



# Kandathil Varghese Mappilai

C. J. Roy

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Kandathil  
Varghese Mappilai

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three Soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda. Second Century A.D.  
(Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi)

Makers of Indian Literature series

Kandathil  
Varghese Mappilai

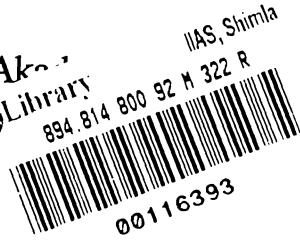
C. J. Roy



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## **Contents**

Preface	7
1. A Mastermind	9
2. Cultural Background	14
3. Early Life and Education	25
4. Into Professional Streams	29
5. Dream Comes True	33
6. New Horizons	44
7. The Man	56
8. Creative Writings	60
9. Judicial Critic	67
10. Last Days	70
11. The Road That Never Ends	81
Select Bibliography	83

## Preface .

The present work is a monograph on Kandathil Varghese Mappilai (1857-1904), an outstanding writer cum journalist who made significant contribution to the development of Malayalam literature.

It was a pleasant surprise for me to get entrusted with the writing of this monograph. I am one who had the privilege to start my life as a journalist in 1957 at the *Malayala Manorama*, the most reputed daily newspaper of Kerala which Varghese Mappilai founded in 1890, before I took up teaching as my profession.

The writing of this monograph was difficult, the source materials lacking and the time at my disposal limited. However, as the writing progressed it became an enriching experience, the man I saw here being a model for ever.

I place on record my thanks to the Sahitya Akademi for entrusting me with this work. I am also thankful to my friends Dr. K. M. Tharakan and Paul Manalil who were constantly enquiring about the progress of this work, to my daughter Bindu and son-in-law Anish for preparing the final copy of the manuscript with skill and to my wife Susan who spent many a night watching silently the beam of light piercing the pitch darkness from my table top.

C. J. Roy

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# 1

## A Mastermind

The history of a country is essentially the series of significant events through which evolves the destiny of its people. This in turn is interwoven with the life and work of certain masterminds who with head and heart contribute to such an evolution. Kerala, the tiny western strip of the South Indian peninsula, had from very old times the privilege to have many such masterminds. We see in our distant past stalwarts like Cheran Cheralathan who established the first Chera Empire, one of the dynasties of Tamilakam in the early centuries of the Christian era and Adi Sankara, the exponent of Advaita philosophy born in this part of India in the 8th century. Thunchattu Ezhuttacchan and Poonthanam introduced us to the sublimities of the Bhakti cult in the 16th century. Kunchan Nambiar and Unnayi Warriar who followed them instilled into us a new sense of personal and social values. The occidental Christian Missionaries of the eighteenth century opened for us the windows to more modern ways of life. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new set of masterminds headed by social reformers like Chattampi Swamikal and Narayanaguru remarkable as men of high thinking and noble action. To this last category belongs Kandathil Varghese Mappilai.

A genuine genius dedicated to the socio-cultural renaissance, Kandathil Varghese Mappilai is rightly acclaimed as one of the chief architects of modern Kerala. The instruments he effectively used for this purpose was the print medium, both the news paper and literary enterprises. Though a writer of eminence, he distinguished himself more as a generous patron of writers. He discovered many a hidden literary talent, brought writers to-



