CHAPTER – III

THE ROLE OF MALAYALAM PRESS AND LITERATURE
IN THE POLITICIZATION PROCESS OF THE WOMEN
OF TRAVANCORE

The gloomiest example of the marginalization of female voice has been in the area of literary history\(^1\). But inspite of this, a large number of women assured their presence in the history of Malayalam literature of nineteenth century.

Printing press played an important role in creating a powerful public opinion and thus led to the gradual growth of ‘Politicalization’ of Kerala’s masses, both men and women. Due to the effort of the missionaries, a large number of magazines came out for the first time in Kerala. The first magazine in Malayalam was ‘Rajyasamacharam’ published in 1847 by Basel Mission and the first scientific magazine was ‘Paschimodayam’ published in 1847. ‘Jnana Nikshepam’ published by C.M.S. missionaries in 1848 was the third magazine and the first illustrated journal published in Kerala\(^2\). It contained pencil sketches drawn by Mrs. Henry Baker Junior. It was also the first Malayalam journal which came out through printing press\(^3\). The fourth magazine in Kerala and the first college magazine was ‘Vidyasamgraham’ published in 1864\(^4\). It was the brain child of Richard Collins, the Principal of C.M.S. College, Kottayam, and its first editor was Rev. George Mathan.

‘Kerala Panchika’ published in 1901 under the editorship of K.Rama Krishna Pillai, wrote an editorial criticizing the custom of bare breasted Nair women accompanying the temple festivals and Maharaja’s procession to Sree Padmanabhaswami temple. The paper also asked the Maharaja to put an end to

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this barbarous custom. However, the custom was ended soon⁵. ‘Keralan’ published in 1905 under the editorship of K. Ramakrishna Pillai also criticized Kochi Maharaja’s act of untying the blouses of Nair women who entered temples wearing blouses⁶.

‘Sanghamitra’ magazine published in 1920 was meant mainly for Ezhava women of Kerala. It was printed at V.V. Press, Kollam. Its managers were P.K.N. Vaidyan and P.R. Narayanan. The magazine continued publication for three years. The name ‘Sanghamitra’ was suggested by C.V. Kunjuraman. ‘Sanghamitra’ was the name of Asoka’s daughter who propagated Buddhist religion in Sri Lanka. She worked among Sri Lankan women and trained them to become noble women. Like that ‘Sanghamitra’ was also intended to make Ezhava women of Kerala, progressive and noble. A large number of women writers such as B. Bhageerathi Amma, K. Vasanthi, who was the wife of C. Kesavan, Chempakakutty, Kayyalakkal Sarada, V. Parukkutty Amma, N. Meenakshi Amma, Muthukulam Parvathi Amma, P.R. Mandakini, N.K. Parvathi Amma, Kanakalatha, K. M. Kunjilekshmi Kettilamma and others wrote in this magazine. Also many male writers donated their writings to it. There was a column called ‘Streelokam’ which included news about women all over the world.

‘Sevini’ was published in 1924 by some Ezhavas of Perinad, Kollam and its editorship was in the hands of E.V. Krishna Pillai. The patron of ‘Sevini’ magazine was the Rani Setu Lakshmi Bai⁷. Mary Punnen Lukose, C.V. Kunjuraman, Kumaran Asan, Muthukulam Parvathi Amma, Beatrice Daniel B.A., and B. Anandavally Amma B.A. were among its writers and the magazine ran for about two years. ‘Sadhujana Paripalini’ magazine was the first magazine brought out by untouchables⁸. It was the mouthpiece of ‘Sadhujana Paripalana Yogam’ and its first editor was Kalichothikkaruppan⁹. ‘Bharata deepam’ from

⁵ G. Priyadarshanan, op.cit., p.65.
⁶ Ibid., p.72.
⁷ Ibid., p.179.
⁸ ambedkar.org/books/Ayyan_kali.html
Kollam under the editorship of Sadhu Siva Prasad was started to propagate the ideas of Brahma Samaj in Kerala. It published an incident happened in Kochi under the heading ‘Netyarammayum Oru Pulaya Sahodariyum’. It describes that during the sixtieth birthday of Kochi Maharaja, a dispensary was opened at Kochi and ‘Netyaramma’ V. K. Parukkutty Amma made a speech and drank a cup of tea along with a Pulaya woman who passed mid-wifery exam. The paper proclaimed that caste system should be efficiently destroyed only with the help of woman\textsuperscript{10}.

‘Vellala Mitram’ Magazine was published in 1924 and it included articles like ‘Innathe Streekalude Katha’ by L.K. Bhageerathi Amma and ‘Stree Vidyabhyasam’ by Patteril Gopalapillai. ‘Divya Kokilam’ magazine published in 1925 edited by Paravoor K.K. Raghava Panikkar had articles of women writers like Muthukulam Parvathy Amma. ‘Dharma Kumaran’ magazine published in 1926 had articles of women writers like P.K. Narayani Amma and Muthukulam Parvathi Amma. ‘Saraswathi’ published in 1927 was another magazine printed from V.V. Press, Kollam and the writers included women like Vrindavanam Vasanthi Amma and Muthukulam Parvathi Amma\textsuperscript{11}.

