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DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYALAM LITERATURE DURING THE
LAST THREE YEARS.

(N.V. Krishna Warrior, M.A., M.Litt.)

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The back-ground:

Malayalam, the mother-tongue of about 150 million people, mostly inhabiting Kerala, the smallest of Indian states on the south-west coast, stretching from Kasargode near Mangalore to Vilavancode near Kanyakumari, between the range of Western Ghats and the Arabian sea, has a long history. One of the four main Dravidian languages, Malayalam has very close affinities with Tamil from which it is supposed to have separated more than a thousand years ago.

But the history of Malayalam literature is not as old as the history of Malayalam language. Even after Malayalam developed into a distinct language and was recognised as such by grammarians, Tamil, which was in a state of bloom, continued to be the medium of literary activity in Kerala. Gradually, Sanskrit replaced Tamil as the language of the learned. The earliest literary composition in Malayalam that has yet come to us is assigned to the 14th century A.D.

After the 14th century, however, we find this literature developing with rapidity and mirroring a quick flowering of the regional genius. This early development was on three parallel lines. The pure and unadulterated local tradition continued to express itself in religious and social songs, and ballads celebrating the loves and sorrows of a few famous heroes and heroines. These songs had simple metres and their language was chaste Malayalam. The Tamil tradition gave birth to a class of devotional epic literature, having a complicated metrical structure and employing a mixed Tamil-Malayalam dialect. "Ramacharitam" is the most celebrated work in this tradition. The intense influence of Sanskrit created a new literary dialect, known as "Manipravalam", in which Sanskrit words of all types happily mingled with Malayalam words, some of the latter even taking the conjugational and inflectional terminations of Sanskrit. This dialect, which was at first employed in erotic poems celebrating certain local beauties of caste character, later became the chief vehicle of Sanskrit lore. "Krishnagatha"

Consequent on large-scale Aryan immigration

composed in the fifteenth century combined these three traditions and is still a favourite. But it was in the words of Thunchath Ezhuthachan, the saint and social reformer who lived in the 16th century A.D., that these traditions finally became unified to form the modern literary Malayalam.

Ezhuthachan gave us translations of Maha Bharatam, Adhyatma Ramayanam and Bhagavatam which supplanted all previous translations of these classics. Following the Guru, Ezhuthachan's disciples rendered most of the puranas into Malayalam. The vast literature of Kathakali, that justly famous Kerala-ballet, also originated at about this time. With Kunchan Nambiar of the 18th century, who invented the popular art-form of Tullal and composed numerous songs on puranic themes with hilarious local touches, to be declaimed by the actor-dancer at Tullal, this so-called "middle period" of Malayalam literature came to a close. Incidentally it may be noted that Nambiar is a humorist par excellence; perhaps his match is rarely found in any Indian literature.

Modern Period:

The influence of English education wrought profound changes both in the form and the content of Malayalam literature. Newspapers and magazines broadened the basis of culture, and a lucid prose-style evolved which was not very much different from the popular speech. The language of poetry also changed; but the content of poetry changed most. Romanticism replaced classicism. Kumaran Asan, Ulloor and Vallathol were the three great poets who consummated this revolution. Fortunately for us Vallathol is still alive and active. Kumaran Asan was the poet of social revolution. The poetry of Ulloor and Vallathol was suffused with nationalism. Ulloor, being a Government servant, could not go the whole hog; but Vallathol identified himself completely with the Gandhian ideology.

Romanticism reflected also in fiction. Social and historical novels came out in unbroken succession. The short story established itself as a virile literary form. In the realm of drama, social skits were followed by historical and social plays. Literary criticism also made rapid strides. A respectable body of translations from other literatures also accumulated.

Contemporary scene:

There was a short spell of mysticism in poetry

heralded by G. Sankara Kurup during the Nineteen thirties, but it was alien to the soil and did not take deep roots. The beginning of second world war found a host of young poets, headed by Changampuzha Krishna Pillai and Idappilly Raghavan Pillai (both of whom are alas, no more) wallowing in dejection and despondency induced mostly by the severe economic depression which in those days hit Kerala very badly. It was at this time that realism and naturalism found their way into the realm of fiction.

