Conciliation Act which was passed in 1936 and which came into force by 1937. *Prabhatham* saw the act as giving some relief to the peasants. But it demanded that the conciliation board should be given more powers. It also served as a notice board for Karshaka Sangham to declare its demands and programmes. It reported the meetings in detail and tried to articulate the demands in a form which was friendly to the peasants.

The newspaper carried a report of the meeting presided over by T S Thirumumb where the decisions of the Akhila Malabar Karshaka Sangham regarding a march to the collectorate were announced.

1. By 2nd December there should be a memorandum submitted to the collector for immediate reform in tenancy laws.
2. It was decided that the procession will start from Karivellur in the north and Kanchikode in the south.
3. It was decided that each Sangham should make required preparations for the procession in each Taluk and it should be given widespread propaganda.

Another item is about the Jatha held by Sangham to Kurumathoor. The report is describing the march participated by 2000 people to Kurumathoor Nambuthirippadu. It was held against various revenue collections other than

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74 *Prabhatham*. 20th June 1938.
Vaaram like Sheelakash, thottkkala, Nattippanam, Mulluvila, tholpanam and the most oppressive of all Vaash.

The Jenmis asserted that “…..It is not usually collected, and he is unaware about the commission being collected by the Karyasthan and thottakkal was only voluntary and nattippanam, mulluvila, tholpanam etc. are employed to prevent the non peasants from exploiting it for private profit, Seelakash was for the preservation of forest and Varakkooli will not be collected from the peasants who are willing to do Varam ketti Alakkal and polu will only be collected as tax from the tenants…… and Vaash cannot be avoided as it is very costly to measure the Vaaram output.”

The peasants declared that if the Jenmi is not avoiding Vaash, they will not give the Vaaram without consulting the Sangham. The above news is an illustration of an important function which Prabhatham performed; giving confidence to the peasants all over the province by narrating the experiences of other Sanghams. The report discusses the determination of the peasants of a particular place not to pay the rent without consulting the Sangham. It also gives us a very crucial insight regarding the growth of Karshaka Sangham as well its localized nature. Each Sangham took decisions, on the basis of the local conditions it experienced. The role of Prabhatham was to create role models for the Sangham by its adept reporting. It enthusiastically reported the incidents of

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75 Prabhatham, 31st October, 1938.
76 Prabhatham, 31st October 1938.
valour, courage, unity and firm belief in the strength of the collectivity expressed by the peasants.

The other news item is about the meeting of Karshaka Sangham held at Peelikode on 10th October 1938, presided by KA Keraleeyan. The meeting decided to march to the Collector of Karnataka to submit a memorandum for the immediate amendment of the tenancy legislation. It was directed that each Karshakasangham should have 3 representatives each in the march and that they should keep at least 2-3 rupees for expenditure77.

The other report is about the Karshaka Jatha to Koothali Thazhat. The Jatha demanded the immediate withdrawal of Vaash, Nuri, Nellu Ayappikal, vaarapolu, maram murikkal, Purappadinu purame Vaaram, Chittu vilakku, Thirumulkkazha, karamavirudha paattam, and Kooliyilla pani (forced labour). It was also demanded that Vaaram should be measured using proper standards and to exempt the children of the school from fees. More than 4000 peasants were part of the march. The Jenmi declared that all the revenues exacted beyond the Marupattom will be exempted.

The news which follows is that of the meeting of the Kasaragod Taluk Karshaka Sangham. Next news is about the meeting of the Karshaka Sangham held near Olayambalam, Thalassery Taluk. The report speaks about the march held to Kottayam Kovilakam on the 18th December 1937, but the landlord refusing to accept any of the demands. A resolution was passed to send a

77 Prabhatham. 31st October, 1938.
delegation to submit a memorandum once more elaborating the demands of the peasants.

1. There has been economic depression and deflation for a long time. So the Purappad recorded at Marupattom cannot be paid, so there should be 50% concession on all Purappadu.

2.
   a) Measuring should be according to laws.
   b) Hundred for Varaser should be changed into Hundred for Mudraser.
   c) The standard Mudra ser should stay and whatever has increased should be removed.
   d) If the Vaaram is collected as money, it should be calculated on the basis of the market price of paddy of that particular period.
   e) When there are natural disasters and destruction of crops, grant total concession to Varam and Pattom
   f) The vechukanal of Onam and Vishu and the extraction of extra revenue from tenants for various purposes should be stopped.
   g) Alavukooli which is not a part of the agreement Marupattom, but still extracted should be summarily stopped.
   h) Oppupanam should be given back.

The next resolution was congratulating the working force of Alappuzha on their general strike and opposing the war and federation. Prabhatam reports the decision to form the reception committee for the Akhila Malabar
Karshakasangham conference to be held at Kunduparambil. The report elucidates the proceedings of the meeting. It can be understood that they paid so much importance to organize the workers and peasants\textsuperscript{78}. Prabhatham reports the formation of Karshaka Sangham at various parts like Kandakai, Andol, Puliyannor, Keezhmala of Karinthalam village\textsuperscript{79}.

There are also reports about the meetings for public campaign. The meeting at Kamballoor was addressed by T.S. Titrumunpu\textsuperscript{80}. It warned the peasants about the malpractices of the Jenmi and his middlemen. The fight of the Karshaka Sangham was two folded. On the one hand, it was fighting a strong battle for social transformation where it dreamt of a world free of landlordism completely. But before this, it had to conduct a struggle for the immediate reliefs within the system. Thus the corrupt practices of the middlemen and the Jenmis had to be fought with. Prabhatham employed its skills in this regard too.

So the next news item reveals the illegal practices which the middle men indulged in. It was reported by Kollachery Karshaka Sangham to Chirakkal Taluk Karshaka Sangham, that K.N. Kammaran Nayar, the Karyasthan of Chirakkal Kovilakam came with the old measuring standards of Para and Kol and threatened the peasants that he will not leave the Vaash and Vaarakooli of the year and will not leave the Polu of last year. In case the peasants become defaulters he threatened them with legal action.

\textsuperscript{78} Prabhatham, 14\textsuperscript{th} November 1938.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
There is a news which reports the formation of new Sanghams in Aaralam, Thillankeri, Pazhassi, Pattanoor, Kunnoth, Muzhappilangadu, Eriyam, Keezhoor of Kottayam Taluk. The news of the formation of Karshaka Sanghams in one place and its reporting in press gave great enthusiasm to the peasantry of the time. The names and details of the leaders published in the press helped them to be known among the activists of the Sangham at various places and helped them to approach the leaders with their day to day problems. From 8th to 23rd October 1938, a group of Congress volunteers conducted a propaganda march in Kurumbranadu Taluk where they have conducted around 35 public meetings which were attended by 25,000 people. According to Prabhatham, it has helped to create awareness about the exploitation among the peasantry in the remote areas\textsuperscript{81}.

