CHAPTER III

Dalit Ways of Seeing the Drama

The dictum, ‘Make Nambuthiri a human being’ shows the verve that had been risen among the articulate youngsters of Nambuthiri Brahmin community, who, during the course of time, emerging as the most vehement forerunners of the approaching political changes, handled a dual role in the social scenario - the role as freedom fighters and as communal reformers. The notional entwinement of the freedom struggle and the communal reformation and its hypothetical equilibrium (which is well-epitomised by the above dictum) in the discursive practices show their dialogical encounter with the colonial modernity.

For Nambuthiri Brahmins in Kerala, the community reformation movement was a premier phase of their stepping up to a colonial modernity. Here, the important point is that the reactionary customs observed by the Nambuthiri Brahmins were absolutely endogenous. Unlike the Dalits, to whom the stigma of pollution was an inflicted one, the Brahmins had arbitrariness in confronting the vicious customs of their community. As they had possessed a spiritual and physical control over the entire society, it was easy for them to keep the domestic problems (concerning gender discrimination, etc.) of their community behind an iron curtain, free from a vigorous public debate. The issues having universal magnitude were taken by them as mere community problem related with customary questions debated in a limited coterie.
The same has been happened in their addressing of the Dalit problems in Kerala. As far as the caste hegemony is concerned, it is evident that the hardline radicalism purported by a minor section of the Nambuthiri Brahmins itself distanced from the trans-casteist praxis advocated by Shudra and Dalit leaders of that time. The leaders who had taken the cause of uplifting Dalits from their social discrimination considered caste as hardcore of their political dialogue. The surge of anti-caste movements which brought visible changes in Kerala society during the period spanning from 1850s to 1930s is to be noted for its comparatively less representation of the Nambuthiri Brahmins. The main spiritual and political figures of that period - Sri Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal, Ayyankali, Poikayil Appachan, K. Kelappan, T. K. Madhavan, C. Krishnan, K. Ayyappan, Mannath Padmanabhan and the like – hailed either from Shudra or from Dalit communities.

It should be against this background that we should see the politics of Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku. Like many of the savarna leaders who fought for the national cause in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the cognate of V. T. Bhattathirippad’s political consciousness is also seen rested in the renaissance thought professed by Rajaram Mohan Roy and the Brahmo Samaj. It was in the early twenties that VT’s link to Indian National Congress turned round to a new phase. In 1921, he participated in the Ahmadabad conference of Indian National Congress as a representative from Kerala. It was through K. Kelappan, the stalwart of Kerala’s reformation movement, that he was attracted towards the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi. It needs to be stressed here that VT’s Yachana Yatra, a walk organised to raise
a fund for the poor Nambuthiri students, had been strongly influenced by Gandhi’s Dandi Yatra, the harbinger of the famous Salt Satyagraha.²

In a caste oriented society, one cannot engage in an apparently secular ‘social build-up’ (like the struggle for national independence) without being encountered by an extremely private caste experience. An incident pertaining to his journey to Ahmadabad for the annual conference of the Indian National Congress rightly exemplifies this. When he returned to his school after the Ahmadabad journey, the authorities demanded that he should pay penance for preferring a ship journey, for a voyage through sea was a prohibited thing according to the sacred law of Brahmins.

In the third scene of the play we see Madhavan, the hero, lamenting on his plight for not having a chance to get a school education. He has in his hand a copy of Unninambuthiri, a tabloid published by a group of radical Nambuthiri youngsters, in which a story had been given of a young Nambuthiri who went to England for I. C. S. (Indian Civil Service) studies. Madhavan exclaims that one could be so lucky to have crossed the sea at a time when the religious rules had been too rigorously prevailed.

V. T. Bhattathirippad was not the first and the only man to do propaganda for modern (English) education for the Nambuthiri youth. The acumen of Kuroor Unninambuthirippad was decisive in formulating a new direction for Yogakshema Sabha, an organisation set for the multi-faceted prosperity of the Nambuthiri Brahmins. It was long before the emergence of a radical group in Nambuthiri society that Kuroor Nambuthirippad argued for the dissemination of English education in his community. His incessant pressure
in the eighth annual conference of the *Yogakshema Sabha* made the conservatives to felicitate Sri. C. S. Subrahmonian Potti for being the first among the Nambuthiris to hold a Masters Degree. It was under his leadership that the Sabha launched a Nambuthiri school at Edakkunni, in Thrissur.³ So, right from the second decade of the twentieth century we can see an attitudinal shift in Nambuthiri Brahmin’s approach towards English education.

As the existing social relations were being checked by the reformation movements in modern times, it was necessary for the Nambuthiri Brahmins to keep their social prominence intact. So, they strove for an educational resurgence. They realised that the ‘vedic pedagogy’, upon which the gamut of their centuries old sovereignty was rested up to this time, became irrelevant in the milieu of colonial modernity. Here lies the difference between Brahmin and Dalit. For Dalits, the struggle for educational rights was a question related to equality. But for Brahmins, education was an entity which has been closely knitted to power and dominance.

In the eleventh scene of *Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku* there is a discussion among the peer group of educated youngsters. The venue is a bachelors’ bungalow in Madras. Being a state which was under the direct rule of British Empire, Madras was then capable of providing better higher education for the career aspirants from the minor principalities of south India. Hence the students who were having their secondary education completed, thronged there.
The scene is opened with the soliloquy of Madhavan, the hero. It is his life as an *apphan* that brings him perennial sorrows. As per the customs of the Nambuthiri Brahmins, an *apphan* (a junior member of an *illam* who is having an elder brother) is not allowed to marry a Nambuthiri woman. But he can maintain nonformal conjugal relations with Nair or Kshatriya women. *Sambandham*, it was through this term that this practice was known in history, was vehemently despised by the junior members of the Nambuthiri Brahmin community.

While portraying Madhavan, the author couldn’t help ascribing him a tinge of his own self, i.e., coloring the character with his own private experiences. The fact that the author himself was an *apphan* adds more importance to Madhavan’s character. Madhavan’s discussion with his friends in the eleventh chapter shows that his new revelations about his community were not a thing which had been perceived through the subjective field of his experiences; rather, it were the result of a new learning disseminated through the colonial modernity. Madhavan’s way of welcoming his friends to his bungalow aptly reflects his acquaintance with English formalities. Their parlance is equally important in understanding their strong adherence to English language. It is an argumentative fact that the five characters in this scene - Madhavan, Krishnan Nambiar, VM, Parasurama Iyengar and RK – bring forward such nuances of a learnt minority: 1) they disavow the irrational customs of the traditional Hindus. 2) they start to see the society through an orientalist/anglicised knowledge system. 3) they prefer English for didactic purposes. So, it is fair to notice that the literary heroes of that time, who often preserved a progressive view in their mind, were always depicted as persons with ‘English knowledge’.
In his critique of *Indulekha*, Chandu Menon’s well-acclaimed novel, Dr. K. N. Panikkar observes:

Chandu Menon conceived the three main characters in the novel - Madhavan, Indulekha and Suri Nambuthirippad - to reflect the main cultural traits which were in contention in Malabar society in the nineteenth century. Madhavan is English-educated, socially progressive, politically alive, and at home with European customs, manners and knowledge. He is adept at lawn tennis, cricket and other athletic games. At the same time he is not an anglophile, or contemptuous of Indian tradition; rather, he is well-grounded in it. He has ‘profound critical knowledge’ of Sanskrit literature, he can appreciate the nuances of traditional art forms, he can recite Malayalam poems from memory with ease. The evolution of his character represents the intellectual process which reflects the contradiction within colonial hegemonisation which not only generated consent but also contestation. Located in this milieu, Madhavan is not a static character, symbolising the accultured Indian of Macaulayian vintage. That part of his make-up is indeed quite evident, but he goes beyond it to embody the elements of the newly emerging national consciousness.4

The focus of the observation can be summed up in this way: An educated Indian of that time normally represented the ‘Macaulayian vintage’. But that very colonial education made them capable of representing the evolving
national consciousness. This is the common trait that we find both in the protagonists of Indulekha and Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku.

From the narratives of that period we get an image that there was an inseparable relation between one's progressive ideas and his English education. It is not safe to consider that the entwining of the two, that is to say, the English education and the reformist outlook, which had been repeatedly narrated in many of the literature of that time, was an innocent one. Rather, it is better to understand this process in terms of colonial hegemonisation. Placing the reformative tasks taken by an intelligentsia in the cradle of English education naturally gave a chance for the British government to legitimise the dissemination of English as the sole language which would open access to a ‘cultured’ modernity. Thus language was turned as a parallel device for the conformation of British raj in India. It was through middle class that they implemented this silent invasion.

As Dr. K. N. Panikar argues, the evolving of the new middle class not only created an ambience of ‘consent’, but also generated a politics of ‘contestation’. But this ‘contestation’ was not a thing rooted in indigenous consciousness.

The make-up of the cultural world of the middle class, to a great extent, drew upon the possibilities inherent in the new literacy that colonialism introduced in India. The colonial system initiated by Macaulay and Bentinck and elaborated during the course of the nineteenth century had many facets and functions, among which its contribution to the creation
of a new cultural ‘common sense’ figures as one of the most enduring and critical. Both in content and in organisation it was qualitatively different from the pre-colonial system. So too in intent, assumptions and epistemological foundations. The limitations in knowledge notwithstanding, the pre-colonial system had the distinct advantage of being indigenous; it had grown out of the intellectual experience of the Indian people. In contrast, the body of knowledge the colonial system sought to inculcate had not evolved from within and therefore its epistemological assumptions were alien to Indian mind.6

A critique of indigenous culture was evolved out of this colonial knowledge system. It was not in an indigenous cultural realm that Madhavan and his friends fixed their critical common sense while they engaged in seeking remedies for the unwholesome customs of the Nambuthirī Brahmin community. Obviously they have pronounced a rupture from the tradition. But the rupture was not solely the result of their ‘anglicised’ way of thought. Apart from that, it was partially the result of their assimilation of the capitalist qualities. So, we can see two distinct, though related, characteristics in Madhavan and his friends: 1) They represent an acculturated/anglicised middle class Indianness 2) They acquire a pragmatic view of life which is nothing but the result of an emerging capitalism.

Brevity of its content notwithstanding, the discussion covers some of the most important points concerning Nambuthirī Brahmin’s future in a modern society. It is with an observation on ghosha sambradayam (the veil system
of Nambuthiri women) that they start this discussion. Krishnan Nambiar invites attention to an article published in *Sunday Times* pertaining to the veil system. They wonder, though they take the facts and figures in that article for granted, how the veil system solely followed by Nambuthiri Brahmins only, if its origin is attributed to the Mohammadan regime, as the article argues. After making some passing comments on the veil system, they suddenly skip to another topic - a topic which had been axial to the radical wing of the Nambuthiri Brahmins during the period of reformation. It was nothing but practice of *sambandham* - the marital contract prevailed in those days between the Nair ladies and the junior members - *apphan* - of an *illam*. Even though they show some insight in their understanding of *sambandham* as a social anathema, they repudiate to see its significance in a more responsive cultural context. To them, *sambandham* is such a system through which the properties of Nambuthiri Brahmins are being cascaded to the Nair community. The discussion precisely shares the anxiety of Nambuthiri Brahmins in dispossessing their power as an affluent social class in the light of various legislations concerning land and tenancy. Even before the dawn of 20th century there had been introduced a number of laws of this genre. A. Sreedhara Menon writes:

The complicated relationship between the landlords and tenants in Kerala necessitated the introduction of land reforms from the 19th century onwards. One of the earliest pieces of land legislation in Travancore was the Pandara Pattam Proclamation of June 1865 which has hailed as “the Magna Carta of the Travancore ryots”… In Cochin land reforms were introduced first to prevent evictions and grant
permanent rights to the tenants. A royal writ or Titturam issued in 1038 K.E. (AD 1863) prevented eviction of Kanam tenants before a period of 12 years …

In Malabar the frequent evictions and levy of excessive rents strained the relations between the landlord and tenant and led to serious disturbances which marred the peace of the district. Mr. Logan who enquired into the causes of the Mappila outbreaks recommended the grant of fixity of tenure to certain classes of tenants and on his recommendation the Malabar Compensation for Tenants Improvement Act of 1887 was passed to prevent the growing practice of eviction.\(^7\)

Continuous legislative interference of the state administration of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar made the agrarian system of Kerala go through a phase of significant structural changes. It not only disrupted the power relations based on a \textit{janmi} system but also helped to emerge a new aristocratic class. This new class was primarily constituted of the intermediary tenants who were holding the land of \textit{janmis} for a long term lease. As the intermediary tenants were mostly Nairs, the newly emerged social structure naturally made a cultural influx centered on the Nair community. This turn resulted in an ideological contestation between Nambuthiri Brahmins and Nairs.

