CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

History involves the attempt to make sense of the past. It involves the effort to make sense of the process of advancement of human society and the dynamics of the interaction of various forces in the progress of history. Any narration of the past, or for that matter, of the present could not escape the element of subjectivity. The interaction of values and facts is inevitable in any construction of history. The most suitable approach to history is a matter of intense unsettled debate in historiography but the inability of any social theorist to remain value free is almost taken for granted in contemporary historiography.

The events get moulded into history through the medium of historical interpretation which involves an unavoidable element of subjectivity. But sanctioning the role which subjectivity plays should not be a carte blanche for relativism. It should not lead one to deny the existence of an objective material truth which is available to us only through the medium of interpretation. At the same time, the search for objective truth should not blind us from being aware of
the subjectivity of one’s interpretation. That awareness commands openness on the part of the historian to remain open ended in his intellectual pursuits, to be open to the new and varied facts, different and unconventional interpretation, stronger and more compelling logics. But that open endedness should not lead to relativism and the failure to strive for change. A historian cannot afford the luxury of relaxing in the twilight of varied interpretations. It is his duty to fight the darkness with the light of his interpretation though with an openness to the possibility of being false.

It follows that a historian while conscious of his limitations could not escape from the duty of making his intellectual pursuit a weapon for social change; change from bad to good or from good to the better. The urge for change can come only if his subjectivity is inclined to the cause of the least privileged in a society or only if he values equality and social justice. Equality or inequality can exist only in a concrete objective material context. The progress of the society, the large scale changes which it is undergoing is not obviously the effect of individual efforts. The changes are effected by collectivities and they do affect the collectivities. Thus in the myriad things which occur in day to day life, the historian seeks and sees the role of collectivities. But there are collectivities and collectivities, interacting, conflicting and intertwining. In the course of the process of interpreting the basic nature of the social order, the historian has to take a position and the dilemma of the historian will be which collectivity should be privileged in order to explain the social order.
In the various approaches to history, Marxism was noted for its emphasis on the role of the collectivity formed on economic basis; i.e. Class and its privileging of the mode of production as the key force to social change. The world is divided into haves and have-nots, in concrete terms the bourgeoisie which had the ownership of the means of production and the proletariat which has nothing but its labour to sell. The capitalist economy surviving on surplus extraction forms the base while other social spheres like politics and culture form the superstructure, and the base is given an explanatory privilege over the superstructure.

What is the role of the superstructure in the unfolding of social events? If the base is economy, for making sense of the history of agrarian movements in Kerala is it crucial or relevant to the discipline of history from a Marxist perspective to study the role of the media and literature? Placed more directly, what is the logic and relevance of studying the role of media and literature in the history of agrarian problems in Kerala?

The emergence of media studies and the intervention by Marxian scholars are well known. Scholars like Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and many others have made insightful interventions in the analysis of culture and media. The role of Antonio Gramsci can hardly be over emphasized in driving home the importance of the impact of ideas on the society and helping the advancement of class interests. Thus the study adopts a Gramscian approach which, according to us, is nothing but a creative and fruitful expansion of Marxism as a scientific
method. As Engels had stated in one of his letters to Bloch, “According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Other than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure — political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas — also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.”

The ruling ideas of the time will be the ideas of the ruling class. The proletariat in class society has to fight for the hegemony in the ideological realm. The control which the ruling classes exercise emerges not only from the coercive apparatuses under its possession but also from the ideological apparatuses. So it becomes the duty of the workers and peasantry to produce a counter hegemony. This counter hegemony can be achieved through cultural interventions in the public sphere through media and literature.


The Background of the Study

The region comprising the state of Kerala had a history of an oppressive caste system combined with a feudal landlordism, Jenmi system. The latter half of 19th and initial decades of the 20th century witnessed widespread upheavals in the society attempting to bring changes in the social, economic and colonial oppression. Before the advent of European powers Kerala was constituted of a number of small principalities constantly fighting against each other. The coming of the Europeans and the consolidation of European suzerainty over the Indian rulers had great implications for the Kerala society as well. The British after defeating Tippu Sultan were able to bring the Malabar Province under their control and the local rulers of Cochin, Calicut and Travancore had to accept the suzerainty of the British crown.