Apart from the malpractices within the system, the Jenmis who enjoyed high ritual status and economic power indulged many repressions whenever they felt even a slight offence to their untrammelled exercise of power. Prabhatham carried news reflecting the multiple dimensions of the oppression unleashed by the landlords on the peasants. Panappuzha Amsam Menavan tried to disrupt the normal life of the peasantry by removing the bridge through which they used to access the river. The provocation was the organization of the peasants into sanghams arguing for their rights\textsuperscript{82}. These incidents show that landlordism and its oppression was not simply an economic struggle. The unbridled power enjoyed by the Jenmis helped them in extracting more from the peasantry and

\textsuperscript{81} Prabhatham, 7\textsuperscript{th} November, 1938.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
the increased surplus extraction and augmented economic power further accentuated their political clout. As the Jenmis belonged to the higher caste, it also resulted in the strengthening of caste oppression. EMS has famously formulated this as the *Jati Jenmi Naduvazhi medhavitham* as the privileged social economic and political position complementing each other and giving untrammelled power to the landlord and giving extreme oppression to the peasant.

The celebration of *Karshaka Dinam* (Peasant’s Day), was the best occasion to spread the slogans of Karshaka Sangham. These celebrations witnessed the passing of resolutions seeking solutions to the agrarian problem. The meetings also became a venue for artistic performances including songs set in folk tunes, plays, *Kathaprasangams*

83 Cheruvathoor, Alanthatta, Chunkathara, Udinoor, Kayyur and other places witnessed the celebration of *Karshaka Dinam* and were assiduously reported by *Prabhatham*.

Akhila Malabar Karshaka Sangham has initiated a campaign among the peasants of Malabar for the amendment of Malabar Tenancy Act. One of the demands was the inclusion of Kasaragod Taluk in South Canara district under the purview of the Act. There was a strong demand for the inclusion of *Punam* cultivation and pepper estates under the Act. There was a strong demand for reconstituting the *Maryada pattam* in favour of the rice cultivators. It was demanded that the requirement to pay *Pattom*, one year in advance to avail the fixed tenancy should be abolished.

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83 A form of dramatic story telling where the content is mixed form of prose and poetry.
The provision for the eviction of the tenants in case of the requirement for construction of the building should also be abolished. The abolition of ‘Polichezhuthu’ also constituted one of the strongest demands. Prabhatham provides reports about the various meetings of the Karshaka Sangham held at various parts of Chirakkal. The concessions made by the Chirakkal Raja and Vengayil Nayanar and the adversarial attitude of the Kurumathoor Nambuthirippadu and Karakkattidam Nayanar were discussed in the meetings. Such regular follow up of the struggle of Karshaka Sangham which helps us to reconstruct its history, has served the crucial purpose of moulding the movement itself. So inevitably the struggle against landlordism as an economic system could not advance without addressing social and political aspects. So Prabhatham played a crucial role in advancing this awareness.

**Highlighting the Importance of Organised Collective Action**

Some of the news reporting served the purpose of inspiring the farmers about what can be achieved by Collective action. The following story narrates how the farmers reconstructed the check-dam themselves. Farmers belonging to the villages of Bakkalam, Morazha, Kallysseri and Ellerinji had gone to meet their landlord Karakkattidam Chanthukkuty Nayanar. The rally approached Nayanar’s house and the leaders of the Karshaka Sanghams met the land lord and put their demands before him. The landlord refused to accept their demands and the angry peasants passed resolutions against the various excesses committed by

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84 Prabhatham, 14th November, 1938.

85 Polichezhuth referred to the right of the Jenmi to reconstitute the lease once in every twelve years. See Prabhatham, 14th November, 1938.
the landlord on the activists of Karshaka Sangham. The resolutions included the protest against the goons of Kallyat Jenmi pelting stones at Vishnu Bharatheeyan, the act of beating up a child for singing the *Karshaka Ganam*, the attempt by the *Jenmi* to defame the Karshaka Sangham activists by making an old woman file complaints of rape against the Karshaka Sangham activists. The Nayanar refused to repair the check dam which had collapsed due to the refusal of the Karshaka Sangham to pay him respects in the form of vegetables and other things. The peasants under the leadership of the Sangham reconstructed it in three days. This was an incident inspiring the peasants and should what the daring peasants could achieve through Sangham and collective actions and self reliance.

*Prabhatham* carries an elaborated article protesting the physical assault of Vishnu Bharatheeyan by the goons of Kallyat Yejamanan. The plight of the peasants and the predicament of the Karshaka Sangham activists who tried to mobilize them are elaborated in these pages. “The oppression experienced by the peasants from the landlords is beyond words. The establishment of the Karshakasangham enlightened them and they started their saga of struggles to achieve their rights through the Sangham. The Jenmis were angered by the realization that the farmers can no longer be controlled like ‘hounds’ and they cannot be retained as their puppets and the cruelties unleashed under the cover of the law of the land could not be sustained for long. Provoked by this realization they started employing various devious tactics to counter the activities of

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86 *Prabhatham*, 14th November 1938.

87 Ibid.
Karshaka Sangham. They tried to torture those who were active in the Sangham and those who were the poorest among the peasantry but the famers paid scant respect to them and continued to be the fore-front of agitation\textsuperscript{88}. This was an exhortation to the peasants for resisting the tactics of Jenmis and an early warning to the challenges that await them. It cannot be missed that Prabhatham correctly identifies the support extended by the law of the land to the oppressive Jenmis. The struggle has to be against the system that produces such laws and supports the Jenmis. So the peasant while struggling against landlordism, has to harvest political power, and then his crop as sung by Edassery Govindan Nair.

**Generating a Secular Discourse**

Secularism and a class perspective was an enduring quality of the discourse generated by Prabhatham. The Jenmis often employed the tactics of making the peasants clash among themselves at many places in Malabar. Some peasants used to act as the goons of the local Jenmi for getting his favour. The slogans and agenda of the Karshaka Sangham, if achieved, would have improved their lives as well, still these peasants failed to recognize this. In Kadumkotta of the Randam Gramam of Cheruvathoor, the Karshaka Sangham meeting was subjected to physical attack by a group of Muslims who supported the Jenmis. Prabhatham writes, “Among Muslims too, there are poor people to the tune of Lakhs. There are those who are hungry even after working hard. There are those who are suffocated by the stress of poverty and hunger. It should never be the case that common Muslim masses should have any hatred

\textsuperscript{88} Prabhatham, 14\textsuperscript{th} November, 1938.
towards the Karshaka Sangham. The ideal of our organisation is to have a society where everybody could live without poverty and starvation………. But it was the poor among the Muslims themselves, who assaulted the poor peasants who were attending the meeting. They have no spite or hatred among them……. Do the downtrodden among the Muslims have any advantage by executing the diktats of these richer classes?”

The question was crucial in the context of the divide and rule policy adopted by the landed gentry and the colonial masters in power. A strong class movement can come up only in a society where strong communal harmony prevails. Any attempt to violate this had to be vigilantly resisted.

Critical Review of the Nationalist Movement

The *Prabhatham* of 5th December 1938, carried an Editorial on the report of the committee to study the Madras Estate Land Act. It went like this “The farmers of the state are of the opinion that the Zamindari system should be abolished and they are fighting with that objective and resolve. The Congress is also increasingly accepting that demand. This system has to go in the near future if not immediately. The farmers have that firm resolve. But that is not the content of the report. The objective of this bill is very limited and lesser. This bill only abolishes one of injustices practiced under a moribund system which will and should come to an end without much delay. What is required is to make at least

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89 *Prabhatham*, 21st November, 1938.

this into a law which is practical with necessary amendments. The struggle for that is the struggle for Independence. The Congress should never retreat from this struggle”. But *Prabhatham* registers its disappointment over the approach of the Congress government on Malabar Tenancy Legislation⁹¹.