As per the opinion of the historiographers, the relation between these two communities had a history of one thousand years. But, during the time when Brahmins became the most affluent class in Kerala (it was in 12\(^{\text{th}}\) century
AD that the Brahmins established their power both in economical and ideological arena), there formed a cultural discourse legitimising the privileges enjoyed by them and thereby demoting the other castes to a far inferior realm. It was through the control over land and temple that they could become the central unit of a casteist society. This not only enabled them to articulate their own position in the society but also made them the sole authority to determine the gradation of other castes in terms of (im)purity. Taking these facts into consideration we can assume that the relation between Nambuthiri Brahmins and Nairs was not so fair throughout all these centuries. It must have been the intermediary position of the Nairs that engendered a concealed conflict between the two. This position gave the Nair community a discrete identity - they were never counted as low as the other lower communities; never counted, of course, either in the status of Brahmins. The practice of sambandham gave the Nair community a ‘virtual link’ with Brahmanism. But it also gave a complex dimension to their relation. Many authors have observed the complexities in the relationship between these two communities. K. N. Panikkar writes:

According to Louis Dumont, the Nambuthiri ‘lived in close symbiosis with the Nair in marriage and sexual relationships’. But except for the status accorded by a hypergamous marriage, the advantage of ‘symbiosis’ lay exclusively with the Nambuthiris and, therefore, the real question is not, as Dumont has suggested, how the higher-caste Nambuthiris complied with it, but how the Nairs came
to accept a system of unequal partnership. Since the Nambuthiris did not permit hypogamy, the Nambuthiri - Nair liaison was qualitatively different from the reciprocal alliances among the Nairs, even within the framework of the sambadham system.

The Nair acceptance of Nambuthiri privileges as a social ideal was the result of the latter’s ideological hegemony and control of land. The sexual morality of the Nairs, as laid down by the Nambuthiris did not emphasise chastity as a virtue. According to Keralolpatti, for instance, the duty of Nair women was to satisfy the desires of the Brahmins. Quoting the Smritis, Ashtamurthi Nambuthiri told the marriage commission that ‘if a Brahmin wished to have sexual intercourse with a Sudra’s wife, the Sudra would be bound to gratify the wish’. Apart from this religious rationale, brahmanic traditions propounded the idea that the Nambuthiris, living in accordance with Vedic rites, were the ideal sexual partners from whom alone brave and intelligent progeny could be conceived. Buchanan observed in 1800 that ‘they were the most favoured lovers, the young women of rank and beauty seldom admitting any person to bed, but a Brahmin, and more especially a Nambuthiri’.

The ideological influence was so strong that the privileges of the Nambuthiris arising out of their social dominance were perceived by the Nairs as a matter of prestige and
privilege for themselves. Where ideology failed the Nambuthiris had their material position to fall back upon. Being landlords with absolute proprietary rights, they could assign land to the families of women whose favours they sought or, in the event of refusal, cancel the assignment if one already existed. Mencher and Goldberg have noticed cases ‘where a Nambuthiri took a fancy for a pretty Nair girl whose family held land on some form of subsidiary tenure from his illam, and was able to force her to become his mistress, even if she was already married and devoted to her Nair husband’.

Thus, the traditional pattern of family organisation, the system of marriage, and the law of inheritance of the Nairs were closely linked with the nature of land relations and the over-riding influence of the values and ideology of the Nambuthiris.8

By the beginning of the 18th century there occurred a qualitative shift in the Nambuthiri - Nair ‘symbiosis’. Nair community, hitherto tethered in a Brahmin dominion, left off their deferential dependence and began to realise their discrete identity in a new light showered by, undeniably, the coloniser. It was through the interference on indigenous economy that the coloniser made substantial changes in Kerala society. The trade and commerce controlled by them initiated a new turn in the production relations. Not only did it reorganise the prevailing economic system but also renovated the micro-structure of the society. By the first quarter of the 20th century these
changes reached a concrete form. Some important acts and regulations initiated by the government pertaining to Marumakkathayam and sambandham resulted in the disintegration of property hoarded by the Karanavanmar of Nair tharavad and Nambuthiri illam. This was beneficial to Nair community in two ways. The practice of sambandham ceased to exist as a liaison. It was given the status of a legal marriage. (The first among the successive laws concerning the marriage and inheritance of family property was the Malabar Marriage Act of 1896. Besides uplifting sambandham to the level of a legal marriage it insisted that the husband and father should give maintenance to the wife and children) \(^9\). The second benefit acquired by Nair community was through the Marumakkathayam Acts. It dismantled the Joint Family system and introduced individual partition.

The first Nair Act passed into law in 1912 was the first important piece of legislation on the subject. It did not give complete satisfaction to the progressive sections of the community because it did not provide for individual partition of the Nair taravads but only for tavazhi partition. Moreover, it sanctioned half the self acquired property of a male to his children and the other half to his nephews. The second Nair Act passed in 1925 provided for individual partition and also deprived the nephews of all claims to the properties of their uncles. The Act also made polygamy illegal.
The Cochin area did not lag behind Travancore in the matter of progressive legislation regarding the law of inheritance, succession, marriage, etc. The Cochin Nair regulation of 1095 K.E (1919-’20) imposed curbs on the karanavar and facilitated the partition of joint families. It legalised customary marriage and declared the wife and children as being entitled to maintenance by the husband or father. The regulation also prohibited polygamy.¹⁰

Thus the legislations regarding land, tenure, marriage, and inheritance of property ensured basic financial security to Nair community. We can see that most of the legislations were in favour of Nair community. It created a supportive social surrounding for them to become an affluent class. If put it in a more precise way, the gain of Nairs became the loss of Nambuthiris. For example, it was ensured through the legal validation of sambandham that the Nair wife/children would get a share of her/their Nambuthiri husband’s/father’s family property. The ultimate result of this legislation was the disintegration of Nambuthiri Brahmin’s property. Similarly, the laws regarding tenure, by prohibiting the compulsory eviction and execution of melcharth (lease out the land to a new one by taking the right away from the former) hindered the exclusive power of Nambuthiri Brahmins over the agrarian land.

It should be against this background that we should see the progressive movements sprouted within the Nambuthiri Brahmin community. Immanent in them there was a concealed fear about the growing influence of the Nairs. The eleventh scene also reflects some fears of this kind in a more direct way.
VM, who is also an apphan like Madhavan, mentions about the Nambuthiri Bill which had been passed in the Cochin Council. It was yet to be approved by the Maharaja, for it arose a protestation from the conservative Nambuthiris due to a clause that envisaged allowing the junior members of an illam to carry out a marriage from the same community. ‘The Nair Bill’ he laments, ‘salvaged the Nair community from the stranglehold of the Nambuthiri sambandham. The ambalavasis are trying to come under the purview of Nair Bill. It is the Kshatriyas who are going to suffer by the Nambuthiri Bill. Sambandham is still vogue in some of the royal families like Thrippunithura, Kodungalloor and Chazhoor. So, they won’t get Nambuthiris for sambandham, if the bill is passed’. However factual his contention is, it reflects the sole concern of a person about his own caste. We have already seen the reason behind the socio-political conflict emanated both in the base and superstructure of the Kerala society between Nambuthiri Brahmins and Nairs. The cultural expression of this conflict was nothing but literature. It is in this context that we should investigate whether the label ‘progressive’ is precisely suited to Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekkku.

Literature actually gave vent to the tension between Nair and Nambuthiri. So it never went to noxious dimensions. Besides the role of literature, some other things also contributed to soothe the tension. The first to mention is, quite clearly, the reformation movement. Secondly, the emergence of capitalist social relations. The advent of a new social order was in fact not a complete breaking away of the feudal past. Rather, it was the making of a social consent through the reformative aims. Had the politics of this consent not been functioned through the agencies of literature and reformation, the Brahmin-Nair conflict would have been reached an unwholesome end.
In an aghast ambience of a transitional period an author is always met with a morale crisis. He/she writes for the future; but he/she remains in the past. So, the image of a text as progressive or reactionary is debatable. As we have seen in the above discussions, V. T. Bhattathirippad represents his caste and class anxieties despite the fact that his play belongs to a broad category of progressive literature. The reason behind this ambivalence is one’s link with the base structure of the society. A text belongs to the cultural sphere of a society. Culture is one of the components of the superstructure. But the ideology of a text is entwined with the material base of society. Analysing Frederic Jameson’s *The Ideology of the Text*, John Mowitt underlines the points on which Jameson focused:

The analysis that unfolds in the *Ideology of the Text* situates textuality in relation to two important contexts. The first of these involves the context of literary study, specifically the enduring debate over realism and modernism within the discipline. The second involves the context of social history, specifically the question of whether and how one is to link the intellectual superstructure to the material base of the society.11

We have seen how their control over land helped the Nambuthiri Brahmins to create a knowledge system centered on the *savarna* ideology and articulate through the narratives created upon the foundation of this knowledge system. Even though V. T. Bhattathirippad overtly accepts the slogans of reformation movement he decides to choose his community as the realm of his activity. This decision was an effort to protect the Brahmin
subjectivity from the vortex of the approaching social changes. He was not unaware of the practice of untouchability which was vogue in those days. There is even a scene in Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku which sheds light on this irrational practice of ayitham.

It is in the sixth scene that we see the Othikkan (the person who teaches veda) comes across Kuramba, a Dalit woman. He was on the way to temple for his vedic worship. Kuramba, haste in fastening a big bunch of grass together for her cattle, is seen by him. Embarrassed to see an ‘untouchable’ in his way, Othikkan fires abusive words at her. Finding no way to rescue himself from being contaminated by the sight of an ‘untouchable’ he just loses his temper. The path they stood was a narrow one. As a Brahmin the Othikkan cannot move aback. Nor can he move forward by the fear of ashudham. As a Dalit, Kuramba should have kept a distance of sixty four feet from a Brahmin. Somehow she contrives to keep an approximate distance and goes away. After that, the Othikkan starts to measure the distance from him to the spot where Kuramba stood to know whether the stipulated distance had been kept by her. Before he could measure a distance of thirty two feet he realises that his sudham has been breached. Dismayed, he goes for a bath to clear off his pollution caused by Kuramba.

As an activist who participated in the struggles against untouchability he had internalised the values of the reformation. So, he could not help commenting on the practice of ayitham. The scene we have seen here adds nothing more to the plot of this play. Nor it admixes a distinct tint in the total aesthetics of the story. It is more a vantage-view perpetuated by the Anglicised/Oriental system of knowledge about the caste disparities in Kerala than an indigenous
understanding of the Dalit problems. But this evaluation raises a question. Was it on this very knowledge system that he stood when he formulated a critique of his own community? Yes, definitely.

Caste was alien to Britain. The foundation of their ideas about individual liberty or equality was European reformation. It was against the background reality of nature, religion and monarchy that the concepts of liberty and equality articulated in the European intellectual sphere\(^\text{12}\). The quality of universality it attributed itself was dangerously inadequate for understanding the Indian reality. It is perhaps not surprising that Europe and America did take an egalitarian philosophy based on individual liberty as their prime slogan to bring in a capitalist modernity, for it was rather easy for them to fix equality in terms of linear homology between society and individual.