The colonialists, especially after the First war of Indian Independence increasingly adopted a strategy of appeasing the traditional elites of the Indian society so that they could retain their political control over the subcontinent. Thus the colonial rule added to the plight of the common masses as it extended extensive support to the elites while continuing its extraction of the resources of the subcontinent and advancing the process of deindustrialization. The process of deindustrialization which involved the deliberate destruction of the indigenous industries and livelihood in order to make India a market and cheap source of raw materials pushed the majority of the population into agriculture. The agriculture of the subcontinent was in the feudal mode with the upper caste
landlords, lower caste tenants and the outcastes as agricultural labourers or agrestic slaves.

The coming of the British, as has been observed earlier, increased the strength of feudalism as the British had to depend upon the elites to survive in power in the face of the attempt by some of indigenous rulers and Indian people to overthrow the British rule. The British Malabar was a classic example of this condition.

The ceding of Malabar by Tippu Sultan and the establishment of the British control over Malabar were followed by an unprecedented rise in revenue extraction and the increase in the power of the landlords, Jenmis at the cost of the peasants. The following chapters of the study contain a detailed analysis of the situation. For the time being it is sufficient to state that the increased revenue extractions and the feudal oppression led to many social upheavals like the Moplah Rebellion. The spread of Western education, nationalism, the inspiration from October Revolution, the emergence of a mass based national movement which acquired popular character through Non Cooperation and the Civil Disobedience Movement, the attempts of social reformers, the spread of socialist and communist ideals across the subcontinent, all these factors helped the emergence of a strong peasant movement in the state, and it which was especially strong in Malabar.

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The peasants were organised under Karshaka Sangham under the initiative of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) and later under the leadership of the Communist party. They led a long drawn out and a fruitful struggle against colonialism and landlordism. It culminated in the legal abolition of landlordism in the state in 1971.

The struggles in the peasant class resulted in the emergence of a section of organic intellectuals who were journalists, poets and playwrights who devoted their energies to the success of the movement. The open and active role played by them helped the basic classes to advance the war of positions in their struggle against colonial and feudal oppression.

The study intends to analyse the role played by the media and the literature in the agrarian problems and the struggle of the peasantry and the working class. For this purpose a detailed study of the newspapers like Prabhatham, and Deshabhimani were undertaken. News papers like Mathrubhumi, Janayugom, Navajeevan etc. were referred to and consulted. The progressive literature written for the cause of the peasantry and working class has been analysed. Apart from elucidating the role played by the media and literature the study also intends to analyse the role played by the print media in the peasant struggle against feudalism. What has been the contribution of the media in consolidating and advancing the struggle of the peasantry? The study raises and tries to answer the following research questions. Has the media been
instrumental in constructing the identity of the peasantry as a class? The present study attempts to answer these questions.

Was it instrumental in equipping the peasantry with ideas helping to produce a counter hegemonic discourse? This question raises some questions about the nature of the media itself as its natural corollary. Are mass media neutral? How far the characterization of Media as monolithic neutral platforms is valid? Is there any valid basis, to categorize the media into bourgeois media and the popular media? The study makes an effort to answer them.

What is the role of literature in constructing the social concept of the struggles? How fruitful was the effort of conscious and openly political interventions in peasant agitations? How far do the literature and society influence each other? Can there be literature which is neutral? These are the questions the present study intends to answer.

**Methodology**

The methodology is descriptive and analytical. Both primary and secondary sources have been used in the study. A content analysis of the Prabhatam, Mathrubhumi and Deshabhimani of selected periods has been undertaken. The progressive and popular literature of Malayalam has been surveyed and analysed.

**Hypotheses**

The thesis has the following hypotheses
1. Media play a crucial role in consolidating and advancing a social movement.

2. The media become a channel for reflecting and forwarding the class interests.

3. In a media penetrated society, it will be crucial for the struggling classes to have their own popular media which will help them build up a counter hegemonic discourse.