‘Vivekodayam’, under the editorship of Kumaran Asan, was the first journal which emerged as the mouthpiece of a community. It published the biographies of Sree Buddha, Swami Vivekananda and Sree Narayana Guru. It also published the proud works of Sree Narayana Guru. Asan also adorned the journal with his own poems like ‘Oru Thiyyakkuttyude Vicharam’, ‘Minnaminingu’, ‘Guru’ etc. ‘Vidyavilasini’, ‘Kavanodayam’, ‘Chandrika’, ‘Dhanwanthari’, ‘Nair’, ‘Mangalodayam’, ‘Nair Samudaya Parishkari’, ‘Arya Kesari’, ‘Katha Kaumudi’, ‘Bhashaposhini’ etc. were other important magazines of the time. The press through their articles radiating nationalistic and reformative fervour, attracted the people of Kerala, both men and women, to the arena of freedom struggle and socio-cultural resurgence movements. The

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p.140.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p.202.
common people especially women were equipped with new ideas by the efforts of the editors and publishers of newspapers and journals.

Simultaneously, a large number of magazines and journals for women and by women came out. Women’s magazines were important as a medium through which ideas regarding womanhood and womanly education were disseminated\textsuperscript{12}. So many women indulged in literary compositions and slowly women became the part and parcel of the socio-political life of Kerala. An insight about women’s freedom began to appear in the women’s magazines of early twentieth century. Indulging in literary composition became a liberation tactics to every oppressed group such as women\textsuperscript{13}. The following table shows the leading women’s magazines of Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

### 3.1 Leading Women’s Magazines of Kerala during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of newspapers</th>
<th>Year of commencement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keraleeya Sugunabodhini</td>
<td>1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarada</td>
<td>1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakshmi Bai</td>
<td>1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhasha Sarada</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahila Ratnam</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumangala</td>
<td>1915</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mahila</td>
<td>1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahodari</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanitha Kusumam</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Keraleeya Suguna Bodhini’ published from Trivandrum in 1886 was the first women’s magazine in Malayalam\textsuperscript{14}. It accepted the public or domestic delineation of social domains in its very first issue and proclaimed that politics

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\textsuperscript{14} Puthuppally Raghavan, *op.cit.*, p.140.
and narrow augmentation about religion would be strictly avoided\textsuperscript{15}. It was the brain child of Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran, K. Chidambaram Vadhyar and N.C.Narayana Pillai and its aim was uplift of women.

‘Sarada’ published in 1904 was the second women’s magazine in Malayalam. Its patrons were Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bai, Rani Setu Parvathi Bai and Ikkuvamma Thampuran and there were three women editors for ‘Sarada’ viz., T.C. Kalyani Amma, T. Ammukkutty Amma and B. Kalyani Amma. ‘Sarada’ was the first Malayalam magazine published by women for women\textsuperscript{16}.

The articles in ‘Sarada’ were written by women and for women. Editorials dealt with subjects like duties of women, service to husbands, women education, chastity, mother’s love etc. were written by T.C. Kalyani Amma. ‘Sarada’ also made comparative study between the life style of Kerala women and that of women at different regions in and outside India. Articles were contributed by women such as T. Ammukkutty Amma, K. Madhavi Amma and K. Padmavathi Amma.

After two years, the publication of ‘Sarada’ stopped and it was re-published from Trivandrum after one year under the editorship of Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai. Another ‘Sarada’ came out in 1913 from Punalur under the editorship of T.K. Kalyanikkutty Amma and ‘Bhasha Sarada’ from Punalur was started by Anchal R.Velupmillai\textsuperscript{17}.

‘Lakshmi Bai’ was published from Thrissur in 1906 under the management of V. Narayana Menon. Poetry, prose, short stories, book reviews, health care, mother and child care, profiles of leading women etc. were its features. The ‘Mahila’ magazine came out from Chengannoor in 1921. It was published by B. Bhageerathi Amma\textsuperscript{18}. This journal also attracted wide sections of


\textsuperscript{17} Puthuppally Raghavan, op.cit., p.146.

\textsuperscript{18} J.Devika, Her Self: Gender and Early writings of Malayalee Women (1898-1938), Stree, Kolkata, 2005, p.135.
contributors and readers mainly women and lasted for nearly twenty years. ‘Mahila’ protested through its articles, against the male dominated society which confines women in the kitchen. ‘Mahila’ was brought in girls’ schools in Travancore since 1924 by government order.19

In 1925, ‘Sahodari’ was published from Kollam by P.R. Mandakini. T.C. Kalyanikkutty Amma published ‘Vanitha Mithram’ from Kollam. The first magazine which put forward some opinions about women’s political rights was ‘Vanitha Kusumam’ from Kottayam edited by V.C. John.20 This magazine continuously fought for the political freedom of women. It had above two thousand subscribers and its annual subscription was two rupees.21

‘Mahila Ratnam’ published from Trivandrum contained works of poets like Kumaran Asan and Uloor S. Parameswara Aiyar and women writers like Mayyanattu Ikkavamma, Thaikkunnathu Kalyani Amma and others. The first story of P. Kesava Dev, ‘Naliniyum Leelayum’ was published in a woman’s magazine ‘Mahila Mandiram’ published by ‘Hindu Mahila Mandiram’, Trivandrum.22 The women’s magazines and journals had something which can be called miscellaneous, which included comments, views, quotations and interesting items reproduced from other Indian or foreign journals. Occasionally articles translated from other journals published in English or local languages in other parts of India were also included.