The classical/aristocratic/bourgeois concepts about inequality met hazards in tackling the social stratification in India. As part of facilitating their colonial rule, Britain conducted certain studies on the caste system. It was on this foundation that the later scholarly discourses on caste had been flourished. This brought about some serious fallacies in the oriental discourses centered on caste, hegemony and untouchability. The appropriation of the information provided by the official surveys of the authority into the corpus of oriental knowledge ultimately resulted in legitimising the colonial rule in India. Assiduity of the later orientalists notwithstanding, the false notions on which the earlier understanding of caste was developed confined the discourse into an eternal decrepitude. Caste was subjected to various interferences without being known its essence. In his magnum opus, *Homo Hierarchichus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, Louis Dumont writes:
Since the end of the seventeenth century the question of whether caste is in essence religious or simply ‘social’ has constantly arisen. The question was for a long time vital for the Catholic missionaries…

Writing in the nineteenth century, the Sanskritist Max Müller raised the same question for similar ends, but in a different context. If caste is by nature religious, the English government of India, whose principle was never to interfere in matters over and above the immediate interests of civil order, was justified in respecting it. If on the other hand it is not, nothing stood in the way of a bolder policy, in so far as it was judged just and prudent. Now, contrary to what Hindus often imagine, caste has no place in the Veda, which, for the Hindus, contains all revelation. It follows that the government and the missionaries could do what they liked with caste.¹³

Though the understanding of the caste system through an imperial discourse gave space to situate the concept of equality in an unevenly structured Indian society, it impeded the establishment of Dalit subjectivity. Savarnas, already an articulate community, could assimilate the values propagated by the western thought more easily than the unarticulated Dalits. Reflected through the social platforms like reformation or enlightenment, it was the Rousseauian concept of equality that spoke on behalf of Dalits.
These observations precisely lead to the following conclusions:

i. It is implicit in *Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku* that there had been gathered a conflict between the Nambuthiri Brahmins and the Nairs.

ii. The basis of this conflict was the pro-tenant regulations introduced by the colonial rule.

iii. Since these regulations endangered the economic dominance maintained by the Nambuthiri Brahmins, it was inevitable for them to find a relatively ‘neutral’ zone/area for keeping their social power intact\(^\text{14}\).

iv. It was on literature that they found this ‘neutral zone’. As an articulate class, the Brahmins could appropriate the protean forms of literature easier than the other castes.

v. The control over literature (or over the means of literature) naturally gave the *savarnas* a chance to act as the official patrons of literature. This resulted in the estrangement of the Dalit mass from the field of literature.

vi. Consequently, the formation of Dalit subjectivity was impeded.

**Nationalism and Dalit question**

The themes of the two plays, *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* and *Ritumathi*, are almost similar to that of *Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku*. As
Thethi, the heroine of *Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku*, Devaki (the heroine in *Ritumathi*) too had to go through various hurdles before she could marry her lover. No less was the relevance of *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* when polygamy was vogue in Nambuthiri Brahmin community. But unlike Thethi and Devaki the heroine of this play (Ettipapthi) finds recourse in death.

Dwelling simply on the semblance, one can argue that these three plays have made a seminal experiment on a scarcely known subject, i.e., the freedom of women. But our discussion on *Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku* has dismissed this argument by placing a thesis focused on ‘Nambuthiri-Nair conflict.’ As the three plays have invariably highlighted the irrational marriage customs followed by the Nambuthiri Brahmin community, the hypothesis developed upon ‘Nambuthiri-Nair conflict’ is equally applicable to *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* and *Ritumathi*.

We have already discussed how the radical/progressive view of the authors has been contributed by the ‘Nambuthiri-Nair conflict.’ We have also seen how the reformation movement helped them to come over to a capitalist modernity. Now we have to examine the way in which a broad platform like ‘Indian nationalism’ helped the Nambuthiri Brahmins to remain in the axis of the discursive sphere.

At one plane, a nation is an idea. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was the intellectual elite - Brahmanic, urban centred and pro-British - who made current the idea of an Indian polity; India as a political community was, in one
sense, their discovery. It is not surprising that intellectuals remained the main protagonists in Indian politics until a few decades ago.¹⁵

But when Gandhi entered into the freedom struggle, as Ashis Nandy points out, the prerogative of the intellectuals was inundated:

Not surprisingly, as soon as the semblance of participatory politics evolved in India, the culture of Indian politics became aggressively anti-intellectual. Gandhian anti-intellectualism, for example, was basically an attempt to shift the centre of political culture from liberal universalism and reinterpretations of Sanskritic texts to the hitherto peripheral, non-Brahmanic cultures of the new participants in politics. These little traditions did not require frequent reassessment to be made modern; they were intrinsically ‘modern’ if not always in content, at least in the flexibility and scepticism with which the content was handled. Making a virtue of those elements of Indian culture which had embarrassed the earlier modernisers, the Gandhian movement, with its stress on social activism and a pragmatic ethic, made redundant all abiding concerns with metaphysics.¹⁶

Gandhi’s apparently altruistic political philosophy, though not completely free from the Brahmanic preoccupations as Ashis Nandy argues, gave a safe platform to the educated elites. It was not by disavowing his obvious inclination towards Hindu scripts that Gandhi could make a secular platform
for the freedom struggle. Rather, he reaffirmed Hinduism while he was engaged in concocting a national spirit. The qualitative side of this Hinduism purported by Gandhi was that it took ‘the hitherto peripheral, non-Brahmanic cultures’ in for fuelling an anti-imperial debate based on indigenous polemics.

During the time when Gandhi entered into Indian politics, the hard core Brahmanism was experiencing a set-back by the emerging modernity. Gandhi did not intend to uproot the tenet of Vedic Brahmanism. As a Banya Brahmin (an influential mercantile class of Vysyas in Gujarat) he was less inclined in questioning the corpus of smritis or sutras which for a long time, was the fulcrum for rationalising untouchability.

Gandhi’s negotiation with Nambudiri Brahman trustee of the Vaikam temple at the time of satyagraha, faithfully recorded by his secretary Mahadev Desai, shows something of the temper of the orthodox at the time as well as Gandhi’s method of persuasion:

“Gandhiji: Is it fair to exclude a whole section of Hindus, because of their supposed lower birth, from public roads which can be used by non-Hindus, by criminals and bad characters, and even by dogs and cattle?

Nambudiri Trustee: But how can it be helped? They are reaping the reward of their Karma.
Gandhiji: No doubt they are suffering for their karma by being born as Untouchables. But why must you add to the punishment? Are they worse than even criminals and beasts?

Nambuthiri Trustee: They must be so, for otherwise God would not condemn them to be born untouchables.

G: But God may punish them. Who are the human beings to take the place of God and add to their punishment?

N: We are instruments. God uses us as His instruments in order to impose on them the punishment that their karma has earned for them.

G: But supposing the Avarnas outside Varna, i.e., Untouchables, said that they were instruments in the hands of God in order to impose afflictions on you? What would you do?

N: Then the government would stand between them and us and prevent them from doing. Good men would do so. Mahatmaji, we beseech you to prevent Avarnas from depriving us of our old privileges.”

After a thorough discussion of the religious authority behind the prohibition against the Untouchables’ use of the road, Gandhi made a last proposal: ‘Would you accept
arbitration? You appoint a Pandit on behalf of the satyagrahis and the Devan acts as Umpire. What do you say to that?’ No reply was recorded. Although the temple authorities finally capitulated and the road past the temple was opened to all (or moved farther away from the temple – the denouement of the satyagraha is not clear), Untouchables were not allowed to enter the temple until 1936. At that time, coincident with another Ilava (Ezhava) threat to convert to Christianity, Travancore became one of the first states to enact a law opening its state temples to Untouchables.17

The dialogue shows how big was his certitude in interpreting/justifying the practice of untouchability in terms of karma. It is clear that Gandhi was ambivalent about caste system. This gave a chance for the declining Brahmanism to remain even in the milieu of colonial modernity per pro of Gandhism. So, Gandhism was actually a camouflage for the Brahmanism to articulate its own ideology in sotto voce.

Another point which needs to be noted here is that Gandhi was eager to (virtually) include the untouchables within the cultural ambit of Hinduism. It cannot be seen as an odd instance, for it shows the channels through which the peripheral cultures are being engulfed by dominant cultures. Temple entry satyagraha was such a channel to efface the distinct Dalit religious identity from the visible discursive sphere and make it congruent with the Hindu/Brahman identity. To put it in a more precise way, the final
beneficiaries of the pan-Hindu philosophy advocated by Gandhi were none other than Brahmins.

Let us examine how the supposedly ‘plebeian’ Gandhian philosophy helped the Brahmanism to sustain itself. One of the important features of Gandhian ideology was vegetarianism. This feature implies the theory of non-violence. Though this theory was emanated from the Buddhist teachings, it carries a special meaning in modern times. At a time when purity and impurity have been determined by traditions of non-consumption and consumption of meat respectively, vegetarianism connotes the caste/varna of an individual beyond what does it communicate overtly (as a life style or something like that).

The Brahman, ritually the purest in terms both of his profession and practices [such as vegetarianism], stood at the apex of this system with each succeeding caste ranked in accordance with the degree of purity in relation to the Brahman.¹⁸

So, vegetarianism, as a hyperbolic statement of purity and impurity, has concretised caste. By embracing vegetarianism Gandhi was covertly proclaiming his ambition to become a member of the apex layer of the caste hierarchy. This can also be read as an apt example of ‘sanskritisation, through which term M. N. Srinivas, the eminent social scientist, explained the non-Brahmin groups’ cultural adaptation towards a ‘Brahminical purity.’

These traits of Gandhian philosophy should also be taken if we envisage discussing Gandhi’s influence on national upsurge. There were in India a myriad of known and unknown resistances against imperialism which shared
no analogy with Gandhism. But they were less prolific when compared to the immediate results that Gandhism produced. The reason behind this ‘Gandhian monopolisation’ of the freedom struggle is implicit in the statement of Ashis Nandy, which finds in Gandhi an anti-intellectualism that concerned more with the hitherto peripheral, non-Brahmanic cultures’ than with the ‘Sanskritic tradition.’

But there is a fallacy in taking the notion ‘non-Brahmanic’ a synonym of ‘Dalit’ or ‘Subaltern’. It is not from the vantage-ground of Dalit discourse that Ashis Nandy uses the term ‘non-Brahmanic’; rather it seems only an expression of the political culture inaugurated by colonial modernity. Ironically, it was none other than the articulate high castes who became the harbingers of this colonial modernity.

This prolix preface will serve much in understanding the genealogy of the politics carried by the two plays, *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* and *Ritumathi*. Like V. T. Bhattathirippad, the authors of these two plays also represent a Gandhian tradition which, notwithstanding its inability to address the social disparity in a scientific sense, interfered in the scenario along with the reformist movement.

The remarkable difference of these two plays from *Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku* is that their more concentrated insistence on the torments faced by Nambuthiri women. It was not the plight of the whole women folk that the authors brought out through their plays. Rather, they particularly focused on the tribulations of Nambuthiri women. But the later literary (and political) discussions built up universality around those themes.
If it was the social necessity to modernise Nambuthiri Brahmin community that expressed through *Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekkku*, it was the influence of Gandhism that made an undertow in *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* and *Ritumathi*.

The second major element in Gandhi’s philosophy was his rediscovery of womanhood as a civilising force in human society.\textsuperscript{20}

But this ‘rediscovery of womanhood’ never went beyond the stereotypes generated by the patriarchic self of the human society. It is perhaps not surprising that there has been a common platform for the reformists and Gandhists in Kerala. As the first ones who acquired modern social values and knowledge system, *men* happened to be the forerunners of social changes. Through community reform movements this process of ‘patriarchisation’ further fostered\textsuperscript{21}.

It is against this background that we should evaluate the ‘rediscovery of womanhood’ in *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* and *Ritumathi*. The Gandhian influence was undeniable in shifting the reformation movement from its communal preoccupations to national concerns. The actual beneficiaries of this shift were none other than the Nambuthiri Brahmins because the Gandhian/national struggle engulfed (rather obliterated) the caste questions which had hitherto been enlivened by the reformation movement. But the assimilation of the reformist agendas by Gandhian nationalism cannot be counted as a one-way traffic. It was after starting to get some remarkable results from the movement that the reformism began to
infuse into Gandhian nationalism. In other words, these two movements actually formed a nexus to wrest the plural voices that were being gathered in the public sphere of Kerala. In his reminiscences, M. R. Bhattathirippad writes:

It was when I had been in such a bewilderment about my future that I heard the reverberations of the freedom struggle – boycotting of foreign goods, ignition of foreign dress, picketing of liquor shops, salt satyagraha, etc. These were followed by the activities of Yogakshema Sabha, Nambuthiri Yuvajana Sangam, and S.N.D.P Yogam. The conflicts I had gone through when I was involved in those activities ploughed my soul. From these experiences I synthesised new ideas. There grown in me a critic of life and social system.\textsuperscript{22}

It was in 1889 that O. Chandu Menon portrayed a bold girl through his début novel \textit{Indulekha}. Four decades later, we meet Ettipapthi, the meek heroine in \textit{Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam}, with all her sorrows and helplessness. Does the sharp contrast between Indulekha and Ettipapthi reveal anything beyond what we see in semblance? Or, is it correct to assume that the difference between these two women characters was only an accidental one?