gether, freed them from communal and caste prejudices and made them work together for the betterment of the language and literature of his native land. What Swathi Thirunal did to music and Ravi Varma to the art of painting in Kerala, he did to the cultural life of Kerala, pulling it from the lethargy into which it had fallen and instilling new life into its core. The scores of literary, social and cultural organizations which in later years bloomed in Kerala have as their model the 'Kavisamajam' founded by Varghese Mappilai. His major contribution, however, was the *Malayala Manorama* which he founded in 1890, presently the newspaper with maximum circulation in India, and its allied publication *Bhashaposhini*, an ideal literary journal he founded in 1896. The foundation stone for journalism had already been laid in Kerala in the first half of the nineteenth century itself by the western missionaries beginning with Herman Gundert's *Rajya Samacaram* (1847 June), a monthly journal which focused on the good news from God followed by several of its kind like *Paschimodayam* (1847 October), *Vidya Samgraham* (1864), *Satyanada Kahalam* (1876), *Kerala Mitram* (1881), *Vidya Vilasini* (1881), *Vidya Vinodini* (1887) and *Nasrani Deepika* (1887) varying in content from political dogmatism to literary criticism. But it is *Malayala Manorama*, with its secular outlook and vision of purpose, which turned out as a starting point for modern journalism in Kerala. It continues to stand out as a living monument of the success of the medium Varghese Mappilai chose for shaping a new society blazing the trail of renaissance in Kerala.

Kandathil Varghese Mappilai played significant role in other areas of the cultural life of Kerala as well. As correctly assessed by Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, a doyen among early Kerala journalists, Varghese Mappilai had two main motives. First, to put an end to the supremacy of uppercaste Hindus in the literary sphere of Kerala, and next, to train up those belonging to the lower strata to enable them to be on an equal footing with

others. He succeeded in both making best use of his intellectual and imaginative faculties through his journalistic pursuit.

Varghese Mappilai was an ardent lover of Malayalam, his mother tongue. This language, the youngest developed member of the Dravidian stock, originated as a distant offshoot of Tamil. It was from its early history starting from around 10th century AD under the strong influence of Sanskrit. *Leelatilakam*, the 14th century treatise on Malayalam grammar, devotes most of its space to the rhetorical aspects of Manipravala, the Sanskrit oriented major literary stream of those days. The medieval poets (among whom Thunchattu Ezhuttacchan of the 16th century be signed out), as a rule employed Sanskrit metres and highly Sanskritised language in their literary compositions. Prose too was not exception, as we find in the Champus (prose cum poetry compositions) heavily loaded with Sanskrit words and complex sentence structures decidedly on the models of Sanskrit. The language used by Chakkiyars while performing temple arts like Koottu and Koodiyattam which are expositions of Hindu puranic stories, possibly had its evolution from the same. Kunchan Nambiar, the 18th century satirical poet tried through his works to alter this state of affairs by infusing into it more native elements. However, this positive approach could not gain ground till the end of 19th century under the influence of English. Varghese Mappilai made best use of the opportunity and through his journalistic pursuits consciously saw to the development of Malayalam as a tool of cultural emancipation of Kerala.

Those were days when literature mostly meant versification. Varghese Mappilai had set apart one full page of *Malayala Manorama* for verse. However, he was particular that the space thus allotted should be properly used. He reviewed with rare insight the verse contributions his journal received for publication. "Poetry is not just descriptions of whatever we see", he once wrote, "when a poet says certain things which he has experienced, one should feel why it did not strike his mind". The

approach underlying this statement heralded the emergence of poets like Kumaran Asan who could enfold the entire vicissitudes of life in the nut shell of 'Veena poovu' (fallen flower), a masterpiece in Malayalam literature.

In the literary field Varghese Mappilai's interest was not confined to poetry; he was equally interested in prose. He knew well that no language can attain full growth through any single branch of literature and that along with compositions in poetry there should be informative and aesthetic prose works coming under various literary movements. A note he published in the *Malayala Manorama* under the caption 'for attention of the contributors' reveals the nature of prose Varghese Mappilai had in mind: "One of our readers has written that the meaning of several Sanskrit words found in some of the articles published nowadays in *Malayala Manorama* cannot be understood without the help of a dictionary and that unfortunately a proper dictionary is not available in Malayalam. We also feel that contributors should avoid the habit of using Sanskrit words even in places where suitable Malayalam words are available."

Varghese Mappilai was also interested in reforming the Malayalam script, which was highly problematic in printing. One of his main suggestions in this connection was the splitting of consonant clusters, a practice which is presently adopted in Malayalam.