On 5ᵗʰ December, 1938, KPCC working committee requested all Congress activists to make the *Jatha*, which was coming to Kozhikode, a big success⁹². The Dec. 19 *Prabhatham* was full of the news regarding the Chevayoor Karshaka Jatha. The editorial titled “*The Chevayoor which is going to make history*”⁹³. In fact on a closer perusal we could see that *Prabhatham* played a very significant role in making that history.

*Prabhatham* reports the Karshaka *Jatha* of Kasaragod Taluk thus, ‘We are receiving reports about the successful advance of the *Jatha*. It is notable that the congress activists are welcoming the *Jatha* along its route. Another factor is the unprecedented support extended by the Muslim peasants. Though the rumour mongering by the anti farmer forces that the *Jatha* was against Muslim interest, the initial misconceptions of the community were removed once they listened to the explication of the real goals of the Jatha members’. Jatha proved the success of the Karshaka Sangham in protecting communal harmony by raising the issues of poverty and other economic issues, thus bringing a unity among the under privileged, across various communities⁹⁴.

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⁹¹ *Prabhatham*, 5ᵗʰ December, 1938.
⁹² *Prabhatham*, 12ᵗʰ December, 1938.
⁹³ *Prabhatham*, 19ᵗʰ December, 1938.
⁹⁴ *Prabhatham*, 12ᵗʰ December, 1938.
Thillankeri in Kannur was one among the regions where agrarian movement was active from the 1940s itself. Prabhatham reports that 1938 December 4 witnessed a public meeting with more than 3000 peasants participating in it. The meeting passed resolutions protesting the police repression and the nefarious activities of the vested interests against the Karshaka Sangham. Prabhatham reports that Karivelloor also had a peasant movement not weaker than other parts of Malabar. The reception accorded to the Karshaka Jatha was notable by the participation of the masses in huge numbers. The members from all the 70 units reached Karivelloor on that day. The participants of the rally were greeted by the Welcome Song of the children. Thillankeri, Mundakkatukurssi, Vadanamkurussi, Eruvassi, Pilikkode, Perunthatta, Vellinezhi Kalappilli, Payyannoor and Karivelloor had active Karshakasangham units. Kalpathur, Mattannur and Cheemeni also had active units of the sangham.

The editorial of Prabhatham was on the experience of the second Akhila Malabar Karshaka Sammelan on 18\textsuperscript{th} December, 1938. It considers the success of Akhila Malabar Karshaka Sammelanam as the proof of the awakening of the peasants of Malabar. The awakening of the peasants is part of the general awakening of the public at large. The farmers alone cannot remain aloof from that. “As the sufferers of similar social oppression, the spirit of the unity of

95 Prabhatham, 19\textsuperscript{th} December 1938.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 Prabhatham, 27\textsuperscript{th} February, 1939.
working class and peasantry was shown by the working class of Kannur and Kozhikode. The recognition that the struggle for the rights of the peasants is part and parcel of the larger struggle for independence and civil rights informed the warm reception accorded to the Jatha by the Congress committees, Student organizations, Youth organisation and the Vayana Shalas." 99 (The reading rooms and libraries were a strong tool for political mobilization of the masses in Kerala)100. The participation of the KPCC President in the rally and his assertion that congress has no other message but an exhortation that the workers and peasants should come forward and struggle for their rights and the fact that Mathrubhumi has shown a bit of lenience by writing an editorial, is a proof to the fact that all sections of the Congress have rallied behind this struggle for peasant rights.101 The Jatha members who came back to Kannur were accorded a warm reception and KA Keraleeyan, T S Thirumunp, A.V. Kunhambu and E.P. Gopalan have sung poems.102

The second Akhila Malabar Karshaka Sammelanam has passed several resolutions for the immediate demands of the peasants. The meeting demanded the amendments to the Malabar Tenancy Bill and it was urged that there should be reforms in the way rent is collected. The practice of Japthi (appropriation), which was applied when the Jenmi did not pay the rent to the government, was

99 The reading rooms and libraries were strong tools for political mobilization of the masses in Kerala.


101 Prabhatham, 26th December, 1938.

102 Ibid.
also source of discontent for the peasant. The *Sammelanam* also requested the government to reduce Pattom and rent in respect of the reduced rainfall that year.\textsuperscript{103}

The peasants of Malabar had to face a spate of false cases instituted upon them by the landlords in order to make them withdraw from activism. The peasants were unable to fight these cases in the courts. In this context, *Prabhatham* published a request issued by K A. Keraleeyan to the public where he explained that the peasants who questioned the illegal practices of the Jenmis had to face severe oppressive tactics by the landlords. The Jenmis used to file cases in the name of the tenants on false allegations and they used to be summoned by the court. Keraleeyan demanded that the farmers who were unaware of the court proceedings were in need of help and there was a need to form a defense committee to defend the peasant interests in the court\textsuperscript{104}. *Prabhatham* published the memorandum submitted by the peasants to T Prakasam while many other newspapers chose to be silent on it.\textsuperscript{105} *Prabhatham* took a firm stance against the attempts of the District collector and other officials to suppress the democratic rights of the peasants.\textsuperscript{106}

P. Narayanan nair, the president of Malabar Karshaka Sangham writes about the troubles faced by the Karshaka Sangham, “The reason for the disturbances of the peasantry is the unlimited power enjoyed by the Jenmis. The

\textsuperscript{103} *Prabhatham*, 26\textsuperscript{th} December, 1938.

\textsuperscript{104} *Prabhatham*, 2\textsuperscript{nd} January, 1939.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
Jenmis are employing the state machinery to repress the peasantry. There are new police stations which have come up at various parts and the CID's are employed more and more. The offices of the Karshaka Sangham are under routine checkups. At many places, the Jenmis are the Adhikaris which means the landlord and the tax collector merged into one. This creates unrestricted power for the Jenmi to practice corruption. There is a clear case of collective physical attacks on the socialists.¹⁰⁷ The ordinary peasant has to bear with the violence unleashed by the goons of Jenmis and the Karshaka Sangham was considering the prospect of setting up of small volunteer committees. He denies the allegation that the Karshaka Sangham employs the out casting as a pressure tactics and he says that it is the weapon in the hands of the landlordism and not of Karshaka Sangham.

*Prabhatam* carries the statement of Vishnu Bharatheeyan which asserts that Congress belongs to the peasants. It becomes relevant in the backdrop of the attempt by the Jenmis to spread canards that the Karshaka Sangham is against the Congress. Bharatheeyan asserts that the majority of the members of the Congress are peasants and the Sangham is willing to work according to the directives of Congress. The fact that the majority won by the Congress in all segments except that of landlords is the result of the popular support it can claim.¹⁰⁸

Karshaka Sanghams activists had to suffer, many police cases.

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¹⁰⁷ *Prabhatam*, 9th January, 1939.