It is not scientific to argue that it might have been their individualistic features that set the contrast between their characters. Had Indulekha not been born as member of a joint Nair family, let us suppose, she would not have acquired the same status as we have seen in the novel. It was the
exclusive power enjoyed by the women members in a matrilineal system, which was vogue in those times in Nair families, which gave Indulekha such boldness in her attitude and outlook. Later colonial/reformative interferences on *Marumakkathayam* put the seeds of bourgeois micro family system and established patriarchy in Nair families\(^23\).

It was at this juncture that Gandhian nationalism pervaded into Kerala politics. The reformation milieu, which transformed women as a mere dependant, rationalised its stance by showing condescension towards them. By the symbolic usage of Gandhi’s patriarchal figure, this condescensive approach justified the power relations ingrained in a male dominated society.

Nambuthiri Brahmins, when they faced the threat of a social change, found resort in Gandhism. The characterisation of Ettipapthi is marked by the process of ‘condescension’ by Gandhian patriarchy. For the radical Brahmins, community reformation sometimes dissented with the shudra upsurges. But Gandhism mitigated these dissents with the intermediary politics it played.

In *Ritumathi*, the character of Devaki, the heroine, sometimes reminds us of Indulekha in her brilliance and courage. In this sense, the play seems to us severing away from the ‘Gandhian patronage’. But the author never bid adieu to Gandhism even when he proclaimed his loyalty towards the proletariat through his poems.

Premji had a career of ardent activism, which, as we know, has been reflected in his literature. As a fervent follower of the left wing politics, he wrote for the peasants as well as for the industrial workers\(^24\). But in spite of
all these things, one would hardly deny the fact that he had in his mind the figure of Vallathol Narayana Menon, the ‘national poet’ of Kerala, as his mentor. It was through Vallathol’s poetry that the Malayalee saw a literary dissemination of Gandhian ideas — like the propagation of Khadi, national education, Hindu-Muslim unity, abstinence from alcohol, eradication of untouchability, etc.

Let us examine the way in which Ritumathi is connected with Gandhian ideas. The impact of the Reformation notwithstanding, in no turn of the course of events did the plays, Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku and Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam, ever contemplate on the subject of the importance of Nambuthiri women’s education. The reasons can be summed up in this way:

(i) Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku was only an appeal for the legitimate marriage of the younger members of Nambuthiri illams.

(ii) In the milieu of Reformation it was the male who articulate the women.

(iii) The first phase of Gandhism, by joining hands with Reformation, patronised the women cause. (Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam exemplifies this)

But the milieu of Ritumathi was different. This play was written in 1944. By that time reformation had become a past experience. Gandhism in Kerala, freed from the tether of Reformation, now became an alternative model. The
freedom of women, her role in society and family, her education, etc., in Gandhian concept became almost visible. Once he wrote:

I have pointed out from time to time that there is no justification for men to deprive women of, or to deny to them, equal rights on the ground of their illiteracy. But education is essential for enabling women to assert these natural rights, to exercise them wisely, and to work for their expansion; again, the true knowledge of self is unattainable by the millions who lack such education. Many a book is full of innocent pleasure, and this will be denied to us without education. It is no exaggeration to say that human being without education is not far removed from an animal. Education, therefore, is necessary for women as it is for men.26

Sharing this concept in its content, Ritumathi differs from the first two plays. It is sure that the exhaustive writing on women’s education by Gandhi might have had a decisive influence on Premji. This can be seen as a true rupture from the male-centred reformist tradition.

Gandhi saw women not as objects of reform and humanitarianism but as self-conscious subjects who could, if they choose, become arbiters of their own destiny. In this way, Gandhi represents a crucial break from the attitude of many of the leaders of the reform movements of the late nineteenth century, who tended to see women as passive
recipients of more humane treatment through the initiative of enlightened, male effort.\textsuperscript{27}

Throughout the play we see a talkative, resistant, responsive and courageous Devaki, who, in her torments, never inclined to a total surrender. This quality brings her too near to the Gandhian concept of an ideal woman:

The real strength of a woman was her consciousness of her ‘purity’ and ‘chastity’. This ‘dazzling purity’ could disarm even the most beastly of men. Women’s virtue was to be her defence.\textsuperscript{28}

All these things show the abrupt diffusion of Gandhian ideas into the political sphere of Kerala and its dexterous usage by Brahminical discourses. The soothed Brahmanism ingrained in Gandhian nationalism trammeled the growth of Dalit discourse.

**Marxist Aesthetics in Theatre**

This phase of the discussion problematises the new socio-political equations emerged under the influence of Marxist ideology. As far as the potentiality of this ideology is concerned, it is interesting to enumerate whether it could act fairly in a caste-ridden society. The four plays that I envisage to analyse here are either directly or indirectly connected with the early history of the communist movement in Kerala. It was in 1938 that *Pattabakki*, the first play amongst the four, had been published. When we come to the last play in the group, i.e., *Ningalenne Communistakki*, not only ascension of fourteen
years can be seen in between, but also gradual progression and acceptance of communist ideas in Kerala.

It was around the period of *Pattabakki* that the socialist wing of the Congress Party emerged as the Communist Party of Malabar\(^2\). Later it merged with the Communist Party of India and went through a lot of crises in the following decade. Some of the events which had national and global relevance were actually a litmus test for the political stability of the Communist Party. (Its equivocal stance in the ‘Quit India Struggle’ had been severely criticised. The party had no hesitation in supporting Britain when Russia entered the Second World War as member of the Allied Army to fight back the Axis Powers). Equally important was its flaws in handling the fundamental question of its party programme, i.e., people’s revolution. The bloody episode of Punnapra-Vayalar (1946) was certainly a fillip, though there had been many an anti-climax like when the party decided to participate in the parliamentary democracy. It is not intended in this treatise to discuss all these episodes in detail. But one should be aware that the period from *Pattabakki* to *Ningalenne Communistakki* was too crucial a time in the history of Communist Party in Kerala.

In an agrarian society the application of the paradigms of domination is rested upon the prevailing land-relations. For that very reason the restructuring of the land-relations would affect and re-define the hegemonies constructed through it. We have already seen how crucial was the undercurrents of land-relations in defining the objectives of social reformation. When we come into the period of *Pattabakki*, a recession in locomotion can be seen in the social reform movements in Kerala. Here
remains a surprising fact about the reformation movement – it had to face an untimely end without having much in its credit pertaining to the prime concern it had, i.e., the eradication of untouchability. (The relevance of some ‘token victories’ like temple entry proclamation is not denied. But it served nothing much in driving out the reality of caste from our society). It was into those ‘half-boiled’ efforts of the reformation movement that the Communist Party began to exercise its new tasks. So, it is important to ask whether the party could retrieve the lost cause of the reformation movement by envisaging a classless society. Let us examine whether the fundamental questions pertaining to caste have been obliterated from the main discursive realm in the post-reformation period. The crux of the investigation will be based on the following four plays:

(i) **Pattabakki**

(ii) **Nammalonnu**

(iii) **Koottukrishi**

(iv) **Nigalenne Communistakki**

The four plays invariably handle the tension in *Janmi-Kudiyan* relation. The Nambuthiri-Nair conflict virtually present in *Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku* is seen becoming more visible and concrete in *Pattabakki* and *Nammalonnu*. Placing the Nambuthiri Janmi and Nair Kudiyan *vis-à-vis* these two plays establish an easy binary of opposites which not only serves the epistemological demands of Marxian ideology but also gives wing to the emerging dreams of Nair community. *Koottukrishi* dwells on another focus,
a more impelled concentration on Hindu-Muslim unity. But the play never leaves out the time’s prime concern, i.e., Janmi-Kudiyan relation. It is in Ningalenne Communistakki that the propaganda of the Communist Party more visibly entwines with the caste equations of the twentieth century Kerala society. A detailed study of the four plays will show how the status quo of the caste hegemony has been maintained in post-reformation period.

In the twentieth century, when the hitherto peripheral units of social mobilisation (for instance, the establishment of printing presses, and the subsequent growth of newspapers, literature, etc.) occupied a decisive role in the political and cultural sphere of Kerala, the changes in society became rapid and drastic. As we have discussed earlier, the colonial modernity was a direct boon to Nair community. As an intermediate class (caste) it could avail most of the benefits conferred by colonial modernity. (The remarkable advancement of Nair community in the field of education can be taken as an example. During the year 1864 the number of Nair students who were attending schools in the Travancore region was more than one fourth of the total strength of the students\textsuperscript{30}. The only caste which surpassed them in this matter was Tamil Brahmin. Unbelievable may it seems, the representation of Nambuthiri Brahmins in schools was only 0.06% - in fact, schooling was not an indispensable thing for them since they had been bestowed with the status of an affluent caste. A consistent growth of the Nair community can be seen in the higher education sector also\textsuperscript{31}. The Malayali Memorial of 1891, which was mainly ushered by the educated Nairs, evidences this growth. Forty percent of the first 250 suppliants who put their sign in the memorandum had been educated Nairs\textsuperscript{32}.)}
The accessibility to education strengthened their influence in authorities and helped them to amalgamate both the interests of the society and the community in a subtle way (one can remember that the opponents had ridiculed the Malayali Memorial by calling it ‘a Nair Memorial’\textsuperscript{33}). As we have seen, the laws concerning tenancy and inheritance further improved their social status.

This rich and dynamic background helped the Nair community to appropriate the above said units of social mobilisation such as newspaper, literature, etc. By using these units, the Nair community could easily institutionalise itself.

It is nothing but the process of this ‘institutionalisation’ that we can see in \textit{Pattabakki, Nammalonnu, Koottukrishi} and \textit{Ningalenne Communistakki}. The image as a ‘representing caste’ of the suffered/marginalised class which had been practically emphasised in the political arena through the Malayali Memorial can be seen extending its branches to literature through these plays. The action is centered on Nair families. Creating empathy, the Nair protagonists establish the identity of their community within the cultural and political discourses that emerged under the intellectual patronage of Marxism.

The Marxist fallacy in (un)noticing the inextricable link between caste and labour is visible in \textit{Pattabakki}. A play, written under the direct influence of October revolution, it laboriously brings in certain situations to concretise the social chasm within the framework of Marxist ideology. Kittunni, the hero, is being presented not only as a lessee but also as an industrial worker.
This as a fine balancing of the ‘peasant-industrial worker comradeship’, which is obviously a progeny of the Russian revolution, deserves special attention. By presenting the protagonist as a peasant-cum-industrial worker, the author not only shows his mechanical adherence to Marxian ideology but also imprints the caste hegemony centered on Nair community. The happening of the latter is not as conscious as the former one. To be precise, the identity of an industrial worker confers Kittunni universality - an image more receptive in identifying him with the world proletariat. On the contrary, his identity as lessee/peasant is a leverage to place a regional issue, i.e., the janmi-kudiyan relation. It is through this identity that the concealed reality of caste is being expressed. As most of the people who had been given acres of land on lease were from Nair community the dispute over pattam (lease) and the consequent discourses naturally focused on them. This has been fairly reflected in the peasant movements of Kerala. Sunny M. Kapikkad, writer and Dalit exponent, observes:

Unlike peasant movements in other parts of India, those of Kerala did not demand ownership of land, precisely because the peasant movements of Kerala were never movements of the landless. The slogan of Kerala’s peasants was security of tenure and reduction of rent on land. These movements of varakkar and pattakkar basically expressed the interests of the savarna middle castes. The uncontested leadership over the Malabar peasant organisations by nambiar and nairs and those sections of savarna families destroyed by British rule, point to the truth of this assertion.34
So, the slogan put forward by *Pattabakki* obviously excluded the Dalit mass. From its purview, the very name *Pattabakki* is significant in understanding the theme on which the play is focused. *Pattabakki* means arrears of land-rent. Hence it naturally becomes a play which handles the problems of leaseholders. It was not accidental that the author turned a blind eye to the plight of the actual cultivators of land. Throughout all the eight decades gestating from 1850s to 1930s, Nair community was evolving as the most articulate caste in Kerala society. Hence they could wrest and appropriate the streams of social changes at their own will. When their relation with *janmi* became frictional on the issue of *pattam*, they contrived to get the issue taken up by the peasant movements. Streamlined thus, the voice of the society became the voice of the Nair community.