According to Varghese Mappilai in every social sphere changes are essential. His writings were efforts in this line. The canons of Udayamperoor Synod (AD1600) had stipulated that Christian children should not be taught Hindu religious books and also not under Hindu teachers as both meant risking their religious faith. Varghese Mappilai got well acquainted with the Hindu classics in Malayalam including Attakkathas, the texts for the classical temple art Kathakali. He even wrote an Attakkatha under the title *Darpavicchedam* or *Yadukula Madhavam* and that too based on a Hindu puranic theme. In striking contrast to

the narrow approach of the Synod, he also composed several Christian songs in line with the popular Hindu religious hymns.

Varghese Mappilai had an all-pervading mind genuinely centred on the progress and welfare of the whole people dear and near to him. He lived for the uplift of the depressed classes, eradication of superstitious beliefs and practices, the spread of education and culture, and political justice for all. And he founded *Malayala Manorama* in 1888, to mirror his life.

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## Cultural Background

In the lush green landscape of Central Kerala with long stretches of paddy fields interspersed with coconut groves is a tiny village by name Karuttalil on the lofty banks of the Manimala river. It is a lowlying land inhabited by gentle, peace loving people of the agricultural profession, enjoying the bliss of family life in mediocre neat and tidy houses. It is customary in Kerala to have for each house a name indicating its location. Kandathil was one such name in the village Karuttalil. The house name Kandathil literally means 'in the paddy field', the plot in which the house was located being a raised portion of the paddy field surrounding it.

Kandathil was an aristocratic family belonging to the Orthodox Syrian Christian community. Traditionally Orthodox Syrians constitute a compact group of people claiming its Christian affiliation as early as the first century AD in contrast to those who embraced Christianity much later as a result of the efforts of the occidental Christian missionaries. The community has a history of about two thousand years dating back from AD 52 when St. Thomas, one of the Apostles of Christ, came to India. They as a rule, have been adhering to the beliefs and practices of the upper strata of Hindus from which they are believed to have switched over to the Christian faith. Kandathil family was not an exception. Many in the family of Kandathil excelled in agricultural as well as industrial sectors. However, it was Kandathil Varghese Mappilai who enhanced the reputation of the family to the maximum.

Kandathil Varghese, affectionately called Vareechan by relatives and friends, was born in 1857 as the young son of Kandathil Eapen, a popular agriculturist of the area. His mother

Saramma also was from an equally reputed family, the Cherukara in Ayiroor. Eapachan had the unique distinction of being the first Orthodox Syrian Christian to hold the coveted high Governmental office of 'Mutalpidi,' the village treasurership. The story of how Eapachan was invested with this office is almost legendary. The high offices of the government were in those days mostly confined to certain sections of the Hindu community. G. Madhavarayar, the then Divan was not happy with this sectarian approach and he issued instructions to appoint members of other communities including Christians to governmental posts. The Protestant Christian sects under the patronage of foreign missionaries were interested in getting appointed to such posts. Eapachan was originally commended to the post of Mutalpidi, but due to pressure from the missionaries in favour of someone else his claim was about to be set aside. At a meeting of prominent agriculturists to discuss on matters relating to improvement of agriculture in Kerala including issues like replacing the age-old wooden crushers for squeezing sugarcane with iron crushers, Eapachan told Madhavarayar about the developments in the Mutalpidi issue and straight away secured the office from the Divan. Originally he had to face lack of cooperation in the proper running of the office from his Hindu colleagues within as well as from the protestant sects outside, but with his humility and tactful approach he gradually won them over to his side. As Moorkkothu Kumaran, a prominent writer of those days pointed out, it marked a new trend in appointments to government services and brightened the future of the Orthodox Syrian Christian community.