¹⁰⁸ *Prabhatam*, 16th January, 1939.
Prabhatham gives us a picture of the cases faced by them. The article attracts the attention of the readers to the cases faced by the Karshaka Sangham and requests their help for the formation of a defense committee as stated by Keraleeyan.\(^{109}\)

The Karshaka Mahasammelanam of Kodakkattu witnessed the participation of 15,000 peasants. It is reported as stated by a peasant that except a big land lord of the village, all others have rendered great support to the organisation of the conference. The two poles raised in the location of the conference had the national flag and the red flag flying atop. The president was welcomed by a large number of women and their participation were at an unprecedented level. Mrs. T S Thirumunpu and other women leaders had taken sincere efforts to organise the women.\(^{110}\)

Prabhatham reports the refusal of the Tahsildar of Kottayam to receive complaints submitted by the Karshakasangham. He was of the opinion that he can receive complaints either from the Jenmis or from individual peasants but not from the Sangham\(^ {111}\).

Building Linkages with Other Sections of the Struggling Masses

One of the most significant aspects of the work of the Prabhatham is its emphasis on building up worker peasant unity. As we have earlier observed the

\(^{109}\) Prabhatham, 16\(^{th}\) January, 1939.


\(^{111}\) Prabhatham, 30\(^{th}\) January,1939.
Jati- Jenmi -Naduvazhi Medhavitham was distinguished by its pervasive influence and power in economic social and political spheres. So the fight against landlordism can succeed only if it is challenged from all spheres. And throwing up this challenge is no small goal and it requires the widest possible unity across the section in the society. The constant attempt of Prabhatham was to construct this unity. Prabhatham in its discourses always strived to promote the cause of unity of working class and peasantry.

The Prabhatham of 5th Sept.1938 reports the strike of the agricultural labourers for increased wages and other demands. Notable is the support extended to the struggle by the Karshaka Sangham, thus reinforcing the peasant and agricultural workers unity against the land lord.\(^{112}\) Prabhatham of that week contained the request of K Damodaran to assist the general strike of the working class. The importance of the struggle of the working class in Travancore and the repressive attitude of the state government were also explained. The request by the strike committee was also published in the same volume. The crisis into which the October 21 strike of the working class of Alleppey was moving was clearly illustrated by this volume. The request also make note of the fact that there has been a police firing on October, 24 and four labourers lost their lives and more than 300 were injured.\(^{113}\) The request also announces the decision of the boatmen to continue their tenday long strike. \(^{114}\)

\(^{112}\) Prabhatham. 5th September, 1938.

\(^{113}\) Ibid.

\(^{114}\) Ibid.
News exhorts the working class to be prepared for long drawn out struggle. The first page itself carries the request for helping the working class of Alappuzha. The request goes thus “The 40000 labourers of Alappuzha, who are fighting for a just cause through just means and it is the duty of everybody to assist them in their struggles. Especially the labourers and public should help the working class by organizing meetings in support of their cause and collect money for a collective fund to help them”. *Prabhatham* also formed a contribution scheme for assisting the strikers.

News is that the workers are assisting the striking workers of Calicut. The news reports the meeting held by the workers of Calicut in solidarity to the striking workers of Alappuzha. ‘*Bloody day in Travancore*’\(^{115}\) was the editorial which demanded the abolition of the draconian changes brought in Criminal Legislation and Press control act and thus to bring in complete civil liberties. It also demanded the immediate resolution of the problems of the peasantry and the working class and it urged the Maharaja of Travancore to take immediate action in this regard. There was a detailed article published on the worker’s struggle in Alappuzha\(^{116}\). It elaborates the hardships faced by the labourers who are employed in hotels and factories. It also elucidates the trouble faced by the labourers involved in weaving and other crafts.

*Prabhatham* carried the news of the decision of the Youth League to participate and make the strike successful. It has been reported that Youth

\(^{115}\) *Prabhatham*. 7\(^{th}\) November, 1938.

\(^{116}\) Ibid.
League workers, G.Sreedhar and A.K.Gopalan participated in the public meeting there.\textsuperscript{117}

*Prabhatham* reports the end of the strike and it carries a statement by the factory owners association that they ‘have conceded to the demands of the labour only because of their earnest desire in resolving the problems of the country and for maintaining peaceful atmosphere and they wanted to make it clear that they have not conceded due to the method of strike adopted by the working class’.\textsuperscript{118}

*Prabhatham* reports the formation of Choodi Thozhilali Union (Coir Workers Union) under the leadership of NC Sekhar at Kozhikode. Their immediate demands were declared in the meeting.\textsuperscript{119} 1938, November, 10, witnessed the formation of the Eercha Thozhilali Union (Saw Mill Workers Union) of Kallayi under the initiative of N.C. Sekhar.\textsuperscript{120} *Prabhatham* reports the meeting of Kannur Beedi Workers Union to discuss its fourth annual conference.\textsuperscript{121} Chirakkal Taluk Vidyarthi Union presided by E.K. Nayanar, discussed the attempts by the local school head master to oust the students who were active in the union and about the withdrawal of scholarships.\textsuperscript{122}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{117} *Prabhatham*. 14\textsuperscript{th} November, 1938.

\textsuperscript{118} *Prabhatham*. 21\textsuperscript{st} November, 1938.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
A meeting of the Peetikathozhilali union, (Shop Assistants Association) was held at Kozhikode and they submitted a memorandum to V.V.Giri raising their immediate demands.\textsuperscript{123} Under the leadership of N.C. Sekhar, there was a meeting of the Kadal Thozhilali Union on the sea shore and the need for making the Karshaka Jatha which was marching to Kozhikode a big success was explained in this meeting, demonstrating the attempt to construct a larger struggle for social change. There was a strong association of weavers in Chirakkal Taluk. They used to convene meetings and used to engage in discussions regarding contemporary issues. The meeting which was held at a paddy field near the Raja’s High School dealt with various issues, not limiting to their own particular interests.\textsuperscript{124}

The Travancore Coir Factory Union was active from the 1930s itself. There were many Beedi workers unions at the local level. One of the strongest Beedi workers unions was that of Thalassery. The Karinkal Thozhilali Union and Forest Workers Union were also functioning actively.\textsuperscript{125} The functioning of Railway Workers Union was also started in this period at Kozhikode and Pothannoor.\textsuperscript{126}

Malabar Aided Elementary Teacher’s Union was quite strong in Malabar. It aimed at expanding its membership into all areas of Malabar. \textit{Prabhatam} reports that some of the committee members were directed to enquire into the

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Prabhatam}. 21\textsuperscript{st} November, 1938.
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Prabhatam}. 19\textsuperscript{th} December, 1938.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Prabhatam}. 2\textsuperscript{nd} January, 1939.
\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Prabhatam}. 9\textsuperscript{th} January, 1939.
matter of the manager in Kalpakamcheri, making the teachers forcibly sign on the salary register without giving them full wages\textsuperscript{127}. The teachers were in the forefront of organizing the libraries and reading rooms thus generating the political awareness among the masses. They educated the masses on how to deal with the day to day problems in life while addressing them in broader ideological perspective. A significant section of them were in the forefront spreading the socialist literature among them. Because of that there was a rare unity between the movements of the teachers and the peasants. So the teacher’s union activists were persecuted by the authorities and police. It was in this context that the Hosur Taluk Aided Teachers Union in its letter to the District Collector asserted that they could not remain aloof from the legally functioning democratic movements of the peasants and other oppressed sections\textsuperscript{128}.