4. Literature plays a crucial role in constructing the social imaginary of the peasantry and working class.

5. Popular literature can be a source and site for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse.

**Review of Literature**

The study involves a vast survey of primary and secondary literature including books and large number of articles written by various scholars, historians, political scientists and journalists. In his work about the caste system and the history of Kerala, P K Balakrishnan deconstructs the notions of a golden past for Kerala and attempts to retrace the history of Kerala on an objective basis. He elaborates the agrarian system of Kerala society where the lower castes were treated as agrestic slaves and their life was restricted to the paddy fields and groves. He released the Kerala history from the stranglehold of myths and legends. His treatment of the Kerala history adopts a materialist perception of the history of Kerala.\(^5\)

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E.M. Sankaran Nambuthirippadu formulated the concept of *Jati Jenmi Naduvazhi Medhavitham* to describe the social order of the pre modern Kerala. According to him, the social domination by upper castes through the hierarchical caste system, the economic domination by the upper classes through the Jenmi system and the political control enjoyed by the upper castes through the Naduvazhitham - the combination of these systems represented the *Jati Jenmi Naduvazhi Medhavitham*.⁶

K.N. Ganesh has attempted to trace the connection between the modern and ancient Kerala society. He has made many pertinent observations about many facets of the Kerala society including the landlordism and colonialism. Thus he observes that the struggle against feudalism went on to become the struggle against caste system and the massive popular movements against colonialism. The Guruvayur Satyagraha was also the struggle against the Zamorin who was at the helm of the feudal system. The Satyagraha also created the ground for a popular movement against colonial oppression.⁷

T.M. Thomas Isaac has pointed out the role played by the unionization of the agricultural workers in achieving social reform in the country. He points out that among the agricultural labourers it was the trade unions which fought not only for increase of wages but also for upholding the dignity of the agricultural

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labourers. Thus the agrarian movement in Kerala, of which the labourer’s union was an integral part, acted as a source of social change as well.⁸

V.V. Kunhikrishnan has emphasized the role of tenancy legislations in restructuring the colonial agrarian relations and ameliorating the grievances of the peasantry. He has traced the historical developments ranging from the report of the Logan, the debate between Turner and Logan and the dissenting note by EMS in the Kuttikrishna Menon Committee and the land reform legislation after the formation of Kerala which has altered the agrarian realm and brought widespread social change.⁹

Prakash Karat in his work on the agrarian relations of Malabar and the peasant movement, has drawn out a vivid picture about the role played by Karshaka Sangham in bringing changes to the agrarian relations of Malabar. He points out that the coordinated action of various sections of the society including teachers, students, youths and agricultural labourers along with the peasants had helped advance the struggle of the peasantry against landlordism.¹⁰

D.N. Dhanagare in his seminal work argues that the development of a class consciousness is essential for the success of a peasant revolt. He presents a critical analysis of the peasant revolt of Malabar which was termed

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as 'Moplah' Riots. Dhanagare analyses the various factors which have contributed to the emergence of the rebellion like the colonial intervention and oppressive tenurial relations. Religion assisted the rebellion but was not its root cause.\textsuperscript{11}

Mike Wayne, in his work \textit{Marxism and Media Studies} has portrayed the entry of capital into the media and the results there of. He has tried to show the explanatory power of Marxism in its approach to media studies. The book has elaborated the ‘changing corporate structures of the media, the role of the state, the use of new technology and the cultural forms and meanings media generate’. The book reinvents the importance and usefulness of the Marxist methodology in understanding the media and the new trends in it.\textsuperscript{12}

Parama Sen explains in detail the way media is affected by the corporate interests involved. She has attempted to show the impact of capitalist interests in guiding the reaction of the media towards various events like that of Kargil War and the U S invasion of Iraq. The study is notable for the methodology it employs as it tries to make an in depth analysis of the capitalist interests pervading the media.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{11} Danagare, D.N. Peasant Movements in India 1920-1950, p.82, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994.
\bibitem{12} Wayne, Mike. Marxism and Media Studies Key Concepts and Contemporary Trends, p3, Aakar books, New Delhi, 2009.
\end{thebibliography}
In his *Mass Communication Theory* McQuail elaborates the concept of mass communication. He states that media cannot succeed without social responsibility. He discusses the future of mass communication and states that it is either socially fragmenting or unifying. He makes several points on how the media need to be socially responsible in order to be effective.\(^{14}\)

In his work, *Press Freedom the Indian Story*, K.G. Jogelkar presents a detailed discussion of press freedom in India and he concludes that the freedom of the editor is crucial for maintaining this. The Press freedom cannot be maintained if the proprietor gets involved in the editorial affairs. He points out that the entry of the big business into the media has also adversely affected the freedom of press.\(^{15}\)

In his work, *Press and Social Change*, Gyan Prakash Pandey states that Press had a positive role in the development of the state of Uttar Pradesh as the press acts as a source of information for the people. They also assist people to form an opinion regarding the developmental schemes implemented by the Government.\(^{16}\)

*Press in India, an Overview* by G.S. Bhargava, involves a perusal over the existing media culture. The media, according to G.S. Bhargava, has been exposed to crass commercialization and this has resulted in a serious


deterioration of editorial values. The entry of big business houses into the media and their intervention in the publication of news has resulted in people losing their faith in the media.  