Along with his agricultural occupation and governmental assignment, Eapachan had attached himself to industrial enterprises. He was a founder share-holder of the Punalur Paper Mills, the first joint-stock company in Travancore. He was quite progressive in his outlook. Those were days when

Christian families as a rule detested the study of the Hindu literary texts. Study under Hindu teachers also was not appreciated. The Synod at Udayamperoor had even provided for expulsion from the church those who pursued the study of Hindu literature. The study of English also was not favoured by the Syrian Christian community. This was not only because English is an alien language, but also because it was felt that its study would hamper their allegiance to the traditional church. Epachan however, did not subscribe to this view. Paying no heed to the stiff opposition from his community as well as his family members, he initiated his son's study at the feet of a Hindu Sanskrit teacher, Kunjan Asan by name, and later did send him for higher studies to educational institutions run by Protestants. He also persuaded his relatives to follow his path.

The Orthodox tradition of the community to which he belonged as well as the progressive outlook of his father played a significant role in moulding a well-balanced personality in Vareechan. The scenic beauties of his rural environment nourished the inborn aesthetic tastes in him. The experience he gained from his masters, both oriental and occidental, the contacts he could establish with men of letters around his locality along with the habit of wide reading endowed him with the necessary equipment of a master builder.

Kerala was during those days striding a crucial period. The early secular Dravidian culture which constituted a golden era for the entire Tamilakam part of which was Kerala, had disappeared. It was substituted by Aryan culture. Social life had become miserable on account of the domination of the high caste Hindus (*savarnas*) over the low caste Hindus (*avarnas*). Each sect considered itself as separate from others and the practice of untouchability and unapproachability were prevalent among them in varying degrees.

Inculcation of spirituality through religious works proclaiming the message of equality among all creatures as

enshrined in the Advaita Philosophy was considered as a suitable means towards civilizing social life. There were attempts in this line by preceptors of different sects but they were not very effective from a practical point of view. Most of the literature available also was not of much use. Excepting the oral tradition of folk poetry, which coexisted with the genres of written tradition, literature consisted mostly of narrative poetry without much scope for introversion. They had their themes drawn from the two great Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. These translations and adaptations barring a few were zealous but unimaginative imitations of the above texts. *Ramacharitam* of the twelfth century, the earliest among them has its theme drawn from the 'Yuddhakanda' of *Ramayana*. Its author Cheeraman was according to indications available from the text a ruler of Venad, which explains its heroic nature instead of religiousness. Its diction is an artificial blend of Tamil and Malayalam, interpreted as a preliminary stage in the evolution of Malayalam, an argument yet to be established. Works of the three poets belonging to a family in Niranam in Central Kerala, Madhava Panickar, Sankara Panickar and Rama Panickar, during the period 1350-1450 stabilised the trend initiated by Cheeraman. *Bhashabhagavatam* by Madhava Panickar, *Bharatamala* by Sankara Panickar and the Malayalam renderings of *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavata* by Rama Panickar indicated the efficiency of literature in instigating the message of salvation through devotion. The Niranam works are also illustrations of a diction almost emancipated from the influence of Tamil.

Among the early poetic works of Kerala, *Krishnagatha* of the fifteenth century by Cherusseri stands out as a landmark by virtue of its linguistic merits. The work is perhaps the first in pure sophisticated Malayalam free from blends of all kinds. Though occasionally too sensuous to be palatable, it is notable for its musicality and fine pictorial visualisation. Thunchattu



Ramanujan Ezhuttacchan led Malayalam literature a step further opening up a realm of self discovery and self communion. With the advent of the Portugese who initiated an era of incessant conflicts and rivalry, establishment of a powerful movement of enlightenment and moral regeneration was an urgent need of the hour. Ezhuttacchan made significant contribution to this end through his works, the *Kilippattu* (Bird's Song) versions of the great Hindu epics. The Thullal works of Kunchan Nambiar as well as the Attakkathas, the classical dance-dramas, followed the same tradition. Though creditable as eulogistic descriptions of the Hindu gods and their incarnations in human forms, the works lacked reflections of this world, perhaps barring a few like the Thullals.