Considering the fact that the author was too scrupulous in taming the theme with Marxian cognisance, we are not to be surprised that the terms such as ‘peasant’ and ‘landlord’ (*karshakan* and *janmi*) carry only a limited notion which is logically congruent with the Marxist bifurcation of propertied class and propertyless class. Those who look into what Marx wrote on the disappearance of the distinction between peasant and industrial worker will find that the characterisation of the hero is in unison with that hypothesis. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* Marx wrote:

> Using the very words of political economy we have demonstrated that the worker is degraded to the most miserable sort of commodity; that the misery of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power and size of his production; that the necessary result of competition is the
accumulation of capital in a few hands, and thus a more terrible restoration of monopoly; and that finally the distinction between capitalist and landlord, and that between peasant and industrial worker disappears and the whole of society must fall apart into the two classes of the property owners and the propertyless workers.\(^{35}\)

In Indian context there is a hazard in understanding the term ‘peasant’ through such a reductionist notion, for it leaves out the presence of caste in one’s class. In Kerala there were at least three strata in the peasant class: the upper stratum formed by landlords (which mostly comprised Nambuthiri Brahmins and Nairs), the mid-layer of tenants (mostly from the Nair community; the rest were Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims) and the lower stratum formed by the tillers of land who were Dalits\(^ {36}\).

Innumerable studies have shown that the dalits occupied the station of agrestic serfs in Kerala’s traditional land relations. Apart from local variations, this was the general pattern of land ownership. It was a system so inextricably melded together with caste that it was impossible for a Brahmin to be an agrestic serf or for a Dalit to be a landlord.\(^ {37}\)

So, the notions concerning peasant, landlord, tenant and tiller attain special implications here in so far as that the caste has its dominant role in determining the class. For this very reason the portrayal of Kittunni as a tenant deserves special attention. We see him in his utter helplessness when
Raman Nair, the caretaker of the land, insists him to remit the arrears of land-rent. It is this helplessness and its eventual growth that induced him to steal rice from Athankutty’s shop. The milieu on which the play has been situated is noteworthy, for it seems influencing the theme in a subtle way. During that period the world was going through Great Depression, the much known economic crisis. Besides, there had been the threat of an imminent World War. Poverty was the common trait of that period. It was further deepened by the scarcity of food-grains, hike in prices, undue hoard of products and black market. The direct victims of these situations were none other than the middle class. As a purchasing class they had to confront all the torments as confronted by the hero in *Pattabakki*. Considering their agrestic serfdom, little was the chance for a Dalit to be a direct victim of these crises. They were yet to be grown as a purchasing class.

The very demands brought up by the Communist Party to combat the situation are sufficient to show its pro-middle class stance. Let us see what their immediate demands were:

1. Implementation of a famine allowance.

2. Dissemination of fair-price shops.

3. Punishment against the officials who compulsorily collect the war-fund.

There is no point in exposing Marxism to such a diatribe that blames it for not being responsive to the unique structure of Kerala/Indian society. This criticism is equally applicable to any other social movements in Kerala which are being extolled by the established discourses as progressive and path-breaking. So, the defeat of Marxism (means, the organised movements within the ambit of Marxian ideology) in contesting caste was not at all different from that of the defeat of the reformation movement or Gandhism. Despite all the efforts initiated by these social movements, caste has survived. The reason is simple. Caste was never a static entity. It was always responsive, resilient and virile.

As a metastructure, the system of caste could appropriate the whole anti-caste movements that had risen within a caste-society like Kerala. One needs to be aware that the anti-caste dialogues set by the social reformers like Chattambi Swamikal, Sri Narayana Guru or Mannathu Padmanabhan never envisaged a casteless society. The reason is clear: all the debates framed against caste discrimination were condescended, appropriated and directed by none other than dominant caste groups. So, the agendas set by them never went beyond the minimum demands like temple entry or right to use the paths near temples, etc. Had these movements been designed and propagated by the real victims of untouchability, the slogans and demands would not have been like this.

All anti-caste movements in Kerala were, in essence, caste movements. Conventional social history gave a space for the savarna castes to institutionalise their role in uplifting Dalits. It is nothing but the re-emphasis of savarna hegemony that we can see in the undue glorification of Vaikam
and Guruvayoor satyagrahas. For Dalits, temple-entry was not as important as their longing for a permanent relief from poverty. Then, how did the struggle for temple-entry become the kernel of all the dialogues set against untouchability? The reason is simple. During the time when the rural economy of the Kerala society survived through temple oriented wealth, it was necessary for the *savarnas* (i.e., the temple oriented societies) to keep the Dalits away from temples, for had they been enjoying entry into that socio-economic space they might have had access and entitlements to a fair share of *savarna* wealth. So we can rightly assume that the social ostracisation faced by Dalits had a strong connection with the vested economic interests of *savarna* castes.

The actual formation of caste took place in the temple-centred Brahmin villages having extensive agrarian activities. As a landed institutional agency of the Brahmin landlords, the temple played a crucial role in the multiplication of castes and sub-castes. The peculiar land system and service-tenure were responsible for the emergence of hereditary professional groups on a large scale, and the Brahminical ideas of ritual status were instrumental in their transformation into endogamous castes…. Caste appeared as an institutional manifestation in the hierarchically structured agrarian society where services were paid for in the form of land rights. \(^{39}\)

But when the temple-oriented economy was shattered by the advent of colonialism, *savarna* castes realised that there would be no risk in opening
the temple-doors to Dalits, for the status of temples as an axis of agrarian economy had been on the wane through the interference of colonial rule. During the period of colonial modernity the agrarian economy started to flux around the intermediary class. For them, the struggle for temple-entry was a fine digression from the economic facets of Dalit upsurges. It was against the background of the agrarian struggle\textsuperscript{40} of 1907-08 led by Ayyankali that they started to see the threat in labour strikes. Ayyankali’s struggle was a sharp discontinuance from the Bhakti tradition of Reformation. Instead of raising temple-entry as the main theme of the battle against untouchability, he fought for the educational rights of the Dalit mass. It was for fulfilling this aim that he organised an agrarian strike. An agitation sprouted from the very gene of Dalit torments, and it shook the foundations of \textit{savarna} economy. Ayyankali, adamant and strategic, showed such a foresight in realising the quintessence of Dalit situation.

As the Ayyankali-led agrarian struggle jeopardised the economic edifices of the society, it became the responsibility of the \textit{savarnas} to prevent the possibilities of repeating such upsurges. Parallel to the physical suppression (considering the gambit involved in it while there was a vehement resistance on the part of Dalits) they contrived to maintain a virtual alliance with Dalit cause through the reformation movement. The exponents of the movement always heeded not to address the strength of Dalits in terms of their identity as an agrarian working class. In contrast to what Ayyankali did, the \textit{savarna} reformers reiterated the social disability of Dalits, for it provided a space for identifying (or fixing) the Dalit subjectivity in its constant impairments.
As tillers of the soil, the Dalits should have been given the right on agricultural land. But it is the demand of tenancy rights that we can see disseminating in those times.

These antecedents show the validity of the following observations:

(i) The struggle led by Ayyankali was in fact a praxis of identifying the Dalit subjectivity in terms their power as a labour stock.

(ii) For avoiding a direct confrontation with this power, the savarnas reiterated the social disability of Dalits as an untouchable class. The temple-entry satyagrahas were more a fixation of this disability than an emphasis of human rights.

(iii) By the time of Pattabakki the non-Dalit castes succeeded in addressing, appropriating and condescending the Dalit issues. As a result, the chance for developing Dalit subjectivity was extinguished.

(iv) It is the problems of the tenants that the author highlights in Pattabakki. For that very reason this work becomes a propaganda play of the evolving shudra ideology. The non-representation of Dalits (and their specific issues) in Pattabakki can be seen as a natural progression of the obliteration of Dalits from the discursive field.

This contention can roughly be made attune with Nammalonnu, Koottukrishi and Ningalenne Communistakki since they carry a theme which is similar to that of Pattabakki. But without seeing the nuances one cannot understand the material foundations on which particular political shifts did take shape.
The immediate years after independence made a rift in national consciousness. The backlash of partition was such deep that it left the Muslims with a ‘non-Indian’ label. Confining to the semblance of this communal alienation (or the virtual distance between Hindu and Muslim), the political parties and the non-political civil organisations (including religious outfits) tried to appropriate the problem by giving it an imaginative meaning. As a result, the concept of secularism won currency in the cultural sphere of India. It was not by displacing communalism that the secularism won its place in public sphere. More truly, it was a re-articulation of communalism. The core trait of communalism, i.e., to identify a person by his religion, was in fact retained in secularism.

The political repercussions of Malabar rebellions are tangible in *Pattabakki*, *Nammalonnu* and *Koottukrishi*. It doesn’t mean that these plays have directly handled a theme that is having a subject of Hindu-Muslim conflict (and reconciliation) in it. But as plays whose action is fixed against the backdrop of Malabar, a place which is having a long history of communal unrest, they have carried deep communal concerns. The religious riots reported in Malabar during the hundred years spanning from 1830 to 1930 are myriad in number. The rebellion of 1921, popularly known as *Mappila Lahala*, was quite a culmination of these incessant tensions. It was mainly through the following three ways that these tensions were being confronted.

(i) The coercive suppression of the riots by the British authority.

(ii) The universalisation of the attitude of caste Hindus against Muslims.
(iii)  Wresting the ‘otherness’ of Muslim community by making an air of fake (romanticised) fraternity.

It is in the third stratum that we see the intermediary of political parties. As modern civil institutions they had imbibed the values of bourgeois democracy which enabled them to address the problem in a capitalist fashion. The alliance between Indian National Congress and Khilafat Committee is an example. But by the outbreak of the rebellion of 1921, the alliance was disrupted.

The intimations of equality offered by caste movements, nationalism and communism were thwarted by the fractures within society - of caste, kinship, religion and locality. Nationalism tried to project a community of Indians, but its expansive sweep, eager to paper over cracks in society, found little purchase in Malabar. For a brief moment in 1921, Congress, Khilafat and local concerns of agrarian inequities came together. The Congress became wary of involving Malabar in the national struggle after the Mappila rebellion of 1921 had broken the fragile unity of the alliance of the Congress with the Khilafat movement.\(^{41}\)

Beyond the regional implications it reflects the extent of crises experienced by the national parties in confronting the communal question. The word ‘crises’ is not amenable to the ostensible stance really taken by the national parties. One cannot argue that the unwillingness of the leaders of the nationalist movement to see the ‘fractures’ in Indian society was an
accidental one. For a long period since its symbiosis with Gandhism, National Congress was the one and only tongue to articulate nationalism. As the caste Hindu influence had a considerable sweep in the ideological concerns of National Congress, the nationalism it envisaged or the ‘community of Indians’ it projected was quite free from the plurality emanating from caste, region and religion. When these ‘other’ realities started to acknowledge its presence by dissident stances, Congress was compelled to enter into the scene.

Let us take the alliance between Congress and Khilafat movement. It was the secret motive to hijack the movement that led Congress to fabricate an alliance. But it proved futile, as the struggle took a violent turn towards communal massacres. Identified themselves with the ‘World Islam’, the Muslim community in India slowly articulated a universality in which the ‘Congress sponsored’ nationalism was less asserted. In Khilafat movement we can see an overt Muslim communalism; but it is a covert Hindu communalism that we can see in national movement. In short, the alliance became a platform for expressing their communal prejudices rather than disseminating a communal harmony. K. Madhavan Nair, the first one who recorded Khilafat movement and Malabar rebellion immediately after their happening, has written that the participation of Hindus in the Khilafat meetings conducted at various areas of Eranad region was too negligible. It is a bare proof of the ill will harboured by the Hindus against the religious cause ingrained in Khilafat. The same hostility had also been harboured by the Muslims against the concealed Brahmanism of nationalist movement. In short, all the platforms, either secular or religious, became a canvas for manifesting the communal antagonism. Heehs notes:
There is a general agreement among anthropologists studying Indian communalism that the Other of the Hindu is the Muslim, and vice versa.\textsuperscript{43}

It is the quest for a method to tackle the ‘Otherness’ that we have been seeing in the political culture of India since 1920s. When the problem was critically confronted by the colonial modernity, the concept of secularism found its space in history. The limited notion of understanding secularism as a ‘mechanism to construct a national political society’\textsuperscript{44} largely obscure the edifices of Indian caste society on which a myriad of ‘Othernesses’ is being manifested through the referential point of Brahmanism. In other words, Brahmanism has been benefited by secularism.

