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MARXIST CRITICISM AND MALAYALAM LITERATURE

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Malayalam may boast of its Marxist critics; but so far we have not had any criticism which in its real sense may be called Marxist.

Marxist Criticism is Sociological criticism, and its basis is the Scientific Sociology of Marx and his disciples. "Marxism looks upon social life as an organic whole in which the separate parts depend one upon the other and here the decisive role is played by the most natural and material economic relationships, above all the forms of labour. In a general analysis of an epoch the Marxist critic must strive to give a complete picture of the entire social development of that epoch....Artistic works depend upon the forms of production in a given society only to an extremely insignificant extent. They depend on them only through such intermediate links as the class structure of society and the class psychology which was formed as a result of class interests. A work of literature will always reflect, consciously or unconsciously, the psychology of the class which the writer represents. Often it reflects a mixture of elements in which the influence of various classes on the writer is revealed, and this must be subjected to a close analysis." (Lunacharsky, On literature and Art, pp.13 f.)

The most eminent of our literary critics are Marxists by conviction. As examples one may cite Prof.Mundassery and Prof.Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai. But in their works of criticism they are revealed as uncompromising classicists. In none of their critical writings do we find an analysis of the social and economic forces, which from behind impelled the author to write a particular piece. In his best works Prof.Mundassery is revealed as an exponent of the concept of Auctya which is classical concept elaborated into a complete ideology by the later writers on poetics in Sanskrit literature. Prof.Kuttipuzha, on the other hand has been a votary Pre-Marxian rationalism. His ultimate ideal is the poetry of Vallathol.

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I am not finding fault with those who have made these trails in our literature and contributed substantially towards the enrichment of our cultural life. I mean simply that Marxian criticism has yet to take shape in Malayalam.

We are apt to confuse the movement of Progressive literature with Marxian criticism, which it is not. The movement of Progressive Literature which was brought to Kerala in the late thirties was an intensely nationalistic movement in origin and was deeply dyed in Gandhian ideals. This movement gave a great impetus to our literature which was completely transformed in a surprisingly short time. The Pseudo-mysticism which came in the wake of the popularity of Tagore's poetry and the melodramatic lyricism of the depression years were swept away. The contribution of this movement, thus, was very substantial.

The movement had a ship-wreck in the late forties when the Communist intellectuals tried to dominate it. They saw the world divided into two water-tight compartments, the Communist and the non-Communists and demanded that every writer should declare in which ~~they~~ camp they were. The intermediate link between a work of art on the one side and the society on the other was lost sight of. This necessarily, was an un-Marxian approach, which was acceptable only to party hacks. The split of the writers of Malayalam which followed has not yet been fully healed.

"Marxist criticism also is, to a significant degree, a teacher. It is pointless to criticise, unless the criticism results in some kind of progress. The Marxist critic must point out to young writers the faults in their work. He must be a teacher to the writer in the social sense.....It is precisely as a result of the co-operation between the important writers and the most gifted literary critics that truly great literature has always arisen." (ibid., pp.23f.) The idea was put to practice, even though to a very limited extent, only in the sixties through the writers' camp organised by the Sahitya Samithi.

Marxism as a political ideology has been brought to our masses by the Communist Party. We may also say that to a limited extent our people understand the theories of class war, surplus value, etc. But Marxism as a philosophy, as a complete vision of social life, has not yet been brought to our intelligentsia. Our Universities and institutes of higher studies ought to have done this. But it is extremely unlikely that in the present context they may come forward to do this. The political

parties of India which profess Communism have mostly been anti-intellectual. If they shed this attitude, they may do something in training Marxian sociologists, some of whom may take to criticism and bring a new dimension to it. The best thing, however, would be for the Indian School of Social Sciences or some such groups to take up this work. Only after we are able to produce some trained Marxian Sociologists will we have our Marxian critics. Learning should be the first step to teaching.