Of course, the time was mature enough with proper setting laid for the building up of a new chapter in the cultural history of Kerala. Life in this western strip of the South Indian Peninsula had become during this period instinct with a quickening impetuosity, a conscientious effort to be freed from age-old traditions, and preparedness for thoughts adopting new ways of life. Many reasons can be attributed for this salutary change at work, the most striking of which was the cultural activities initiated by the Christian missionaries. Though Christianity had come to Kerala even in the first century through St. Thomas the apostle, there was no serious attempt to evangelise and turn others to the Christian fold; the cultural life of the early Christians of Kerala being more or less the same as that of the Hindus. It is with the advent of the Portugese missionary groups, particularly those attached to the Roman Catholic Church there was a sea of change. They found the place favourable enough for evangelisation and conversion. St. Francis Xavier, the chief missionary of India, landed in Kerala in 1542 and preached the Gospel to the people of the coastal area. Herniquez, a disciple of St. Francis wrote books on catechism and also compiled a dictionary and grammar. His catechism was the first book printed

in a native language, namely Tamil. The types for its printing were made at the Vaipincotta seminary under the supervision of the Spanish missionary John Gonsalvez. The seminary was established by the Jesuit missionaries and attached to it was the Jesuit House founded in 1577 by Antonio Guedes De Moraes. It was here the first printing press with vernacular types was established in their effort to bring out catechism texts printed in vernacular. Missionaries like Antan De Proenca, Guiseuppe Constanzo and Johann Ernestus Hanxleden (popularly known as Arnos Padiri) made remarkable contribution in spreading Christianity through their work at Ambazhakkadu near Trichur where the St. Paul College was established in 1695. Fr. Clement, the Indian missionary who arrived in the Malabar Coast in the middle of the 18th century and resided at Veropoly very soon became a scholar in Malayalam. His work *Samkshepa Vedartham* which explicates the Christian ideals was printed in Rome in 1772 after overcoming a lot of difficulties in getting the eleven thousand and odd types manufactured in 'chaturavadvu' which was the Malayalam script form of the time. Interestingly, the book was dedicated to Maharaja Rama Varma of Travancore. Fr. Clement also compiled a Malayalam Dictionary and wrote a treatise on Sanskrit and Malayalam script.

It was, however, the Protestant missionaries who were responsible for a thorough regeneration of the cultural life of Kerala. The Protestant missionaries had begun their sway in Kerala with the beginning of the 19th century after the establishment of the British power in India. They found Kerala a particularly welcome place, as Christianity was not unfamiliar in this part of the south Indian peninsula. The protestant missionaries were attached to two major societies, namely the Basel Mission and the Church Mission Society with their Headquarters in Tellichery and Kottayam respectively. A prominent Missionary of the Basel mission was Dr. Herman Gundert from Germany. After his studies in Theology at the

Tubinger University he became a pastor and at the age of twenty-four landed in Madras as a Christian missionary, married a Swiss girl by name Yulia Dihova and they together carried on the work of spreading the message of the Holy gospel. They also got enrolled in the Basel Mission. The Basel Mission which had resolved to start its activities in India deputed Dr. Gundert to Malabar where the first Basel Mission unit was organised by him. He attained proficiency in Malayalam to the extent of compiling a grammatical treatise, Malayalam dictionary and Malayalam texts for the use of pupils in the primary school he started. His *Padyamala* published in 1860 was the first reader for children in Malayalam. He opened a Litho Press at Nettoor in the verandah of the Illikkunnu Church, from where he published the journal *Rajyasamacharam*, the first Malayalam periodical, in 1847.

Dr. Gundert's settling down at Illikkunnu served as the starting point for a golden age of Malayalam language. He established a *kallaccu*, a crude type of printing press with the aid of which booklets attracting people to Christianity were published. The number of books to his credit on religious, literary and educational themes is around thirty. His pioneering work is the Malayalam-English Dictionary he published in 1872. Scientific and well documented with etymological explications, it is an outstanding work in lexicography.