This as a contextual understanding of \textit{Pattabakkki, Nammalonnu} and \textit{Koottukrishi} is more relevant in forthcoming reading. All these plays try to create stereotypes of communal fraternity which, to a large extent, are mechanical. We have already seen the lack of skill exhibited by the National Congress to tame the communalist preoccupations in the Khilafat movement. It is over those cracks left by the mutual inconceivability of National congress and Khilafat movement that the left wing intelligentsia tried to build a ‘secular’ bridge.

Let us take the portrayal of Muslim characters. They obviously share some common characteristics. These characteristics are set in a stereotype mould which normally situates the character in a conceivable theatre space with reference to their community. Take for example the dialect they use. It is not just an individual nuance that we see in the dialects of Athankutty and
Kittunni in *Pattabakki*. Rather, it is a reiteration of their communal identity. The difference is most visible in *Koottukrishi*. It is through the distinct dialect of Aboobeker and Ayisha that the contours of ‘Mappila Muslim’ are drawn. A close analysis will show that the dialect used by Athankutty or Aboobeker is ‘oppositional’ to what is used by Kittunni, Pangan Nair or Sreedharan Nair. In so far as that the long history of communal conflicts is concerned, the specific bifurcation of the Hindu-Muslim identities by the authors cannot be taken as a fortuitous one. On the contrary, it was a conscious construction of the ‘Other’.

Creation of the ‘Other’ or the political process involved in it should be understood as an important shift of the Brahmanical discourse from the paradigms of the past. By the advent of Gandhism into the national scene, the brahmanical Hindu self started to extend its scope by virtually including the ‘erstwhile Other’, i.e., the Dalit mass, into its fold. This was actually a ‘structural adjustment’ necessitated by the capitalist modernity. But this helped the caste Hindus to adulterate the consolidation of a Dalit subjectivity which was about to express itself under the able leadership of ideologues like Ayyankali or Poikayil Appachan. As the Dalit or the ‘untouchable alien’ who had hitherto given a ‘functional support’ to the *savarna* ideology by its conferred identity as an Other has been virtually taken as ‘Hindu’, it became a necessity for the caste Hindus to redefine the Other in terms of religion. Malabar gave a good vent for them to diffuse the ideology of the Other, for this region had a long history of communal conflicts starting from the early decades of the nineteenth century. By creating a ‘constant other’ through the scrupulous counterpoise of antagonism and fraternity, the caste Hindu
ideology was actually escaping from the internal threat of the consolidation of Dalit subjectivity.

This strategy has conspicuously been manifested in *Nammalonnu* and *Koottukrishi*. We can see that the authors are conscientious in maintaining a counterpoise between the Nair tenants and the Muslim tenants. But just heed what K. Madhavan Nair has written about the condition of Muslims in Eranad:

Almost all the Mappilas in Eranad were *Verumpattakkars*.46

But these plays try to establish that the condition of both Nair and Mappila *Kudiyanmar* in Malabar was equal. The construction of this fake fraternity was actually a compulsion of the tenants’ agitation cumulated in the circuit of Malabar Muslims. That is why these plays place the theme of communal fraternity in the kernel of land relations. The two commissions, Logan and McGregor, appointed by the then Madras Governor Beckingham, have emphasised the interrelationship between the ‘Mappila riots’ and the *Kudiyan* problem. The Malabar Kuzhikkoor Act, introduced in 1887, was in fact a consequent of this finding47. Among the cascade of ceaseless *Kudiyan* agitations in Malabar, a few which had been recorded as most vehement happened in and around the fatal time of 1921. The large participation in the *Kudiyan* conferences held at Kottakkal and Pookkottur48 can be seen as proof of the discontents among the Mappila tenants in Malabar.

If we take these annals as such, we can see subtle intertwining of the religious fanaticism influxed in Malabar and the discontents grown among the Muslim tenants. As most of the *janmis* in Malabar were Nambuthiri
Brahmins, Nambiars and Nairs, it was an exigency for the savarnas to avoid the growth of these discontents into a level of lethal religious violence. So, they tried, though in vain, to bring a mechanical fraternity into the confusions of communal prejudices.

It is the fabrication of this fraternity that we see in Nammalonnu and Koottukrishi. As these plays have been written in the proximate time of Indian independence (and partition) they could effectively use the theme of communal harmony against the background reality of janmi-kudiyan relation. In Koottukrishi, we see the alliance between a Hindu janmi and a Muslim kudiyan. The idea of joint farming proposed by Sreedharan Nair was actually a subterfuge of the janmi to evade from the pro-kudiyan acts introduced by the government. By the process of joint farming, Aboobeker is virtually lifted up to the status of Sreedharan Nair, the nephew of his former janmi. When the solid space of agri-land is symbolically transcribed as a ‘paradise’ of fraternity, two things are being stated in an undertone:

i. A permanent solution for the kudiyan problem in Malabar can be achieved through the maintenance of a harmony between Hindus and Muslims.

ii. ‘Janmi-kudiyan’ can simply be transcribed as ‘Hindu-Muslim’.

Then, where can we find the actual tillers? Have they been visibly portrayed? Let us look at the characterisation of Chakki, Neeli, Pathumma and Karumba. The space they were given in the play was actually a replica of the space they occupied in their real life. It cannot be specified as a ‘space’; rather it is a ‘no-space’ or a liminality. If we juxtapose them with
the rest of the characters, we can see that the Dalit characters have been portrayed as ‘things’ with less individuality. They were not given a share in the ‘secular front’ opened by Aboobeker and Sreedharan Nair. Rather, they were placed in the ‘opposition’, operated by Poker, the villain. By depicting them as a people who could easily be influenced by the vicious plots of Poker, the author was actually recreating the very societal prejudice hitherto retained against Dalits. It was the inducement of Poker that led these Dalit women to turn down the appeal of Aboobeker to work on his land. The friendship between Aboobeker and Sreedharan Nair is seen by them as queer and inconceivable. The communal prejudice actually borne by the savarnas is now seen inflicting upon the innocent Dalits. When Chakki, Neeli, Pathumma and Karumba express their unwillingness to work on the land of Aboobeker and Sreedharan Nair, they decide to do the entire farming by themselves. This can be seen as a symbolic ostracisation of the Dalits even from the field from where they meet their means of subsistence. The song sung by Ayisha and Parvathy when they pluck the weeds from the field is a direct example of this ‘selective inattention’ historically borne by the savarnas against the solid reality of Dalit subjectivity. We should remember that the Njattupattu (the song sung by Dalit labourers while they transplant the seedling into a ploughed land) and kalaparippattu are strongly interwined with the life of serfdom lived by the Dalits. These songs carry tangibly well the torments they faced and the tribulations they underwent. But the kalaparippattu (the song sung by Dalit labourers while they engage in the work of plucking the weeds) sung by Ayisha and Parvathy is actually a song in praise of Gandhi. This as a posthumous glorification of Gandhi is more critical in the milieu of religious animosity which was reinvested through the partition of India. The lines are a brisky remembrance of his
legendry struggle for independence. Thus it becomes an appeal for nationalism. It is truly a metaphoric devourment of the Dalit space by the meta idea of nationalism. It can thus be concluded:

i. Secularism is an easy way to construct the ‘Other’.

ii. It is by constructing and maintaining the ‘Other’ that the *savarna* ideology retained its dominance.

iii. *Koottukrishi* is a propaganda of secularism engendered from the very stem of *savarna* nationalism.

iv. It reckons the communal reality; but negates the caste reality.

v. As a result of the hyperbolic assertions on religion, Dalits were compelled to search their subjectivity through religions.

If we take out the characters of *Ningalenne Communistakki* and *Nammalonnu* we can see in all of them a conflict brought forth by the uncertainties of a ‘retarded capitalism’\(^{49}\). Situating capitalism on the remnants of feudal social relations, they rearticulated the hegimonical order burgeoned from caste and caste oriented labour. Hence these plays could effectively retain the status of Nair community as a ‘local reference group’\(^{50}\).

In *Ningalenne Communistakki*, the house of Paramu Pillai is described as *tharavadu*. But in strict sense it is not a *tharavadu*. By the end of the first half of the twentieth century, the joint family system in vogue among the Nair community had become obsolete in the light of various regulations
brought in by the government. But the term/word was virtually retained, might be because of its ability to bring back the ‘private empires’ of large families maintained by Nair community. It is not a matrilineal koottukudumbam that we see in Ningalenne Communistakki. The family of Paramu Pillai comprised himself, his wife and children. This was an important step towards modernity. But the transition from matriliny to patriarchy has generated much disarray in the internal structure of the Nair community. Nammalonnu and Ningalenne Communistakki show the way in which the two generations, old and new, responded to these confusions. Paramu Pillai and Pangan Nair tried to retrieve the past while their sons, Gopalan and Shankunni searched ‘certainties’ in the chaos. Their political activity, as Robin Jeffrey points out, was actually an effort to find this ‘certainty’.

The base the Communist Party built in rural Kerala and among high castes - notably Nayars [sic] - in the 1940s owed much to the collapse of the matrilineal joint-family and the consequent uprooting of a generation. Elsewhere in India, to be sure, high castes led the Communist Party of India; but they tended to be urban intellectuals seeking to mobilise lower-caste workers. In Kerala, on the other hand, significant numbers of rural, primary-educated Nayars – ‘the primary school’, as Puthuppalli Raghavan said, was ‘only a furlong’ from his house – came to the Communist Party because it appeared to offer absolutes and certainties totally lacking in the old society crumbling around them.51
The suggested link between Nair community and the Communist Party is apparent in *Ningalenne Communistakki*. When Paramu Pillai muses over the ‘good old days’ – the time when his uncle was alive – it is nothing but the centrality of a *tharavadu* that is being suggested. The spilt granary of his uncle becomes a thing to be bragged about. But we know that ‘the uncle’ implies nothing in a patriarchal social system. Ironically, nothing is found to replace ‘the uncle’. It is this dilemma of Nair community that we see finding expression through Paramu Pillai.

The new generation who sought ‘certainties’ in the muddle had found some temporary recourse. For them, communism was one such recourse. So, they tried to be communists. In a certain sense, communism became a metaphor for rearticulating/renovating their community.

The subtle way in which the hierarchy worked in *Ningalenne Communistakki* will exemplify the ‘liaison’ established between caste and communism. The deference shown by Karamban and Mala towards Gopalan is actually dependence/loyalty which is expected to be exhibited by a serf. In close analysis we can understand that the prerogative enjoyed by Gopalan and Suma in the company of Karamban and Mala is an indirect eulogy of their community. The message given by the play can be summed up thus: The didacticism involved in communism demands an articulate class to interpret it. Being an articulate class, the *savarnas* naturally became the right/entitled ones to propagate communism. Thus they could retain the caste hegemony even in the internal structure of the Communist Party.
It was in essence a repetition of the reformation movement. The articulate class who controlled the reformation movement made it a platform to re-emphasise the ‘progressiveness’ of their caste. As the leadership of the movement had been rested in the hands of communal organisations, it was easy for the more articulate community to wrench away its promulgated aims in accordance with their own interests. But during the 1940s the shop of reformation was shut. And, communism was not such a platform like reformation or nationalism to give space for communal organisations to play its game. So, the politics of caste worked in the ‘communist era’ under camouflage. The caste hegemony concealed in Ningalenne Communistakki should be understood against this background.