Basanti Sinha in her study of the Bihar Press in its relation to the national movement observes that the press has played a very crucial part in advancing the cause of the national movement. But she also observes that there were press controlled by the big landlords who were hesitant to take progressive positions but even they largely advanced their support to the national movement.  

In his work *Mass Communication in India*, Keval J. Kumar narrates the emergence and growth of the mass media in India. He sees an urge to imitate the western models in development communication. These imported models might not suit the Indian conditions according to his study.  

Robert Mc Chesney in his work *The Political Economy of the Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas* has argued that the corporate media system is incompatible with a viable democratic public sphere. The hyper commercialization has led to the degradation of the media and he hitches his hope on to the emergence of a media reform movement.  

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Robin Jeffrey in his work on the *Print media in India* has noticed the emergence of capitalism as a notable change in the post independence years. He notes that this has coincided with the newspapers losing their sense of Mission which they used to uphold in the pre independence period. The compulsion of the print media to bolster the revenue from advertisement has compelled the media to undergo commercialization.²¹

K.K.N. Kurup elucidates the positive role played by the Malayalam literature in promoting social change and nationalism. He notes that various genre of literature like novels, poetry, short stories, and fiction have played a crucial part in advancing the nationalist movement in Kerala. He has noted that the emergence of political journalism has helped the dissemination of enlightenment and nationalist ideals in Kerala.²²

In his work on the history of Malayalam literature, Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai, has identified different stages in the growth of Malayalam poetry. He notes that after the emergence of Malayalam as a language independent from Tamil, Malayalam poetry had a phase of enlightenment where many poets wrote for nationalism and social justice. Similar waves swept through in other streams of literature like novels, short stories and plays.²³ M Achyuthan also elaborates the role played by Malayalam literature in the struggle for Indian Independence. The


book involves a detailed description of the role played by the Malayalam literature in various strands of literature.\textsuperscript{24}

In his \textit{Short history of Malayalam literature}, Ayyappa Panicker narrates the protest against oppressive life condition latent in the folk songs and ballads of Kerala. He also takes a critical view of literature and assesses literature for its literary value.\textsuperscript{25}

S.C. Bhatt in his \textit{Overview of the Indian Press since 1955} notes the large circulation of newspaper and other publications in Kerala, thanks to the high literacy and political awareness of its readers. He notes that \textit{Deshabhimani} is the party organ in the country which has a very wide circulation and which unlike other party organs is treated as a newspaper due to the comprehensive coverage it gives to the events in Kerala.\textsuperscript{26}

Noam Chomsky has presented the Propaganda Model in which he states that propaganda serves the same purpose as coercion serves under imperialism. He stated that the bias in the reporting is not due to individual conspiracy but due to structural factors. He has identified five filters through which the news pass through before reaching the people. They are ownership, funding, sourcing, Flaks and norms. These factors keep on exerting their influence over the


\textsuperscript{26} S.C. Bhatt, Indian Press since 1955, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 2000.
production of news and the corporate interests could advance their goals through them.\textsuperscript{27}

In their collective endeavour to make sense of the media culture in Kerala and in their attempt to critique the functioning of the media, T.M. Thomas Isaac and N.P. Chandrasekharan argue that a simple proliferation of the media without media literacy can have negative consequences for democracy. They strongly argue that there is a need for media literacy which will help the ordinary citizen to approach the media critically and make sense of the real picture.\textsuperscript{28}

The present study tries to analyse the growth of consciousness among the peasants and the development of a media which is different from the traditional and so called nationalist media. It also traces the development of a political ideology with proletariat class consciousness and a literature with strong leanings towards the proletariat aesthetics.

\textsuperscript{27} Noam Chomsky, Edward S. Herman, Manufacturing Consent The Political Economy Of The Mass Media, Pantheon Books, New York, 1988