The second world-war gave a boost to literary production and the momentum gained there is not yet over. ^{short} India attained independence and the great calamity which followed the partition of the country was no more than a distant rumbling for the people of Kerala. The life continued with little variation. Fashions in literature rose and fell. The "Progressive Movement" which began its career a few years before the war, split as a result of the extreme politics of the communist party. The slogan of socialist realism and the tirade against formalism and bourgeois decadence, reverberated through ^{unity} literary corridors. Still the Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishad, now more than a quarter of a century old, exerted a unifying influence. Gradually the storm in literary tea cups subsided and unity of purpose was established. The last three years:

When we look at the literary production of the last three years we have every reason to feel proud. In the realm of poetry, Vallathol finished his translation of Rig Veda, a major achievement at his age. Sirday K.M. Panicker also has a few translations to his credit. G. Sankara Kurup continued to write lyrics suffused with a fine humanistic internationalism. Balamani Amma, the poetess of Motherhood, is becoming more and more subjective. In the cycle of elegies which she composed after the death of her uncle, himself a celebrated poet of another generation, there is a fragile ethereal quality not found elsewhere in our literature. Vailoppillil Sreedhara Manon, that high-priest of beauty, was perhaps the most prolific. There are about a score of other practising poets, but we can hardly point to a new luminary which swam into ^{Kem} these three years. A remarkable development in poetry is the emergence of juvenile verse, to which G, Vailappilli and others have contributed their quota.

In the realm of fiction, Thakazhi Siva Sankara Pilla's "Chemmin" (Prawn) had record sales. This romantic novel depicts the lives of fisher-folk in central Travancore. "Ummachu" by P.C. ~~K~~ Kuttikrishnan (alias Uroob) is another novel which won wide recognition. The theme of ^{this}

novel is the intermingling of Mopla (Muslim) and Hindu cultures in the South Malabar. His second novel "Sundaranmarum Sundarikalum" deals with more contemporary social history. Three novels dealing with life in the Army are also worth mentioning - "The Unknown Men" by Nandanar; "Bloodstained Foot-marks" by Parappuram and "A minus B" by Kovilan. These have broken absolutely new ground. A historical novel on "Jhansi Rane" by Sirdar K.M. Panicker is just ~~to be~~ released.

Unlike in Poetry, in short story new faces are winning recognition. "Madhavikkutty" (Mrs. Kamala Das) has brought a highly sensitive feminine mind to the problems of domestic discord, disease and juvenile and artistic temperaments. "Raja Lakshmi" in her famous long short story "Daughter" discussed the problems of educated woman-hood. Three soldier-writers, Nandanar, Parappurath and Kovilan have sketched military life in its various aspects. M.T. Vasudevan Nair, T. Padmanabhan, K.T. Mohammed and number of comparatively later-comers/ ^{also} deserve mention. The old masters, Thakazhi, Kesavadev, Basheer, Karur, S.K. Pottakkat, P.C. Kuttikrishnan, Varkey, etc., have also been fairly active.

There had been a flowering of drama, mostly as a result of the activities of Malabar Kendrakala Samithy. Hundreds of realistic plays on contemporary social themes are being written and staged. Among them, "You made me a Communist" by T. Bhasi, "This is Earth" by K.T. Mohammed, "Family Pride" by Cherukad, "Life" by Thikkodiyan and "Do not Play with Fire" by Uroob deserve special mention. "Raja Sringan" by Valloppilli is justly famous for its lyrical quality.

Another branch of literature which came to its own during these years is that of travelogue. Sirdar Panicker, S.K. Pottakkat, K.C. Peter, A.K. Gopalan, Joseph Mundassery, Dr. K.K. Raja, Dr. K.R. Pillai, Dr. K.B. Nair, Miss Annie Joseph and C.R. Krishna Pillai are a few who have contributed their share to this branch. Almost all parts of the world have been covered by these writers. The present writer's book on the North India may also be mentioned here.

Autobiographies and biographies are also being written. Among the former the "Atmakatha" by K.M. Panicker, "Jeevitha Samaram" by C. Kesavan and "Days bygone" by K.P.K. Menon stand out. Literary criticism also shows signs of new animation. Ulloor's monumental "History of Kerala Literature"

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in five volumes is being published posthumously. Mr. Kuttikrishna Marar continues to wield a forceful pen which corrects many a popular fallacy and Mr. Sukumar Azhicode has two substantial volumes to the criticism of poetry. More and more translations of world classics are also coming forth.

When we limit our view to the present moment, we are impatient at the progress we are making; but when we look back upon the work accumulated during the last three years, we naturally feel satisfied and confident of the yet greater achievements in the future. Kerala, the smallest, but the most education-minded state of India, is no doubt forging ahead in the field of culture and will continue to give variety and depth to the culture of India, which ^{is our} common heritage of all of us.

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