The reading of magazines, journals, newspapers and other literary works which discussed women’s issues, urged the womenfolk to think about their own problems and position in society. Women writers like Chinnammu Ammal, Lakshmikkutty Varasyar, B. Kalyani Amma, T.C. Kalyani Amma, Thachattu Devaki Netyaramma, Ambady Kartyayani Amma, Tharavathu Janaki Amma, Pachalloor Parvathi Amma, N. A. Amma, Mary Punnen Lukose and Muthukulam

Parvathi Amma continuously published their works in the leading magazines of the period. In the case of the women who wrote at that time, some of them had added their occupations like Inspectress or Headmistress along with their names. Some others became Lecturers and later Professors in colleges. K.Lakshmi Amma, one of the earliest women officers in Travancore Education Department, viz., Assistant Inspectress of Schools, also wrote articles in ‘Sarada’.

Women, who showed resentment in telling their names to aliens, began writing articles after their names and to participate in socio-cultural and political debates. Women’s magazines created women writers, expanded women’s horizons of knowledge and made a change and development in the view of life.

Many interesting debates took place in these journals. The debate between Anna Chandy and T.K.Veluppillai continued for sometime in the ‘Samadarshi’. In the essay ‘Nair Streekalum Grahavum’ appeared in ‘Mahila’, Konniyoor Meenakshi Amma writes, women should concentrate on helping men to rebuild the community, the economic foundations of which have fallen to pathetic depths. She again continues “it is essential that we be always engaged in some kind of work, however light, like the women of China. In this way, if we concentrate on economic affairs constantly, our mind will turn moral and upright and consequently, God’s radiance will fill our minds naturally.

Lucrative trades like sewing, lace making, poultry farming and so on, may be begun. Why not enter into crafts like spinning, weaving, mat making, coir making and husk beating? Each woman must necessarily own a Charka. That way, we will be able to take relief that we are performing our political duty too. Women are well placed to engage in animal husbandry and small farming. The expenses of household can be met with the income from such occupations, without relying upon the income of the menfolk and the rest can be saved….. No greater fortune can bless the community if each Nair woman would have noted this and perform her domestic duty accordingly.

24. Ibid., p.98.
Mrs. I.C. Chacko wrote in the essay ‘Nammude Streekal’ in ‘Vanita Kusumam’: “Only through higher education are we able to interact with brilliant and learned scholars who were admired by the world in different times”. She wrote about marriage: “Married at an age at which they ought to be amassing strength of the body and intellect through games and study, those young girls are denied a chance to fortify themselves. Though usually referred to as Streedhanam, it is, in actuality, Purushadhanam. In the same manner as a person buys a bullock or a horse for a sum of money, a father purchases a bridegroom for his daughter, paying a higher or lower sum commensurate to his qualifications. Our Streedhanam is that price”.

3.2 The Variety of Literary Compositions Produced by Kerala Women during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of writers</th>
<th>Title of works</th>
<th>Name and year of publications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. C. Jacob</td>
<td>Streekalude Abhyunnathi</td>
<td>Mahila Ratnam, Book.1, Number 4, Vrischikam 1091 M.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(article)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Bhageerathi Amma</td>
<td>Samudaya Sevanam (article)</td>
<td>Mahila, Vol.1, Number 8, August, 1921.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. C. Kochukutty Amma</td>
<td>Sanathana Dharmam (article)</td>
<td>Mahila Mandiram, Vol.2, Number 3, 1103 M.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(article)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champathil Chinnammamu Ammal</td>
<td>Oru Kolacase (story)</td>
<td>Lakshmibai, Book.8, No.10, 1088 Makaram M.E. (1913 February)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Saraswathy Bai</td>
<td>Thalachorillatha Streekal (story)</td>
<td>Bhashaposhini, Book .15, No.8-9, 1086 Meenam-Medam M.E. (1911 April-May)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25. Ibid., p.100.
Apart from the press, literary field also experienced new experiments. Like all dominant institutions, literature was also a patriarchal monopoly. Even when women of Kerala were not sent to schools for formal education, they were tutored privately at home in the Sanskrit classics and classical music. Art and literature were significant components in the formation of the female mind in Kerala. Royal authorities always patronized art and literature, providing an atmosphere in which cultural life crucially included literary and artistic activities.\(^{26}\)

Royal families of Kerala have been the citadels of literary activity by women in early times. The poetesses of the period who followed writing in traditional themes included women from royal palaces such as Ambadevi Thampuratti of Chembrol Palace, Rugminibai Thampuratti, sister of Swati Thirunal Maharaja, Makayiram Nal Ambadevi Thampuratti, mother of Raja Ravi Varma, Kuttikunj Thankachi, daughter of Raja Varma Thampuran, Nagercoil Kalyanikkutty Ammachi, wife of Ayilyam Thirunal Maharaja, Kilimanoor Umadevi Thampuratti, Ambadevi Thampuratti, Kuttikkunj Thankachi, daughter

\(^{26}\) Ibid., p.99
of Irayimman Thampi, Rani Lakshmi Bai, wife of Kerala Varma and K.M.Kunjilakshmi Kettilamma\textsuperscript{27}. Important prose writers included Tharavathu Ammalu Amma, T.C. Kalyani Amma, B.Kalyani Amma, K.P. Kunjilekshmi Amma, K.P.Gowrikkutty Amma, Kathulliveettil Devaki Amma, Thekkekunnathu Kalyanikkutty Amma, Ambady Ikkavamma, Ambady Kartyayani Amma and Thottakkattu Madhavi Amma\textsuperscript{28}. Simultaneously, so many women writers also came forward. While some women confined their literary activities within the traditional themes, some others selected the themes of nationalism and social change.