The author has laboriously tried to bring equality between *savarna* and *avarna* by depicting a comradeship between Gopalan and Mala. But the scenes constituted for emphasising their ‘equality’ sometimes reminds us of the famous words written by George Orwell, the renowned writer – ‘some are more equal than others’! Though Mala, the Pulaya girl, loves Gopalan, he disowns it, for he had already fallen in love with Sumam, the only daughter of the landlord, Kesavan Nair. Here the author actually uses the institution of marriage for retaining the status quo of the society. When Gopalan realises the love that Mala had in her mind towards him, he tries to redefine it by condescending her as a sister. This is a deliberate application of Victorian morality. When the ethos produced by colonial social relations starts to embed in the indigenous culture, it is the real sound and passion of our own people that is being stricken off.
Theatre of the Modern Individual

Modern individual replaced the ‘realist man’ as protagonist during 1970s. Having its ideological roots in 1960s, this shift was a decisive discontinuance from the vestige of colonialism which extended its shadows up to late fifties.

The origins of post-colonialism have been variously located in the 60s, when a major reshuffling of authorities and boundaries took place and militant groups emerged, when a search began in the erstwhile colonies for indigenous culture and the West was confronted with the validity of culture hitherto seen as inferior.\textsuperscript{52}

Without knowing its capitalist underpinnings one cannot understand the political notions implied in post-colonialism. Though Kerala had not been entered into a consummate capitalism during the period when \textit{Ningalenne Communistakki} was written, the issue dealt by this play was in essence a capitalist reinterpretation of the existing feudal/semi-feudal power relations. It is from the decadent matriliny that the modern/capitalist individual extracted flesh and blood. Individual partition hastened the growth of this cosmopolitan individual. The idioms of land/tenancy/agriculture have given such an identity to the central characters of \textit{Nammalonnu, Koottukrishi} and \textit{Ningalenne Communistakki} which could easily be framed spatially. As the spatial identity shared by the Nair protagonists was closely related with their holdings acquired under a feudal/semi-feudal system, it is not surprising that the Dalit characters portrayed in it were devoid of such an identity.
This spatial identity can be reckoned as a seminal characteristic of capitalism. If we closely see the approach of Shankunni, Sreedharan Nair or Gopalan towards the existing social system, we can understand that the ethos acquired by them is strongly fixed in a capitalist propriety. When the state had taken steps to settle the land questions in accordance with the demands of the intermediate class, there had also been developed a capitalist reasoning along with it. It was within the edifice of this reasoning that the modern individual came into existence.

Post-colonialism reshaped the modern individual. By the enforcement of the Kerala Land Reform (Amendment) Act of 1969, the question on land was solved at least in a creamy stratum. This brought a theoretical end to the struggle directed and disseminated by the Communist Party.

The abrupt end of the century old conflicts over land and tenancy made a vacuum in the discursive field owned by the intermediary class/caste. It is into this vacuum that the post-colonial revelations made a fill up. The new aesthetics put forward by Avanavan Kadamba is strongly fixed against this background. Hence it is clear that the counter-search claimed to be carried out by Avanavan Kadamba was not purely an aesthetical one. The spatial identity shared by the erstwhile protagonists cannot be seen in the characters drawn in Avanavan Kadamba. This is not an indication of their lacking of physical (land) possessions. Rather, it is a reflection of the crisis faced by the capitalist individual. The notions of ego which have been reflected in the very name ‘Avanavan Kadamba’ (inhibitions) is in fact an appraisal of the modern man. This play lacks a protagonist. Here the characters/group of characters is seen symbolically representing a quality/place/profession or the
space they acquired in the society. It is not the negation of individual identity that we can see here; on the other hand, we witness the creation of a universal identity – an identity more fit to the capitalist needs.

The comfortable binaries upon which the realist plays sought its action are redrawn in *Avanavan Kadamba*, though in a distinct way. The functions of Attappandarangal (a group of performers who dances) and Pattuparishakal (performers who sing) reticently articulate this binary without being subjected to an established pattern of realism.

Attappandarangal and Pattuparishakal carry opposing political identities. They are the contrasting voices of consent and dissent, ruler and opposition. They are the people destined to sing and dance for the society.\(^5^3\)

*Avanavan Kadamba* sometimes becomes a middleclass critique of Indian democracy. The vices of democracy, which are being invoked through the characters like Erattakkannan Pakki or Desathudayon, have been pictured in such a way that one would find easy comparisons in post-independent India. The characters appear in this play do not carry the features (qualities) of a concrete/complete character which we can see in the realist plays. Here the characters become epitomes of the State, democracy and the civil and political societies. It is the broad admixture of this physical components and bourgeois/savarna morality that has enacted the formation of *natyadharma* in *Avanavan Kadamba*.

The spatial identity enjoyed by the modern individual was subjected to a philosophical revision in the post-colonial epoch. This revision was much a
result of the emerging conflict between the philistinism grown under capitalism and the bourgeois morality. As the spatial identity was in fact a replica of caste identity, the bourgeois quest for universal/secular individual resulted in the negation (or at least a concealment) of caste as dynamic reality. Consequently, realism was expurgated. Masks replaced the concrete man/woman as protagonists; quality/profession replaced caste. The modern sensibility experimented in *Avanavan Kadamba* is liable to be examined in this context.

… modernity implied fleeing from the real world. It had the alluring hollowness of casteless city aesthetics… Consequently, Kerala modernity was based on a totally individualist sensibility… This modernity created an abstract individual who incorporated everything into an absolute and *ungrounded* idea of freedom. Unfortunately, that individual was a *savarna* Hindu or a *savarna* Christian.⁵⁴

The festival of Valadikkavu envisaged in *Avanavan Kadamba* is actually a bourgeois dream about attaining ‘casteless city aesthetics’. The *natyadharmi* reinvented in the play thus becomes a validation of the ‘abstract individual’ created in the milieu of modernity. Since the possibilities of an alternative theatre are said to be rested in an understanding/retrieval of the *thanathu* (the indigenous), it is pertinent to know whether the *natyadharmi* experimented in *Avanavan Kadamba* was in any way efficacious in reclaiming the ‘tradition’.
In his exhaustive study on Kavalam’s plays Dr. Raja Warrier points out that both the literary and performative texts of *Avanavan Kadamba* are fixed in Kerala’s own spectacular culture (drishya samskaram). The whole three components, i.e., Angika, Vachika and Aharya, in this play are seen using the possibilities of classical, folk and ritual traditions respectively. The resemblance between the rhetoric used in *Kakkarassi Natakam* and the language spoken by the characters in *Avanavan Kadamba* is reckoned as a direct evidence of its indebtedness to folk theatre. The stylised acting experimented in this play is undeniably a contribution of classical theatre. What is more noticeable in the play is its costume – the skirts made up of tender palm leaves, the masks of areca spathe, the five colours that extracted from nature – all these things are nothing but an indication of its kinship with ritual tradition. Ever since the first performance of *Avanavan Kadamba*, the adherence of its costume to the ritual arts like *Mudiyettu* and *Patayani* has always caught attention.

If we enumerate these techniques in detail we can see the idioms of intellectual turbulence that reverberate through *Avanavan Kadamba*. It is true that the playwright succeeded in constructing a counter-aesthetics by retrieving the *thanathu* from the colonial amnesia. But the anxieties shared by the play do not build an alternative to the dominant discourses/paradigms which control the middle class concerns in a post-independent society. Through the allegory of *Valadikkavu*, it is a republic of equals that the playwright envisages. It can be read as a negation of the multiplicity/plurality emanated from caste, ethnicity, region, religion and language. The observation made by K. K. Baburaj, one of the eminent Dalit exponents in contemporary Malayalam, is relevant in this context:
Why are categories such as opposite (viperetham, viruddham, vimatham), alternative (badal), secular (mathetharam) and parallel (samantharam) – all derived from dialectical thought as lessons for the reconstruction of life now regarded with misgiving the world over? It is significant that such misgivings and reservations have arisen precisely from within the class of people regarded by all social philosophies as being incapable of speech. This is evidenced by the fact that the idea of othering delineated by Western systems of thought, and the process of pollution and invisibilisation in the East, are both in a state of crisis. At this juncture, along with the emergence of new subjectivities, discourses of the multitude are also taking centre stage. Notions such as parallel and alternative do not regard the subaltern classes as authorial subjects in a dialogue. That is not all. Systems of knowledge premised on dialectical thought perceive the widespread dissemination of any subaltern discourse through the anxiety of annihilation. What I wish to indicate here is that for those sections of the people who wish to transcend the dominance of the ancient authority of caste, race, and gender, what is more desirable is the presence of a discourse of multiplicity than the establishment of a unitary position. In short, both the class struggle posited by Marxism, and the contradiction between nationalism and imperialism
foregrounded by post-colonial movements, found it impossible to incorporate the oppressed all over the world.⁵⁷

Though the observation dissents to see the capitalist juncture at which the ‘multiple discourses’ take place, it sheds light to the hazards encountered by the subaltern subjectivities in a post-colonial milieu. It is by putting a veil over the solid reality of caste that Avanavan Kadamba speaks about the moral crisis of the modern individual in a bourgeois democracy. Since caste is an anomaly in capitalist modernity, the dominant ideology which controls this modernity tries to conceal the reality of caste. Hence this play becomes a direct appeal to the savarna-led capitalism. We can see the latent presence of this retrograde ideology in K. J. Baby’s Nadu Gaddika also.

Nadu Gaddika was an offspring of avant-garde, a new aesthetics which redrew the boundaries of art and literature with the shade of political cognisance, that was, at large, antithetical to the apparatus of the State; both apparent and invisible.

It is hard to measure the magnitude of the State in a modern democracy. Its presence is more complex in a democracy than in an autocracy. Culture and its derivatives give comfortable space for the State to hide its coercive face. Terry Eagleton writes:

There is, finally, one other link between culture and power. No political power can survive satisfactorily by naked coercion. It will lose too much ideological
credibility, and so prove dangerously vulnerable at times of crisis. But in order to secure the consent of those it governs, it needs to know them more intimately than as a set of graphs or statistical tables. Since the authority involves the internalising of the law, it is on human subjectivity itself, in all its apparent freedom and privacy, that power seeks to impress itself. To govern successfully, it must therefore understand men and women in their secret desires and aversions, not just in their voting habits or social aspirations. If it is to regulate them from the inside, it must also imagine them from the inside. And no cognitive form is more adroit at mapping the complexities of the heart than artistic culture. So it is that, as the nineteenth century draws on, the realist novel becomes a source of social knowledge incomparably more graphic and intricate than any positivist sociology. High culture is not some ruling class conspiracy; if it sometimes fulfils this cognitive function, it can also sometimes disrupt it. But works of art which seem most innocent of power, in their sedulous attention to the motions of the heart, may serve power for precisely that reason.  

In short, the State creates an ‘illusory politics’ in the terrain of culture. It will take more effort in a democracy to free from the virtual influence of this illusory politics. Avanavan Kadamba and Nadu Gaddika, though in an outward manner, declare a severance from the cultural paradigms set in by
the State. But so long as the caste hegemony is retained in them there will be no meaning in engaging a battle with the incognitos of the State.

Unlike the other eight plays which we have discussed earlier, *Nadu Gaddika* situates the life of the Adivasis in the central space of the play. Let us see in close the most apparent features of this play:

i. The space of action.

ii. The presence of a ‘hitherto denotified group’ as characters.

iii. The portrait of the *Gaddikakkaran* (one who performs the ritual *Gaddikayattam*) as a political commentator.

iv. Its breakaway from the proscenium stage.

Hill districts like Wayanad or Idukki bear a stigma of backwardness. The same is true to the places where sea is proximate. This stigma gives an authority for the urban intelligentsia to speak on behalf of the people who inhabited in the hilly/coastal areas. This further distanced their realm from the mainstream dialogues which, from a long time back, have been influxing around the midland. Being the most powerful community who was having an unbeatable control over the midland, Brahmins could wrest the oral tradition of literature in accordance with their vested interests. In order to legitimise their undue possession over the major portion of the midland, the Brahmins created a plethora of fables projecting the ‘cannibalism’ of the forest dwellers. The image of strangeness/remoteness/otherness created
through these narratives was such deep that one could not break open the dubious opacity constructed in and around the hilly/coastal areas.