No less was the contribution of the Church Mission Society. Rev. Benjamin Bailey was one of the early pioneers of the mission in London. He was born in 1791 at Disbury, Yorkshire in England. He was trained under Thomas Scott, the first Secretary of the Church Mission Society and ordained as a priest by Archbishop Verthan Harkot. On the request of Col. Munroe, the Resident of Travancore, the corresponding committee in Madras deputed him to Kerala in 1816 for the spread of Christian faith. He established a Seminary for Protestants at Kottayam in 1817 and was appointed as its first

Principal. Assisted by missionary colleagues like Joseph Fein and Henry Bekker he gave shape to several socio-educational activities. He founded the first printing press in Malayalam and got the necessary Malayalam types from Fort St. George. He had undertaken a translation of the Holy Bible. This he completed in 1824. He compiled two lexicons, English-Malayalam and Malayalam-English. He was also responsible for certain improvements in Malayalam alphabets.

Installation of printing presses, beginning with the C.M.S. Press at Kottayam by Rev. Benjamin Bailey in 1811, was an invaluable contribution of the missionaries for the cultural development of Kerala. The number of periodicals brought out through the printing establishments in different parts of Kerala during 1847 to 1890 is estimated as around twenty-five. The growth in printing technology played significant role in the steady growth in literature as well as the development of journalism.

The Protestant missionaries involved themselves in secular issues as well. They established schools where in addition to the Bible, subjects like grammar, mathematics, rhetorics, poetry, astronomy and other branches of science as well as philosophy were taught. They thus opened to the natives the windows of learning for a better and deeper understanding of the world. Their ministry was not confined to preaching, but included the bridging of the gaps in the social strata and the humanisation of the so called untouchables as well. Under the initiative of missionaries, education was imparted free of cost to all interested, irrespective of caste and creed. The educational activities of the missionaries and their utility were duly taken note of by the government and steps were taken to promote them further through establishment of government schools. Provision for free and compulsory education to all at the primary level to begin with, followed by higher levels also was made. With the spread of the new type of education, the prose form of language which till then was mostly confined to normal discourses became

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an effective tool for social and cultural communication. A new generation gradually emerged using Malayalam and its natural form, the prose, as the medium for acquisition of knowledge as well as self expression displacing Sanskrit which was traditionally considered the main source of scholarship.

A major instrument which the Protestant missionaries had for the above purpose, apart from educational institutions, was journalism. It was Dr.Gundert, the great German missionary who settled down in Tellicherry in Northern Kerala who initiated Keralites into journalism, with the journal *Rajyasamacharam*, *News of the Land* which started publication in 1847. *Rajyasamacharam* was considerably far from the concept we have of an ideal journal, its primary aim being that of spreading of the gospel. The size of *Rajyasamacharam* was royal octavo. It was printed in a hand made cyclostyling press and being probably intended for free circulation was not specifically priced. There was no indication that it was a publication of the Basel Mission, nor was there any mention of the editor's name; from the simple, flowery, literary style it is assumed that it was edited by no less a person than Dr.Gundert. The title did not do justice to its content. The journal being devoted to religious propagation, the *rajyam*, country, represented heaven. Evidently the journal's only aim was to propagate Christian faith. Each issue had a centralised article narrating the experiences of the priests while at their missionary work and the accounts of those taken to Christianity. The crux of the narration was "I am the way, the goal and life".

The *Paschimodayam* started by Dr.Gundert during 1847 October was different from *Rajyasamacharam* in certain respects. The title *Paschimodayam* meant that which rises in the west. True to this meaning, it gave importance to the developments in the western hemisphere. Its size was the same as that of *Rajyasamacharam*; Royal octavo; number of pages also the same. The editor's name was printed as F.Muller and

the journal was priced four paise. Unlike *Rajyasamacharam* it evidently aimed at apprising the people the modern trends in the western scientific world. Materials like *keralappazhama* an introspection into the historical past of Kerala, also provided interesting reading. A scientific approach was available in presentation, the material presented being adequately substantiated with proper illustrations and statistical details.