The first story written by a woman was ‘Raja Pankajam’ by T.C.Kalyani Amma which appeared in ‘Vidya Vinodini’ magazine in 1901\textsuperscript{29}. The first drama written by a woman in Malayalam was ‘Ajnatha Vasam’ published in 1890 by Kuttikkunju Thankachy\textsuperscript{30}. Kuttikkunju Thankachi, daughter of Irayimman Thampi, is said to have excelled many scholars of her day in grammar and logic and she is also the first woman dramatist of Kerala\textsuperscript{31}. Thottakkattu Ikkavamma enriched Malayalam literature by her ‘Subhadrajjunam’ drama, ‘Sanmargopadesam Ottanthullal’, ‘Rasakreeda Kurathippattu’, ‘Kalkkipuranam Kilippattu’ etc\textsuperscript{32}. The first voice to be sounded in Kerala against male domination was that of Thottakkattu Ikkavamma in her drama ‘Subhadrajjunam’ published in 1891, where she announces women is capable for writing poems as well as conducting administration\textsuperscript{33}. This drama begins with a courageous assertion of women’s literary power:

“Didn’t Bhama, the darling of Krishna, wage battle?

Didn’t Subhadra hold the chariot reins once?”

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{27. Geetha, “Ulloorinte Sahitya Charithravum Ezhuthukarikalum”, V.J.Varghese and N.Vijayamohanan Pillai, (eds.), \textit{Anjooru Varshathe Keralam, Chila Arivadayalangal} (Mal.), Association for Comparative Studies, Changanassery, 1999, pp.281-284.}
\footnote{29. A.V.Anilkumar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.25.}
\footnote{31. Jancy James, \textit{op.cit.}}
\footnote{32. \textit{Lakshmi Bai} magazine, Book No.25, Issue 6, Kanni, 1105 M.E.}
\footnote{33. G.Kumara Pillai, \textit{Lakshmi N. Menon}, (Mal.), Poornodaya Book Trust, Kochi, 1999, p.25.}
\end{footnotes}
If women dare all these
How can they not be fit?
Just for the famed art of poetry?” 34

Some other women considered literary compositions for social
transformation and support to freedom struggle. Muthukulam Parvathi Amma
wrote a number of works such as ‘Mathrivilapam’, ‘Sree Chithira Maharaja
(poems) ‘Sree Narayana Margam’ (biography), ‘Save India’ (drama) etc. which
were included in the text books of Travancore at that time. She was a poetess
greatly influenced by the poems of Kumaran Asan 35.

Balamani Amma was a poetess whose life was completely influenced by
Gandhian ideology and freedom struggle. She began to write poems from 1925.
Her poem about Gandhiji, ‘Njangalude Netavu’, praises ‘Charka’ as the weapon
of Ahimsa. Her important nationalistic poems were ‘Charkageetam’, ‘Aikya
Keralam’, ‘Kaikkolvin Ahimsaye’ etc. In the poem ‘Ini Melil’, she says, the
emancipation of women was necessary for the culmination of Indian
Renaissance 36.

Kadathanattu Madhavi Amma was a propagandist of Gandhian ideology
and Indian culture. Her important poems for the propagation of them are ‘Ente
etc. She wrote the poem ‘Gathakala Chintakal’ inspired by Gandhiji’s visit to
Vadakara 37.

Mary John Koothattukulam wrote many poems like ‘Tharangini’,

34. Jancy James, *op.cit.*, p.100.
35. Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai, *Malayala Sahityam Kalaghattangaliloode*, (Mal.), Prathibha
36. M.Achyuthan, *Swatantrya Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum*, (Mal.), Kerala Sahitya
Academy, Thrissur, 1985, p.308.
Academy, Thrissur, 2009, p.58.
Sister Mary Beninja, a nun of the Carmelite Order was another poetess and her most important work was ‘Lokame Yatra’. Her poems include ‘Thottam Kavithakal’, ‘Kavitharamam’ etc. In 1932 Ambady Ikkavamma translated Gandhiji’s interpretation on Bhagawad Gita ‘Anasakthy Yogam’.


Eventhough women writers were only a few, the literature of the period had a great impact on womenfolk in particular. Almost all women writers of the period were influenced by the national movement. The atmosphere of the organized move for political freedom indirectly impelled the feminine mind towards its own sense of and need for independence. It stimulated awareness in the thinking and writing woman of a world outside her immediate personal concerns. This socio-political awareness kindled afresh, inevitably led to self awareness both as a gender specific concern and as an attempt at charting out an individual identity irrespective of gender values and discriminations. This fresh response consequent on a new awakening was a milestone in the history of women’s writing in Kerala.