The Bala Bharatha Sangham of Karivellur gave a lot of assistance to the Karshaka Sangham. It was a movement of the children. The organisation helped the Karshaka Sangham in spreading the information regarding the activities of the Sangham across the village. This was of crucial importance as the modern means of communication were yet to reach the masses at that point\textsuperscript{129}. Bala Bharatha Sangham had more than 11 branches with around 500 members. The orderly foot march of these children would arouse anybody’s interest. There was a meeting presided by P Krishna Pillai.\textsuperscript{130} Abhinava Bharatha Yuva Sangham, is

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{127}] \textit{Prabhatham}. 21\textsuperscript{st} November, 1938.
  \item[\textsuperscript{128}] \textit{Prabhatham}. 2\textsuperscript{nd} January, 1939.
  \item[\textsuperscript{129}] \textit{Prabhatham}. 19\textsuperscript{th} December, 1938.
  \item[\textsuperscript{130}] \textit{Prabhatham}. 16\textsuperscript{th} January, 1939.
\end{itemize}
at the forefront of the struggle for Karshaka Sangham. The organisation had more than 800 members led by A V Kunhambu, the great peasant leader\textsuperscript{131}. On 17\textsuperscript{th} Nov. 1938, K Damodaran who was returning to Travancore was arrested by the police at Thiruvananthapuram. He was detained to prevent him from participating and delivering any speeches at the meeting of the Youth League\textsuperscript{132}.

The report of the *Prabatham* also gave the information on Adimathozhilali Sanghatana,\textsuperscript{133} (The association of agrestic slaves) and their activities. It was formed at the instance of Karshaka Sangham in Chirakkal taluk. The agrestic slave laborers joined the organisation and a working committee was formed\textsuperscript{134}.

The Organisation of Agricultural Labourers who were in the status of agricultural slaves was a notable initiative by the Sangham. The readiness of the farmers to take initiative to organize the agricultural labourers on the one hand shows the need for widest possible unity against the power of *Jenmis*, but on the other hand shows a transformative vision which has imbued the movement. We would argue that *Prabhatham* had a very significant role in generating this ambience. *Prabhatham* actively supported the attempts of social reform; under an activist headline, that ‘the temple entry bill should not be stopped’ *Prabhatham* reports that a delegation of Kshetra Raksha Committee approached the Madras

\textsuperscript{131} *Prabhatham*. 16\textsuperscript{th} January, 1939.

\textsuperscript{132} *Prabhatham*. 21\textsuperscript{st} November, 1938.

\textsuperscript{133} The agrestic slaves were those who were sold by *Jenmis* to others for forced labour and they generally belongs to castes like Vettuvar, Maavilar and Karpalalar. See, *Prabhatham*. 14\textsuperscript{th} November, 1938.

\textsuperscript{134} *Prabhatham*. 14\textsuperscript{th} November, 1938.
Prime Minister Rajagopalachari, demanding that the passing of ‘Kshetra Pravesana Bill’ (Temple Entry Bill) should be delayed\footnote{Prabhatam. 21\textsuperscript{st} November, 1938.}.

It can be seen that the \textit{Prabhatham} carried the details about the unionization happening among workers of various industries, teachers and others. It also noticed the organisation of students and youth and most importantly it never missed to emphasize their role in advancing the cause of the peasantry by assisting their struggles.

**Imparting a National Perspective**

The times of \textit{Prabhatham} were also the period when India was striving for political independence. The peasant movement of Malabar had its counterparts across the country. There were strong peasants’ movements in what is now UP, Bihar, Gujarat and Maharashtra. The struggle was there across the country including principalities and British provinces. \textit{Prabhattam} could not ignore these developments as it was the organ of a movement committed for a larger social transformation. The fight against colonialism required the unity of the peasants across the country and \textit{Prabhatham} carried news reports about the various struggles undertaken by the peasants. The attitude of the congress and other parties to the peasant movement was also critically analysed. The stories of repression faced by the peasants in Principalities were reported with great importance. Thus the reports of \textit{Prabhatham} served the cause of enlightening the peasants that their struggle was part of a larger struggle launched all over India.
Some examples of such reporting are given below. Here is a news under the header that, 'Farmers are settling accounts and the landlords are bowing their heads', which reports the agrarian struggle of Gujarat\textsuperscript{136}. The success of the peasant struggles of Mansa in Punjab is reported with great enthusiasm by \textit{Prabhatham}. The terms of settlement were very favourable to the peasants of Mansa\textsuperscript{137}. The reports announce the victory of the peasants in front of landlordism and the news of such victories enthused the peasants of Kerala to continue their fight with determination.

The peasants of Sohawal, in present day Rajasthan, had decided not to pay the taxes due to the excesses of the landlord. Even though they registered their complaints to the king there was no response. Thus the peasants started a no tax campaign. It is reported that the authorities had invited the Gorkha militia to suppress the struggle\textsuperscript{138}. The news item bears close resemblance to what the peasants had to experience later in Kerala. The excess committed by MSP and repressive police forces was a formidable challenge and it was the indomitable spirit of self sacrifice which helped the peasants to march ahead in such situations. The stories of similar oppression must have played a crucial role in strengthening that spirit.

\textit{Prabhatham} reports the meeting of the Zamindars in Lucknow condemning the tenancy reform legislations passed by the Congress ministries.

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Prabhatham}. 13\textsuperscript{th} June, 1938.

\textsuperscript{137} 1938 june 20, Pustakam 1, lakkam 11.

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Prabhatham}. 13\textsuperscript{th} June, 1938.
and passing resolutions demanding congress Jenmis to oppose Tenancy legislation\textsuperscript{139}. The \textit{Prabhatham} also carries reports about the anger expressed by the Congress MLAs of UP in the compromising attitude of the Congress towards the Zamindars in the matter of UP tenancy Legislation\textsuperscript{140}. The report on UP Tenancy Bill talks about the resolution of Kisan Sabha which urges the Congress not to surrender to the interests of the landlords and Zamindars.

The speech of trade union leader Niharendra Dutta Mazumdar is reported. He exhorted the peasants and working class to strive hard for India’s freedom as it could be only through their struggles that India could achieve complete independence. He said that this is the true socialist path\textsuperscript{141}.

The article of NG Ranga published in \textit{Congress Socialist} is given in detail by \textit{Prabhatham}. The article explains the attitude of the Pune district committee of the Kisan Sabha towards the Bombay Agrarian Relations Bill\textsuperscript{142}. Ranga says, the vested interests of this state have constantly campaigned against the bill through the media and the press. Due to this and due to the influence exerted by the landlords inside the congress, the bill has come out in its present form. What has been offered by the bill has been taken away by the clauses in the bill itself. From one end to the other, the bill has become an ad hoc measure exhibiting internal

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Prabhatham}. 13\textsuperscript{th} June, 1938.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
contradictions". He added that the bill reveals the class conflict within the Congress of that time. This bill is also similar to the agrarian and labour reforms in other parts of the state. He also notes that most of the local dailies have criticized this bill. Many congress committees have passed resolutions demanding agrarian reforms and most of them are in support to the Poona district committee. So this procession is not the singular interest of the Poona District Committee. It is an expression of the collective interest of all congress committees. The news tells something about the national movement itself and the various tensions within it. The landlord class which is hostile to the land reform legislation could find their supporters inside the national movement itself. The dual character of the national elite is clearly brought to light by this report.