The new forms of dialogue sprouted in the soil of liberal-capitalist democracy tried to reread the stigma of ‘remoteness’ borne by the places where Adivasis or Dalits found their habitat. This new reading was actually a result of the disillusionment experienced by the bourgeois individual in a democratic society. When the concepts of equality, which were largely a contribution of the liberal thought of the west, faced resistive turbulence in the solidity of caste, it became an exigency for the bourgeois/urban middle class to transcend the limits of caste in array with the new revelations brought forth by the post-colonial disciplines. It was through two branches of social activism that the bourgeoisie sought a ‘hyper-democracy’ in Kerala.

i. The alternative democratic forums having a semi-Marxist disposition in it.

ii. The ultra-left outfits who sought the possibilities of a counter-government.

The bourgeoisie, who was unsuccessful in attaining a consummate capitalism, found subterfuge in these counter-movements. But neither of these movements ever reckoned the role of caste in hampering the growth of the society (towards a consummate capitalism).

Let us take the example of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat (KSSP). No other alternative democratic forums have had a wider reach in Kerala than
KSSP. Its contributions in various fields spanning from education to development are surprisingly large. We can see two main factors behind the unique success of KSSP.

i. The infallible leadership. (From the very day of its formation as an organisation it is being steered by a limited cross-section of the urban intelligentsia).

ii. Its acceptability among the semi-middle class.

The new methods brought in by an expertise group comprising teachers, scientists, doctors and engineers in the field of education, health, energy, environment and development were actually a reticent criticism of the existing system of development. It was by the influence of the new streams of thought fostered under the post-colonial discourses that KSSP postulated these alternative paradigms of development. But a micro analysis will show that all these experiments ended up in reasserting the caste-made social stratification existed in Kerala. The reasons can be inferred thus:

i. Through the alternative developmental paradigms the bourgeois intelligentsia extended the scope of democracy.

ii. Though the new experiments reached the stratum of the semi-middle class, it never touched the bottom layer of the social hierarchy.

iii. The aggrandisement of the democratic platform liberated the capitalist individual from his erstwhile moral crisis and helped
him to establish a virtual alliance with the ‘universal individual’; an icon that emerged from the caste-free western liberalism.

iv. This euphoric turn of the bourgeois culture further impeded the self expression of the subaltern people.

As pointed out before, the latter branch of social activism through which the bourgeoisie sought an alternative democracy was the ultra-left movement organised and propagated by a dissident group of Marxists who broke away from the Communist Party of India (Marxist). As the homology between Naxalism – it is by this name that the armed upsurge of the ultra-leftists known in history – and modernism has abundantly been mooted in the literary sphere of Kerala since 1980s it is not intended here to go further in this subject. Dr. P. P. Raveendran, one of the prominent critics in contemporary Malayalam literature, points out:

It is pertinent to investigate the ideological foundation of the kinship between modernism and ultra-leftism. We can understand in our final analysis that both these streams originated from the same entity, i.e., from the middle class. It is but its middleclass background that we indirectly accept when we say that the ultra-leftism was primarily a cultural surge. These two streams carry in unison an anxiety about the deterioration of values which are hitherto considered as perennial and universal.⁶⁰
A conflation of these two branches of social activism – the one which brought in an alternative developmental paradigm by using the available spaces of democracy and the other which sought possibilities of a counter-government through guerrilla warfare – can be seen in the authorial identity of K. J. Baby, the author of *Nadu Gaddika*.

‘Discovery’ of Wayanad

Narrativising the ‘remote’ becomes the key to displace the established realism in discourses. But the physical sphere of this literary process has seldom been noticed. During 70s, the time when food-crop production in the midland faced hazards due to various reasons, the highland migration of the middle class peasants became widened. Consequently, a constellation of government employees appended to it. The process of ‘articulating the remote’ became less difficult under these concrete circumstances. It can thus be summed up: The relationship between the intellectual transition from realism to modernism and the material migration from midland to high land is homologous. The ‘exotica’ found in modernism can only be seen as an effort to narrativise the ‘remote’. Modernism, in another sense, was in fact a legitimisation of the highland migration.

The place of action of *Nadu Gaddika* is Wayanad. Being a migrant himself, K. J. Baby had to confer a validation to the process of migration. This as a societal need of the middle class, contains two important facets:

i. The endeavour for keeping the spatial identity intact.
ii. An effort for appropriating the ‘Other’ in order to establish/transfer a middle class self in it.

In essence, these two facets were nothing but an attempt to get over the ambiguities faced by the capitalist individual. It is against this background that the ‘highland life’ depicted in Nadu Gaddika becomes a rationalisation of the savarna/middle class dominance maintained in the midland portion of Kerala.

The portrait of Gaddikkaran as a political commentator is truly a metaphorical extension of this rationalisation. The Gaddikkaran, who invokes memories in the mind of Yachan, is obviously a representation of the articulate middle class. The refined Malayalam he uses is actually establishing a virtual dominance over the Adivasi Bhasha used by Yachan and Velli. This can be seen as a covert legitimisation of the didacticism followed by the articulate middle class.

When the Gaddikkaran opens a scenario of remarkable historical junctures by invoking the memories of Yachan, we see the various incognitos put on by the janmi at various turn of events. He who was an ardent worshipper of imperialist Britain during the period of colonialism is now seen as a congressman in independent India. Once he cladded in Gandhism when Gandhi was an icon. He was not at all hesitant in bearing a red flag when there came a time of the communists.

The fundamental strategy of the bourgeoisie – ‘classificatory practices’, as Bordieu said – is quite evident in the incognitos borne by the janmi. This scene can also be read as a self criticism of the bourgeoisie. A creation of
1970s, this criticism mainly aims at institutionalised Marxism. A middle class intelligentsia who had faced an identity crisis in the deterioration of established communist parties dreamt of an ideal revolution. But this dream was blended with the existential thought put in by the modernism. In short, the Naxal movement which shook the 70s was actually a conflation of Marxism and existentialism. No other is the thought carried by *Nadu Gaddika*. Dr. T. P. Sukumaran’s observation is relevant in this context:

No one is unaware of the fact that the prototype of Gaddikakkaran is Varghese, the one who sowed the seeds of self-esteem and revolutionary consciousness in the mind of the tribal people who are living in the highlands of Wayanad.\(^6^1\)

The findings we reach can thus be assorted:

i. Wayanad/Adivasis depicted in *Nadu Gaddika* is obviously a repetition of the ‘types’ constructed by a *savarna* discourse.

ii. The bourgeois value system has mitigated this ‘*savarna*-view’.

iii. This opened a space for the bourgeoisie to think, speak and act on behalf of the Dalit.

iv. Through this space the bourgeoisie assumed themselves to be the ‘condescending authority’ of the Dalit.

v. This further widened the impairment of the Dalit subjectivity.
Notes


5. Ibid.


9. Ibid., p.197.


12. It was through the criteria of nature, individual and (religious) morality that the modern concepts on equality had been addressed. The scholars who attempted to define ‘equality’ could not escape from the limited notions such as the homology of equality and individual liberty, natural inequality, moral inequality, etc. See Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus : The Caste System and Its Implications* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999)

   Now we come to the modern feature which is most immediately opposed to the caste system: equality. The ideal of liberty and equality follows immediately from the conception of man as an individual. In effect, if the whole of humanity is deemed present in each man, then each man should be free and all men are equal. This is the foundation of the two great ideals of the modern age. By contrast, as soon as a collective end is adopted by several men, their liberty is limited and their equality brought into question…
Rousseau is often considered a rebel against inequality; but in reality his ideas remained very moderate and were to a large extent traditional. In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau’s prime merit is to distinguish between natural inequality, which is but a small thing, and moral inequality or ‘inequality of combination’, which results from the exploitation of natural inequality for social ends. The man of nature, a brutish creature, endowed with a sense of pity but not knowing good from evil, and innocent of the differentiations on which reason and morality rest, is sometimes said to be free and even to be acquainted with equality, which must no doubt be understood in the sense of absence of moral inequality (but would it not be better to say he is acquainted with neither of the two opposites?). It is explicitly stated that inequality is inevitable and that true equality consists in proportion; thus one has here again something like Plato’s ideal of distributive justice. (11, 12)

13. Ibid., pp.24-5.

14. This shift (to literature) was actually a conversion from one form of capital (i.e., economic capital) to another form of capital (i.e., cultural). Bourdieu has defined this process by the term ‘classificatory practices’. See Leela Fernandez, *India’s New*
How does one specify the theoretical and empirical boundaries of a social group? A range of practices produce the boundaries of social groups. This practice is not an individual behaviour; rather it is the outcome of a dynamic set of processes that are both symbolic and material, and that are shaped both by longer historical processes as well as temporality of everyday. These mechanisms, as Pierre Bourdieu has argued, are ‘classificatory practices’ that are developed as individuals and segments of social groups use strategies of conversion of different forms of capital (sets of cultural, political and economic resources) to preserve their relative social standing and capacities of upward mobility. (xxx)


16. Ibid., p.53.


18. See the introduction, *Caste in History*, p. xix.


24. Premji’s passion was such that which never allowed the aesthetic concerns to subvert the propagandist preoccupations. Some of his poems, e.g., ‘Janmithwam Nashikkanam’ (Down with Feudalism), ‘Ponnaniyile Beeditozhilai’ (The Beedi Worker in Ponnani), aptly exemplify this. Please see C. Achutha Menon, ‘Premji : Kaviyum Nadanum’ (Premji : Poet and Actor) in Lakhavathinte Swarathil (In a Mild Voice) (Prabhat Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990) p.71.

25. Ibid., p.73.


28. Ibid., p.271.


31. Ibid., p.103.
32. Ibid., p.191.

33. Ibid., p.196.


37. Ibid., in Sunny M. Kapikkad’s treatise, p.469.


With the formation of the Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS) in 1907 Dalits began to be organised as an agrarian class under the strong leadership of Ayyankali. While demanding a six-day week for workers, Sangham was emphasising its identity as a working class, which, by the *savarna* discourse, had not been addressed thitherto. It was by reiterating the strength of Dalits as a working class that Ayyankali summoned up the will of the tillers.

The country can progress only through us who are workers on lands. If we strike work, our masters will starve. We are used to starvation and we don’t care. Let us strike work from tomorrow. (382)

This was a blow which might have shaken the very pillars of the economic structure of the society. So it was necessary for the superior castes to defeat the insurrection of the Dalits.

The prolongation of the strike had its impact on both sides. The janmis were unable to cultivate their lands. The workers were unable to find their livelihood. But Ayyankali was adamant. Then a clever idea occurred to him. He thought of finding alternative jobs for the striking workers. For this, he made a pact with the fisherfolk of Vizhinjam who agreed to take some of the strikers along with them on their fishing expeditions. This was a tactical victory of the workers. The janmis, in their sense of defeat, ran
amok. The workers retaliated. And the government had to intervene to stop the violence. (383)

Despite its decisive impact on the membranes of hegimonical paradigms, this legendary struggle was laid untouched in the backlog of annals of history. Canonical historiographers called it by the name ‘Pulaya Lahala’.

Historians with a certain bias considered the first war of Indian independence to be the Sepoy Mutiny [in Malayalam, Sipayi Lahala]. No wonder then that upper-caste historians did not have a better word than ‘lahala’ to describe the first freedom struggle of the untouchables (384)

It will be an interesting vocation to compare it with the glorification received by the Vaikom or the Guruvayoor Satyagrahas. A struggle organised and led by Dalits themselves, the agrarian strike of 1907-08 received little attention while the latter ones, as they were organised and directed mainly by savarna leaders, received a pretty well eulogy. See T. H. P. Chentharassery, ‘Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham : The Story of a Freedom Movement’ (tr. by T. M. Yesudasan) in Susie Tharu & K. Satyanarayana, No Alphabet in Sight : New Dalit Writing from South India (Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2011) pp.381-4.


43. See Peter Heehs, *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998) p.132.


46. Ibid., p.78.

47. Ibid., pp.30-1.

48. Ibid., pp.82-4.

50. It must have been the social mobility of the Nair Community that inspired Robin Jeffrey to mark it as a ‘local reference group’. Please see Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well-Being : How Kerala Became ‘A Model’* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1992) p.51.

51. Ibid., p.48.


56. Ibid., pp.53-5.

57. See K. K. Baburaj, ‘Subjectivity, Otherness and Language’ (tr. by Dilip M. Menon) in Susie Tharu & K. Satyanarayana (eds.), *No