Apart from women’s writings, they were inspired by male writers also. A large number of poets, novelists and dramatists, encouraged by the national movement and social reform movement emerged during this period. Socio-religious leaders like Chattampi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and poets like Kumaran Asan used literature as their means to change the society. Nationalist poets like Vallathol Narayana Menon wrote poems brimming with nationalistic zeal. Side by side, Communist literature also encouraged the

people a lot. It stood for social reform, political freedom and liberation of working class.

Brahmananda Sivayogi’s ‘Streevidya Poshini’ advocated women education and his important work was ‘Moksha Pradeepam’. Subhananda Gurudevan, Muloor S. Padmanabha Panicker and many other poets wrote many works in favour of depressed classes. Sahodaran Ayyappan’s progressive poems influenced Kerala society of the time. Poikayil Yohannan wrote a large number of poems popularly known as ‘Poikayil Appachante Pattukal’, which reflect the oppressive lives of the slave castes.\(^{39}\)

The second and third decades of twentieth century were the golden period of Malayalam poetry. The great trio, Kumaran Asan, Ulloor S.Parameswara Aiyar and Vallathol Narayana Menon, greatly contributed to Kerala’s Renaissance and Freedom Movement. It was Kumaran Asan’s poems which gave life and leadership to Kerala’s Renaissance.\(^{40}\) His poems gave great blows to the existing caste order and social inequalities and all people of Kerala, especially the Ezhava caste, was awakened by its strength. Asan edited the journal ‘Vivekodayam’ which propagated the ideas of his organization as well as enabled him to give expression to his own ideas through poems. Kumaran Asan’s poems gave an intellectual and literary boost to the cultural stir of the time. ‘Duravastha’ can be considered as a victory of sex over caste, sex division over caste division. This poem narrates the story of the coming together of a Brahmin girl and a Pulaya youth, leading them to self-knowledge of their own subjectivity and sexuality and their consequent union in matrimony. In this poem, he warned; “Change the laws yourselves or else the laws will change you indeed”\(^{41}\). ‘Duravastha’ created a clamour in the field of Malayalam literature.\(^{42}\) The other poem ‘Chandala Bhikshuki’ is based on the story of a Buddhist monk, Ananda.


\(^{42}\) Varghese Padiyara, Vichara Mekhala, (Mal.), Lilly Book Centre, Changanassery, 1984, p.112.
and a Chandala woman Matangi. ‘Oru Pattu’, ‘Simhanadam’, etc. also reflects anti caste themes. In fact, he was sowing the seeds of revolution, both in literary and social fields. His poem, ‘Oru Ulbodhanam’ is addressed to his own caste members to awake, unite and win freedom at any cost. In his poem ‘Chinthavishtayaya Sita’, Asan does not project Sita as an epitome of passivity. Instead, her thoughts embody women’s right to justice.

Having worked for long as the General Secretary of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, Asan had ample opportunities to get himself acquainted with the social life of Kerala. His consciousness of the inequalities rampant in Kerala society made him raise his voice against such evils as caste barriers. These reform oriented poems helped a lot to free Kerala’s women community from the shackles of religion, tradition, caste and customs.

National movement and freedom struggle brought literature close to life. Malayalam literature and its various branches of expression also served as an effective medium for the dissemination of nationalist ideas among the people. The main aim of nationalistic writers was to awake their countrymen and women towards the path of freedom struggle and most of them were highly influenced by the charismatic personality of Gandhiji. Gandhian ideology began to circulate through the medium of literature and many works stimulated national pride and included ideologies such as ahimsa, truth, communal harmony, self sacrifice, universal love etc. The idea ‘mother and motherland are greater than heaven’ and the imagery ‘Bharat Mata’ was the feeling which inspired poets and writers of the period.

Ulloor S. Parameswara Aiyar wrote ‘Matrubhoomiyute Trippadangalil’, ‘Sukham Sukham’ etc, paying homage to the fight for Swarajya. In 1928, he congratulated Maharaja Sree Chithira Tirunal for his generous act of Temple Entry Proclamation, in his poem ‘Chaithra Prabhavam’. When Catherine Mayo made a scurrilous attack on the Indian women depicting them as parrots in the

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cages and born slaves, Ulloor in his ‘Chitrasala’, portrayed the Indian women like Sita, Draupadi, Gargi and others to counter act the so-called superiority of colonial culture. His ‘Umakeralam Mahakavya’ was based on Travancore history during Umayamma Rani’s reign.

But it was Vallathol Narayana Menon who deserves the title ‘the nationalist poet of Kerala’\textsuperscript{45}. He identified himself with the nationalist movement and was accepted as a poet of resurgent Indian nationalism by the outside world. Like other literary luminaries of his period, he plunged heart and soul into the national movement. In 1902, he sent his compliments to ‘Parishkarabhivardhini Vidyarthi Samajam’, in which he described Indian National Congress. It was the second reference about Indian National Congress in Malayalam literature after the second chapter of ‘Indulekha’\textsuperscript{46}.