The article by Dinkar Mehta elaborates the struggle of the peasants against taxation and the strong police repression they had to face. The police had filed fake cases in their names. The courageous people of Lavet including the men, women and children are striving yet, they are steadfastly continuing their struggle. The article of Satyanarayan Saraf who is the president of “Natturajya Sammelana” is about the famine in Bikaner. The plight of the famine stricken people of Bikaner is elucidated in this article. The number of cattle heads lost in the famine is also given in detail according to the estimates of 1935.

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143 Prabhatham. 13th June, 1938.

143 Ibid.
The *Prabhatham* of 7th Nov.1938 carries the announcement of the All India Kisan Sabha secretary that the peasants should take membership in Karshaka Sangham to get representation in the national conference held at Gaya in April 1939. This is part of the regular announcements which *Prabhatham* carried and it also shows the connection of Karshaka Sangham to the national organisation All India Kisan Sabha.

There is a news which declares that the struggle of the peasants and workers in Bengal have acquired a united form. According to the instruction of the state level leadership, the Kisan sanghams of Bengal have protested the jute ordinance by observing it as a day of protest. The jute should get a price of minimum 10 rupees. The fall in the wages of labourers who work in jute factories should be remedied.

These were the two demands. There is news on the struggle for arable land in Bihar where the peasants had a tussle with the Zamindars during the harvest season and the following year witnessed the landlords cultivating peasant lands forcibly.

News is about the arrest of Bhagat Singh, who was an AICC member and Secretary of Punjab Kisan Sangham in Bilga in Punjab on 17th October, 1938. He was prevented from moving out of the village, from making speeches and from giving statements to the press. The term of this prohibition was one year.

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144 *Prabatham*. 7th November, 1938.
reported that this has generated strong protests against the high handedness of the Punjab administration.

*Prabhatham* reports about the political prisoners in the UP jail where they have been convicted only for the reason of being members of the Communist party. They are very active congress workers and more than 14 members of AICC and the 70 MLA s of UP have taken a favourable position for their release¹⁴⁵.

*Prabhatham* reports the massive struggle which has originated in the Mewar, in present Rajasthan. Though the Prajamandalam was banned within one month of its formation, there was a massive demonstration to protest that move and the protesters were arrested and put into prison and they were subjected to inhuman torture which according to *Prabhatham* even, 'rivaled the Travancore police' and the prisoners had started a hunger strike in the prisons¹⁴⁶. This reporting which is trying to draw a parallel between the struggles across India and those in Kerala, serves the purpose of emboldening the masses to remain inspired in their struggle against colonialism and imperialism.

*Prabhatham* carried an article on the Peasant Satyagraha of Reora (January 1939). It was narrating the atrocities of landlords on the peasants. The article was written by Jadunandan Sharma, the peasant leader of Bihar. The peasants of Gaya had been reeling under the pressures of landlordism for the last four decades. Even after the payment of rent, the landlords took away the

¹⁴⁵ *Prabhatham*. ⁷th November, 1938.

¹⁴⁶ *Prabhatham*. ¹⁹th December, 1938.
land from the peasantry and the struggle was against this\textsuperscript{147}. These news reports demonstrate the national outlook which \textit{Prabhatham} attempted to cultivate in the struggling peasantry which was crucial for the success of their struggle.

\textbf{Building an International Solidarity}

While \textit{Prabhatham} gave attention to publish news across the country, it also gave space to international events. \textit{Prabhatham} contained inspiring news about the struggles of workers and peasants across the world.

\textit{Prabhatham} has published excerpts from the speeches delivered by Maxim Litvinov, \textit{Norkom} of Foreign Affairs of USSR in the League of Nations. The translation of Marx’s work on “How prices are determined”, is also given.

They have handled news from an international perspective. The article commemorating the Russian revolution, elaborates the importance of the Soviet experiment, its relevance for the working class and the need to learn from the experience of the Russian working class and peasantry. The article published by \textit{Prabhatham} say “The poor peasants, workers and soldiers of Russia created the Great Russian Revolution without bloodshed and destruction to property. The phrase, \textit{without bloodshed}, should not be interpreted as the ahimsa (non-violence) of Capitalism which is actually full of violence. It should be understood as the achievement by organised force of the working class through an action with lightning speed.”

\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Prabhatham}. 16\textsuperscript{th} January, 1939.
Prabhatham reported the Polish Agrarian Revolt. It reported that the police of the country are trying to suppress the movement. It is said that the farmers’ party has two crores of supporters with them.  

Prabhatham used to publish analytical notes regarding the international developments. Germany, England, China and other countries used to be the subject of this column. There has been a report on the beginning of a general strike in Palestine.

An article on the activities of Chinese women who are interested in politics describes the courage of these women even to work in military barracks. Prabhatham thus became a platform to urge the women into action. The article by P.C. Joshi on October Revolution explains the need for peasant worker alliance. The article asserts that it is the duty of the peasants to educate the masses about the achievements of the Soviet Russia under the leadership of Stalin.

Political Education: Equipping the Masses with Ideological Weapons.

One of the most significant functions performed by Prabhatham was the ideological education it provided to the peasants through various writings. The question answer column written by Surendran presents a Marxist analysis of

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148 Prabhatham. 1st August, 1938.
149 Prabhatham. 7th November, 1938.
150 Prabhatham, 2nd January, 1939.
151 Prabhatham, 14th November, 1938.
152 Surendran was the pseudonym of EMS Namboodiripad who was the all India joint secretary of CSP and later Gen.secretary of CPI and later CPIM.
the Malabar revolts. Surendran notes that the organisation of the people through Khilafat agitation and the activities of Congress have helped the tenants to come out strongly against the exploitation they face. So to say that it is communal riot is wrong as the underlying reason for the riots was agricultural. It is true that after sometime the riot took communal colour. But according to the writer, it was the handiwork of the ruling class who had found that the only way to suppress the riots was to give it a communal colour. He writes thus, “a mass movement which had originated from an agrarian discontent and which had begun to take the shape of a political revolt, because of the incapacity of its leadership which could understand its driving force and because of the lack of self consciousness of the masses involved in it and because of the propaganda of the bureaucracy, ended in a failure getting a communal colour. The revolt is the best example for the getting organised under the middle class and their movement, not having peasant’s own organisation and movement and getting miserably failed due to the lack of strength of the organisation. This analysis is distinct in its attempt to generate an atmosphere amicable for the growth of the peasantry as a class for itself. The write up perceives the problem as emerging from the landlordism and the solution too lies in the mitigation of the same.

Along with the representation of agrarian problems, Prabhatham served as a tool for the political education of the masses by CSP. Prabhatham used to publish articles as study material for party classes. The Congress Socialist Party had directed its cadres to discuss these materials in the party meetings and to

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Prabhatham. 30th May, 1938.
seek clarification in the event of any ambiguity or doubts. These activities used to be organised in such places where the Karshaka Sangham or unions were strong and where there were clubs and libraries functioning under the leadership of CSP lenient. It was also notified in the newspaper any opinion or complaint they have about the newspaper Prabhatham should be written to the editor. Out of the 18 pages which follow, 16 of them mostly deal with agrarian issues and remind the importance of being prepared for a decisive fight against colonialism and feudalism.

The article by Kodoth Govindan on “How to save pepper cultivation?” is another example of the way in which Prabhatham handled the agrarian issues. The article attempts to analyse the agrarian problems critically and tries to enlighten the working class and peasantry about the root cause of their problems which is landlordism and imperialism. It shows that Prabhatham had recognized that caste practices and superstitions are a hurdle in the path of the mobilization of peasantry and the working class against the oppressive forces and they are potentially divisive. The article by Kodoth says that it is not the planets like Saturn but the servants of the British Empire like Sir Basil Blackett154, who are responsible for the fall in the prices of pepper. The article ends, “how to save pepper cultivation by struggling against imperialism and landlordism”155. The

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154 Sir Basil Phillott Blackett KCB KCSI (8 January 1882 – 15 August 1935) was a British Civil Servant and an expert on international finance. He assumed office as Finance Member to the Government of India in 1923.

attempt was to drive home the point that the day to day problems which the ryots faced in their life had causal linkages with what is happening in many other parts of the world. Thus they had to fight British to protect the pepper. Presenting it in such a crude form was essential as the 30s and 40s where the times when the awareness level was pretty low.

Karshaka Sangham gave great importance to the ideological and other wise education of its activists. Prabhatam reports the news that in Kannavam and Othiyode, there were meetings of Karshaka Sangham and the night schools for the peasants were inaugurated by Sardar KP Chandroth. The schools were to be run by the Congress Volunteers. More than twenty peasants joined the classes at the venue itself. Such reporting would have contributed to the creation of an enthusiasm in the minds of the peasants to emulate this example in various parts. The newspaper used to give great importance to the attempts by the Karshaka Sangham to spread political education. These classes were greatly helpful in raising the class consciousness of the peasants.156

The stories which were published in Prabhatam in almost all issues were intended to create political awareness and social sensitivity among the peasants. A note published under the pen name ‘F’, titled ‘That Old Peasant’, narrates the experience of an activist going to organise the peasants. The narration is in such a way as to give a proper training to the emerging activists while reflecting upon the class consciousness of the peasant class.157

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156 Prabhatam. 7th November, 1938.
157 Prabhatam. 19th December, 1938.
Another headline of the *Karshakalokam* is “*Krishikkar Sanghatichal*” (If peasants unite…) The headline itself enlightens on the need for organisation and the advantage of organizing. To demonstrate that collective action could resolve many of the issues there were news regarding the success of collective action. The report was about the Marayamangalam co operative society and the way it was solved. There was more than 1000 rupees to be paid back to the society. Even after many efforts, the society could not recover the amount and the peasants were filled with suspicion, hatred and anger. By the intervention of Valluwanadu Karshaka Sangham and Nellayi cooperative society, the amount was reduced to 165 after a discussion with Ramachandran Nedungadi and Deputy Registrar K Achyuthan nair. Thus money was collected and paid by the Karshaka Sangham. It is reported that moves are on for returning tenants their land and the procedure for closing the society are on. The report ends with the comment that the peasants of the area are now relieved of the fact they don’t have to be feared of the society even on hungry stomachs they could sleep with peace\(^{158}\). Page after page, *Prabhatham* is describing the sufferings of the peasants.

*Prabhatham* identifies hunger and starvation as the biggest threat to the peasants and workers which have been the creation of the state but the present reporting gives a completely different picture. The style of reporting which introduces a hierarchy of suffering where hunger is seen as a lesser evil and peace is defined as the absence of debt rather than the absence of scarcity and

\(^{158}\) *Prabhatham*. 7\(^{th}\) November, 1938.
penury, reveals even the reporters of *Prabhatham* were affected by the hegemonic thinking regarding the welfare of the peasants. The news item also reveals the political consciousness of the leadership of that time.

The media can play a crucial role in introducing the changes which are happening across the world to the people. The 1930s with its undeveloped technology of communication and interaction, *Prabhatham* has performed this function in a notable manner. There is an article on collective farming which explains the success of collective effort in agriculture. The collective farming method was called Kolkhoz\(^{159}\). The article explains the democratic and self managing nature of the Kolkhoz\(^{160}\).

The article written by E.K., titled as ‘Nirakshararaya Krishikkar’, sheds light on the condition of the illiterate peasantry and their exploitation by the landlords. The report finds that there are Vayanasalas, which have come after the establishment of the Sangham. *Prabhatham* and *Mathrubhumi* are available in these places and the author reports that the Karshaka Sangham workers find a great relief in the fact that *Prabhatham* is available\(^{161}\).

Some of the articles sought to elaborate on the organizational aspects of the Sangham itself, comparing it with various other movements especially the

\(^{159}\) Being a collective farm, a kolkhoz was legally organized as a production cooperative. The Standard Charter of a kolkhoz, which since the early 1930s had the force of law in the USSR, is a model of cooperative principles in print. It speaks of the kolkhoz as a “form of agricultural production cooperative of peasants that voluntarily unite for the purpose of joint agricultural production based on ... collective labor.” It asserts that “the kolkhoz is managed according to the principles of socialist self-management, democracy, and openness, with active participation of the members in decisions concerning all aspects of internal life”. See *Standard Kolkhoz Charter*, Agropromizdat, Moscow (1989), pp. 4,37.

\(^{160}\) *Prabhatham*. 26\(^{th}\) December, 1938.

\(^{161}\) *Prabhatham*. 16\(^{th}\) January, 1939.
national movement. Why the peasants should be with it and ahead of it? The article of K Madhavan about the Indian Agrarian movement states thus. "Karshaka Sabha is an organisation of peasants of all classes. The organizational policies of Congress and Kisan Sabha are similar. After congress, it is the Kisan Sabha which has the highest membership. Their immediate goals are also the same. But their long term interests are different. The congress wants the political independence of the country. The economic freedom, it believes would spontaneously follow it. But that is not the ideal of the Kisan Sabha. Like trade unions it believes that economic independence should be there along with political independence and struggles towards it."\(^\text{162}\) The next note elucidates the inevitability of the unity of the working class and all sections cutting across political affiliations to gain full scale civil liberties. These articles performed the key functions raising the theoretical understanding of the peasants. It served the function of providing them with ideas and aimed at the construction of hegemony of the progressive sections.

**Inspiring the Peasantry through Literature**

Apart from being a newspaper which reported local, regional, national and international events, apart from being an educator in ideological and theoretical issues, *Prabhatham* carried a lot of literary writings. In fact it became the platform for the initial writings of many later stalwarts of Malayalam literature like S K Pottekkad and Thakazhi Sivasankarapillai and P Kesavadev. *Prabhatham* carried

\[\text{\textsuperscript{162} Prabhatham. 27\textsuperscript{th} February, 1939.}\]
poems, stories and plays. All of them served the cause of inspiring the peasantry by deeply touching and awakening their emotions.

**Deshabhimani: Carrying Forward the Legacy of Prabhatham**

The *Deshabhimani* was launched from Kozhikode in 1942, as a weekly, with M.S.Devadas as its founder editor. It was the official organ of the Communist Party of India (currently CPIM), and the year was important because of the Quit India Movement in India. Later on, Prof. V.T.Induchoodan became the editor. In 1946, it was converted into a daily. In June 1947 it was banned by the government. After these, on 13th August, 1947, *Deshabhimani* got permission to publish, with the ten thousand rupees as a bail. When the paper criticized the ministry then led by T.Prakasam and his policies towards the Communist workers, the Madras Government banned the paper on 13th April, 1948 and they accumulated the deposited money of the press.163 It resumed publication in 1951.164

*Deshabhimani* was the result of the feel about the lack of the media with a left or proletariat ideology by Kerala unit of the Communist Party. Initially it was started with a limited capital which involved donations by the party members and supporters. *Deshabhimani* expressed the voice of the peasants and advanced even in the face of state oppression.