Vallathol Narayana Menon entered the arena of nationalist poetry in 1921, through the poem ‘Kaalam Maari’\textsuperscript{47}. His poems came at the harvest time of Indian Renaissance and projected their sublime beauty, social content and patriotism. Vallathol became an ardent nationalist solely through the charismatic personality of Gandhiji. In Gandhiji he saw a personality that seemed absolutely identical with the Indian sages and ‘rishis’ of old, whom he had idealized and worshipped from childhood. In his celebrated poem ‘Ente Gurunathan’ which means ‘My Preceptor’ written in 1922, he describes Gandhiji as a unique personality in whom Christ, Krishna, Buddha, Sankara, Rantideva, Harishchandra and Muhammad blended themselves to perfection\textsuperscript{48}. According to him, Gandhiji is a sacred pool free from lurking monsters, a lamp flame that does not give off smoke, a treasure trove of precious gems not infested by poisonous snakes, moonlight that casts no shadow. In his anthology of poems, ‘Sahitya Manjari’, he tried to popularize Gandhian Philosophy and ideals of nationalism and social change.

\textsuperscript{47} A.P.P. Namboothiri, \textit{Akshara Silpikal}, (Mal.), \textit{D.C.Books}, Kottayam, 1988, p.11.
His poems on Lok Manya Tilak, Swami Vivekananda, Lala Lajpat Rai, Dadabhai Naoroji, C.R. Das and others invested the figures of national leaders with charismatic halo. His poem on the tri colour Congress flag was capable of injecting patriotism into the veins of every ‘Malayali’. The ‘Charka’ or the spinning wheel becomes many kinds of wheel or ‘chakra’ in one, in his poem ‘Chakragatha’. It is the ‘Sri Chakra’, the Tantric diagram used for the evocation of divine power. It is the ‘Sudarshan Chakra’, the mighty, legendary weapon of Lord Krishna. It is the wheel of time that will bring about the downfall of the imperialists in its inexorable turning.

Vallathol Narayana Menon wrote the poem ‘Phalaprapti’ in support of Vaikom Satyagraha and ‘Harijan’ uplift. His poem ‘Pora Pora’ echoed in meetings and jathas all over Kerala and ‘Nammude Marupadi’ was his answer to Hindu Muslims riots. His ‘Ente Prayaga Snanam’ describes Calcutta session of the Congress in 1928. He had profound love towards motherland, pride towards India’s heritage and favour towards India’s Freedom Movement. His ‘Bandhanasthanaya Aniruddhan’ and ‘Sishyanum Makanum’ praise Indian culture and ‘Mathru Vandanam’ is remarkable for its description of nature and patriotic fervour. Vallathol Narayana Menon also wrote against animal sacrifice, casteism, devadasi system etc. Through his poetry, the theme of glorious Indian womanhood attained tremendous popularity in the twentieth century. Indian womanhood was represented by legendary and historical figures and the modern womanly model was firmly installed as an authentic indeed, vital part of Indian heritage.

Sahodaran Ayyappan, through his poems, emphasized the right of the individual to freedom of choice in marriage and equal property rights for men and women. V.C.Balakrishna Panicker, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, G. Sankarakkurup, Vidwan K. Prakasam, V.V.R. Nambiar, Naduvathu Mahan

51. Mathrubhoomi weekly, 13 November, 1938.
52. J.Devika, Engendering Individuals, The Language of Reforming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam, op.cit., p.100.
Namboothiri, Bodheswaran, Kallanmarthodi Ravunni Menon, Kuttamathu Kunju Krishna Kurup, Amsi Narayana Pillai, Muloor S. Padmanabha Panicker, ‘Kavithilakan’ Pandit K. P. Karuppan, Vidwan T.Kelu Nair and the Tamil poet Subramanya Bharati were also very popular in Kerala during the period of freedom struggle. Kuttippurathu Kesavan Nair, Vennikkulam Gopalakkurup, K.K.Raja, Subramanyan Thirumumbu, P.Kunjiraman Nair, N.V.Krishna Warrier, Edasseri Govindan Nair, Nalankal Krishna Pillai, Varikkolil Kesavan Unnithan, Vidwan T.K.Raman Menon, Puthencavu Mathen Tharakan and P.Bhaskaran also motivated national pride through their poetry.


Chandu Menon’s ‘Indulekha’, published in 1891 was the most influential piece of writing of the time. It touched upon issues of individual choice, love, marriage and sexuality and celebrated the prestige of education. Chandu Menon presents a faithful picture of certain features of the rapidly changing social life in Malabar. The story of ‘Indulekha’ is a story of the conflict between the older generation steeped in patriarchal ideas and traditional ambitions and the young caught up with the spirit of freedom of the individual. The novelist announces his faith in the beneficial influence of English education. He is convinced of the need to bestow English Education to all, especially to women to whom the ‘Smritis’ had deprived of all kind of freedom. Indulekha has all the makings of a feminist heroine and was a refreshing even a liberating experience. Indulekha is a rebel in her own right far ahead of her times. While Madhavan represents Chandu

Menon’s ideas, the generation from Swadeshabhimani to Kumaran Asan was represented by the character ‘Sinnan’. Through Travancore State Congress, ‘Sinnan’ grew into a society, a nation and rules the country.\footnote{Ponjikkara Raphy, *Prakashadhara*, (Mal.), Current Books, Thrissur, 1989, p.52.}

His incomplete novel ‘Sarada’ also brought out the plight of a young girl caught in the web of a broken *Tharawad* and consequent litigations.