The publications like *Prabhatham* and *Deshabhimani* represented the interests of the working class and the peasantry. As the organs of the Congress


Socialist Party and Communist Party, they stood by the struggles of the proletariat and peasantry. They constantly published news on peasant struggles and tried to counter the attempts by the bourgeois media to put their struggles into oblivion by either not reporting them or distorting them through exaggeration. *Prabhatham* served as a tool of political mobilization and organisation as it was the channel of communication for the vast majority of the peasantry which it attempted to reach out. *Deshabhimani* carried this tradition forward and went ahead to become a daily newspaper.

*Deshabhimani* had to face repression in the form of police raids. The leaders like EMS, C. Unniraja, M.S. Devadas, P. Narayanan Nair and many such leaders were arrested from the office. Many documents related to the communist movement were captured by them.\(^{165}\)

*Deshabhimani* was notable by the extent of support it enjoyed among the party supporters. The fine of Rupees 3000 which was imposed by the government, was collected by *Deshabhimani* within four days and as a result it could continue its publication.\(^{166}\)

*Deshabhimani* itself reports that on 3\(^{rd}\) February, P Raman was beaten up by the policeman for having a copy of *Deshabhimani* with him. The experience acquired by the founders of *Deshabhimani* in running *Prabhatham* came to their rescue and *Deshabhimani* survived many challenges to become a self sustaining prominent daily of Kerala.

\(^{165}\) *Deshabhimani*. 23\(^{rd}\) January, 1947.

\(^{166}\) *Deshabhimani*. 4\(^{th}\) January, 1953.
It can be noted that *Deshabhimani* carried forward the anti-imperialist and anti feudal struggle and strongly assisted the peasant movement through the worst phase of state and feudal oppression. It carried regular reports regarding struggles across the country and across Kerala.

The Koothali Struggle was reported in *Deshabhimani* and it voiced the concern of the peasants. *Deshabhimani* published a report on the black marketing which was widespread at the time of general scarcity. The bureaucracy was assisting the black marketers and they were persecuting those who opposed it and the societies run by Karshaka Sangham were facing opposition from them. *Deshabhimani* characterised the Kallyat Nambiar as one of the most prominent black marketeers.\footnote{167 *Deshabhimani*, 9th Feb. 1947.} For preventing the black marketing of Kuttyat Govindan Nair, even a 12 year old child Kondat Raghavan was arrested\footnote{168 *Deshabhimani*, 9th Feb. 1947.}.

The authorities were given a lot of complaints regarding the destruction of crops and the hutments of the peasants by MSP (Malabar Special Police) but the administration gave no response. *Deshabhimani* has published a long list of such atrocities. The murder of Narayanan Nambiar in September, 1946, was an example of this peasant hunt.

The persecution of the peasants across Malabar by the MSP was constantly in news for *Deshabhimani* for a long period. The incidents of atrocities against women being in Kandakkai, the destruction of reading rooms and
libraries, the incident of a teacher being beaten up etc. are discussed in detail. Kayyur, in the name of capturing the paddy of Kannan Nair a peasant Kodakaravalappil Koran had been beaten up. In Mattannur, the brutalities of the Pazhassi Adhikaris and MSP with the help of the local police is reported by Deshabhimani. The students were also subjected to the torture of MSP in the Chirakkal Rajas School and Thaliparampa Muthedathu school.

Deshabhimani requested that the cases which were registered as paddy capture cases should be withdrawn and the peasants should not be tortured on this county. The rent for the Jenmi could be given as cash. What the peasants did was to get the paddy measured in the “Stores”, after the amount of seeds, cultivation cost and family allowance is taken. The rape and molestation of women as part of the ongoing campaign against the MSP was reported by Deshabhimani. Deshabhimani reports the incident of the house of Kanthalottu Kunhambu, being searched on 10th February 1947 and in the name of the raid the police had destroyed whatever was there in the house. KPR Gopalan had to face the same when his home at Kallyasseri was raided on 14th February in the same year. The peasant prisoners numbering 415, had started a hunger strike in Kannur jail as they were denied basic facilities, reports Deshabhimani dated 19th February, 1947. It reports with enthusiasm that on 26 February, 1947, Koothali estate has been brought under cultivation by the farmers.169

Deshabhimani published the news of the Kerala Agrarian Relation Bill where it described the bill as a bold step forward to undo the feudalism and

169 Deshabimani, 20th February 1947.
landlordism. The bill fixed the ceiling as 15 acres and fair rent was fixed as one twelfth to one fourth. The speech of E.M.S. in the meeting of the Kisan Sabha is reported in the Deshabhimani. E.M.S. stated that the Indian constitution permits land reform with compensation and so in Kerala the government is pledged to implement land reform with minimal compensation. He asserted that the government is hopeful that it could achieve land reforms with the help of the Kisan Sabha. March 2nd, 1958 Deshabhimani carried the article by C Achyuthamenon, explaining the details of the land reform measures. The article elaborates in detail about Kanam, Kuzhikkanam, Otti, Verumpattoam, Varam, Pankupattom etc.

The Desahabhimani carried the statement of A.K. Gopalan countering the suggestions of KPCC. The KPCC has stated that there is no need of ceiling limits in Kerala. They suggested to categorise the land according to the revenue. A.K. Gopalan stated that both these suggestions would disrupt the process of land reforms and destroy its essence. The newspaper reports the march of the peasants to Thiruvananthapuram demanding the passing of the KARB into an Act.

The Deshabhimani of 1st August, 1959, carried the header that the Indian democratic system was butchered in Kerala. The news goes on to say that the reason for the dismissal of the government, was the opposition of the rich

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170 Deshabhimani, 20th December, 1957.
171 Deshabhimani, 4th November, 1957.
172 Deshabhimani, 7th March, 1958.
landlord class against the land reform measures. *Deshabhimani* used to give precise responses to the questions raised by the Liberation Struggle leaders. Though not as frequent as in *Prabhatham*, *Deshabhimani* too carried poems on special occasions. The *Deshabhimani* of 1st May, 1946 carried the poem of K.P.G. exhorting workers to fight for their rights.

The study of the print media reveals a perceptible difference in the way of functioning of various newspapers. It can be safely argued that the organs like *Prabhatham* and *Deshabhimani* assisted the peasants to a great extent in generating a counter discourse to deal the problems of agrarian sector. It equipped the peasantry in its fight for hegemony with the strong ideas and a vision about the alternatives. This has helped the peasant movement of Kerala to change its self from that of class in itself to a class for itself.

It can be seen that the dominant classes retain their dominance not only through the dominance of coercive apparatus but also because of the control exercised over the ideological apparatuses. *Prabhatham* and *Deshabhimani* and such organs undertook crucial attempts to counter the attempt of ruling classes and to challenge the ruling ideas.

The period from 1934 to 1971 witnessed the agrarian question dominating the headlines of the newspapers irrespective of whether they were in support or against the cause of the peasantry. The literary writings which *Prabhatham* carried were mostly dealing with the agrarian issues. These literary writings were educative for the peasants as how to struggle against the injustices they had to face from the oppressive and exploitative agrarian relations.