Many dramas were written during the period with the sole aim of social reform. Kocheeppan Mappilai’s ‘Mariamma Natakam’ was one of the earliest attempts at social drama in Malayalam\footnote{K.M.George, *A Survey of Malayalam Literature*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1968, p.195.}. V.T.Bhattathiripad’s ‘Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku’ was a strong indictment of the dowry system and the practice of young girls getting married off to old men. This play was performed in several Namboothiri households.

M.P.Bhattathiripad’s ‘Ritumati’ discussed the taboo attached to educated girls and even to allowing them to dress properly. M.B.Namboothirippad’s ‘Atamhuti’ attacked the dowry system among Namboothiris while ‘Vidhyavayute Vidhi’ portrayed the fate of a widow. ‘Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam’ by Mullamamgalathu Raman Bhattathirippad, ‘Apphante Makal’ by Muthiringottu Bhavatrathan Namboothiri etc. are also historical treatises for women liberty.

Among the dramas with political themes, K.Ramakrishna Pillai’s drama ‘Prathima’ attained special distinction when the government proscribed it. It presents the story of a dictator who wants to make the world believe that he is popular among the people of his country\footnote{Ibid., pp.196-197.}. He made his own statue and instigated some persons to erect it in the name of the public but the whole plan ended in chaos. The statue was the symbol of crumbling despotism. Ramakrishna Pillai wrote another play ‘Vellappokkam’ which was also banned by the government of Travancore.

In 1935, E.M.S. Namboothirippad published a booklet called ‘1917’ prepared in prison, based on Trotsky’s ‘History of the Russian Revolution’. It
was probably the first original Marxist oriented work in Malayalam. A large number of Communist pamphlets such as ‘Karl Marx’, ‘May Dinam’ etc. were published under the leadership of E.M.S. Namboothirippad and K. Damodaran. New magazines like ‘National Front’, ‘Congress Socialist’ etc. also came into being. The contribution of writers, singers and actors for the growth of Communist movement was remarkable.

The influence of Communist literature upon the working class was very great. ‘Thozhilali’ was the most important of all the newspapers published for the purpose of educating the labourers. This newspaper was published in 1926 by the Labour Association itself. Began as a fortnightly, it soon became a weekly and remained a source of inspiration for the labourers. It published articles on the triumph of labourers in Soviet Russia and the labour movements in different places in the world, the day-to-day developments in various factories and the agricultural and industrial sectors within Travancore. The methods and techniques of exploitation of the labourers by the rich and the requirement for a united struggle against the exploitation were explained in the articles published in this newspaper.

‘Velakkaran’ published by K. Ayyappan and ‘Kesari’ published by A. Balakrishna pillai were some of the journals advocating the cause of the working class of Travancore in the early stages. A photo of Vladimir Lenin was printed with his brief biography in ‘Sahodaran’ weekly in 1930. Exploitation, black marketing, profiteering, poverty, starvation and famine were regularly dealt with, in all these publications.

The writings of Cherukad displayed compassion towards gender power. Cherukad’s famous heroine of ‘Muthassi’, Nani Mistress, brings order, neatness and efficiency to her husband’s home besides being a hard working and capable school teacher and a committed and disciplined political activist. With the rise of Communist party, drama became popular as an expression of the revolutionary

zeal of the emerging political culture. The progressive writers were at the vanguard of the new theatre movement. ‘Alappuzha Thozhilali Samskarika Kendram’ presented at the stage for the first time, a poverty stricken family, instead of stories from ‘Puranas’ and history. The starvation and unemployment among labourers was the main theme of the drama ‘Desasevakan’ staged by them.

The print media served as an instrument of political mobilization. The press was an important vehicle of popular education. Through it, the ideas of democracy and freedom began to permeate among the members of the middle class and gradually among the masses. In fact, to a large extent, the press had contributed to a great stir in the social, political and economic life of Travancore. The newspapers of either bourgeoisie or working class succeeded in influencing their followers and achieving their political goals. Printing press played an important role in creating a powerful public opinion and thus led to the gradual growth of politicization of Kerala’s masses, both men and women.

Malayalam journalism had reached a high standard in Travancore and Cochin in the nineteenth century. At that time, the newspapers did not deal with problems of political interest so much as those of social and literary interest. Political journalism however began from the days of such stalwarts as Devji Bhimji of Cochin, K.P.Kesava Menon of Calicut and Swadeshabhimani Rama Krishna Pillai, Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, C.V.Kunjuraman and Mammen Mappilai of Travancore. The birth of political journalism in Malayalam is a precious legacy of freedom struggle in Kerala.

The ‘Keralamitram’ published in 1881 by a Gujarati, Devji Bhimji from Kochi was, in all means, the first systematic newspaper in Kerala. ‘Kerala Patrika’ published in 1884 dealt with social and political problems and gave coverage to news of political significance. ‘Malayali’ published in 1886 by C.Krishna Pillai criticized the acts of Diwan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar.

'Nasrani Deepika’ published in 1887 at Mannanam was the mouthpiece of ‘Nasrani Jathyaikya Sangham’. Its managing editor was Nidheerikkal Manikkathanar.

‘Deepika’ later supported anti caste struggles, Harijan uplift movement, Temple entry movement, struggle for civic rights etc. and popular revolts like Malayali Memorial, Vaikom Satyagraha, Nivarthana agitation etc. It wrote several editorials on the activities of Indian National Congress. ‘Malayala Manorama’ published in 1888 by Kandathil Varghese Mappilai, criticized the corruption among Travancore bureaucracy and supported Malayali Memorial, Ezhava Memorial, Nivarthana Agitation, Responsible Government in Travancore and adult franchise. The conflict between the ‘Malayala Manorama’ and Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar can be said to have started immediately after the investiture ceremony of Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma in 1931.

The opportunity to take retaliatory action against ‘Malayala Manorama’ came in September 1938 when it published reports highly sympathetic to the State Congress led agitation for responsible government. The news of the incidents on the Sankhumukham beach, the Neyyattinkara firings and the unfortunate happenings at Puthuppally were published in the newspaper. The government cancelled the license of ‘Malayala Manorama’ and confiscated the press and the Maharaja was promptly informed of it. It started publication again only on 29 November 1947. ‘Sujananandini’ was published by Paravoor Kesavanasan in 1892. ‘Swadeshabhimani’ published in 1905 by Vakkom Abdul Khadir Maulavi was edited by K.Ramakrishna pillai who dedicated his life for progressive journalism. He ardently criticized the misrule of Diwan Rajagopalachari. In 1910, ‘Swadeshabhimani’ newspaper and press were confiscated and Ramakrishna Pillai was exiled from Travancore. ‘Kerala Kaumudi’ published in 1911 by C.V. Kunjuraman, and edited by K.Sukumaran,

‘Kesari’ weekly published an article of Sanjayan by name ‘Sir C.P. Povuka Thanne Venam’ which means ‘Sir C.P. must go’, on 24 Kanni 1114 M.E.66. ‘Bhaje Bharatham’ newspaper published from Chengannoor under the editorship of M. Mathunni and Sankarathil Sankuppillai was the first paper published for spreading Congress ideology67. In 1923, the editors were punished for treason. They were the first Congress political prisoners of Travancore68. The history of ‘Mathrubhoomi’ published in 1923 is strongly related to the history of Indian National Congress and freedom struggle in Kerala.

‘Deepam’ published in 1931 from Ernakulam wrote articles supporting revolt for responsible government in Travancore and was banned by Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar. The issue of ‘Dasan’ dated 25 March 1933 contained a scurrilous attack on Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar under the heading “The Knight Errant”. As per Government orders, M.M.Varkey, the printer and publisher of ‘Dasan’ agreed to change the printing of the newspaper from City Press, Trivandrum to Subhodayam Press, Puthenchantha69. ‘Chandrika’ published in 1934 was the mouthpiece of Muslim League and ‘Prabhatham’ published in 1935 was the mouthpiece of Congress Socialist Party. ‘Prabhatham’ was Kerala’s first Socialist newspaper70. Its editor was E.M.S.Namboothirippad and he was also helped by K. Damodaran, I.C.P. Namboothirippad and A. Madhavan. Though

67. Ibid., p.248.
68. Ibid., p.249.
69. Confidential Files 4464/44, Bundle No.134, Directorate of State Archives, Trivandrum.
70. S.Raimon, op.cit., p.250.
published in Malabar, it had wide contacts in Travancore and Cochin. It wrote for the rights of labourers, peasants, teachers, students etc. and was a supporter of peasant struggles. ‘Prabhatham’ used to publish complaints raised by the peasants and there were special columns for this. This newspaper wrote about Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, socialism and Soviet Union. The publication of a poem written by Chovvara Parameswaran titled ‘Atmanadam’ annoyed the government which imposed heavy fine upon it. The license of ‘Prabhatham’ was suspended following refusal to furnish security to government for the publication of a poem on Bhagat Singh’s martyrdom. It also supported the Nivarthana Agitation. Finally it was abolished by the government. ‘Pauraprabha’ published in 1938 from Kottayam and ‘Pauradhwani’ published in 1939 from Kottayam supported the agitations of Travancore State Congress.

‘Deenabandhu’ published in 1941 from Thrissur supported national movement and the agitation of Travancore State Congress and it was circulated in Travancore also. ‘Desabhimani’ published in 1942 from Kozhikode became the mouthpiece of Communist Party. ‘Kaumudi’ owned by C.Kesavan was also banned by the government.

Ceaseless agitation organized through the columns of the newspapers brought to the public, the evils of the administration and the blissful effects of the experiments on responsible government tried in British India. Naturally the masses were awakened to a new sense of patriotism and dignity which prompted them to demand proudly a share in the administration of the State. Thus Malayalam press and literature helped very much in boosting the self-esteem of Kerala women towards empowerment and political fervour.

71. Prabhatham, 30 May, 1938.
72. pd.cpm.org/2002/sept08/09082002_desabhimani.htm
73. www.prd.kerala.gov.in/historyofpress.htm