*Jnananikshepam* the treasury of wisdom, was a monthly journal started by Rev. Benjamin Bailey in 1848, published from the C.M.S. Press, Kottayam. It appeared in Demy octavo size and in four pages. Later the number of pages was increased to eight. Below the title printed in the front page both in English and in Malayalam, the contents of the journal was given under the heading *sangativivarangal* (subject particulars) which normally included a preface, news items, stories of human interest, notes on language and literature, weekly forecasts and other pieces of information of common interest, particularly those associated with the church activities. The outlook of the journal was quite progressive, advising priests to marry, to use the native language in liturgy, encouraging family prayers and Bible classes and discouraging the practice of receiving remuneration for spiritual services. *Jnananikshepam* has also to its credit the practice of including fiction in its columns. It was in this publication, 'Pullelil Kunchu', by Arch Deacon Oommen Koshy, considered as the first novel in Malayalam by many, was published in 1882. The journal was largely secular in nature which made it acceptable to non-Christians also. The journal maintained a high degree of perfection both in form and content. This journal, the publication of which continues uninterrupted even today was the first Malayalam magazine printed in a printing press. It is also the first Malayalam journal which has many of the features of a modern journal.

There were other journals too, of different standards, even substandard. There was at least one journal by name

*Santushtavati* started by a foreigner W. H. Moore in 1867 published from C.M.S. Press, Kottayam, which strongly opposed the British rule, and was forced to close down due to the allegations it made against Divan Madhavarayar.

The above cultural background provided a proper setting for the intelligent and imaginative mind of Varghese Mappilai and it contributed considerably to his development as a man of multiple capabilities.

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## Early Life and Education

**M**uch is not known about the childhood of Varghese Mappilai. From what little we know they were happy days with his affectionate parents and well placed relatives willing to carry out every small wish of his. He was the youngest of his parents' four sons; younger to Mathulla, Cheriachan and Eapen. As the 'baby' in the family his parents had a special soft corner for him.

Vareechan started his education at the age of around five, as was the custom of those days. His first teacher was one Kunjan Asan. The first lessons consisted of *nilattezhuttu* (writing on the floor), and learning of the texts *Amarakosam*, *Siddharoopam*, *Sreeramodantam* and *Krishnavilasam*, as per the traditional indigenous system of learning. The system was generally not appreciated by the Orthodox Christians as they felt the learning of the Hindu texts was detrimental to their faith. It is interesting to note that there was an approach corresponding to this from the Hindus when the English system of schooling started in Kerala. They felt that the primary aim of the new system was inculcating in children the spirit of Christianity. It was rumoured that the textbooks used in these schools included those opposed to Hinduism. This prompted the Hindus to detest sending their children to English schools. A biography of Madhavarayar, a Divan during the period, mentions about a complaint he received from a section of people in Vaikom area regarding the teaching of books which are not in favour of Hinduism. Madhavarayar visited some of the English schools and found out there is no truth in the allegation. He subsequently called on the people to cast off such impressions and support



the good intentions with which the English schools have come up. While this had positive effect in the attitude of Hindus regarding the English schools, the Christians continued their negative approach to the indigenous system of education, particularly their anti-pathetic stand to the Hindu texts. This negative approach was actually something thrust upon the Christians by their religious heads. The canons of the Udayamperoor Synod of 1600 includes certain provisions which prohibit learning Hindu texts and even learning under Hindu teachers. The Christians as a rule adhered to this proscription till recent times and have been maintaining an aversion to the Hindu texts. Even secular works like *Panchatantram* are not exception to this. Rev. George Mathen, one of the most reputed scholars among the native missionaries in an address on education strongly condemned this attitude as follows: "It is true that works like *Panchatantram* are based on Hinduism. But they are not only refreshing to the mind but also help considerably in the acquisition of competency in language. To prevent children from reading them is a crime."

Though learning the Hindu texts were proscribed by religious rules, Eapachan did not subscribe to such views. This enabled Vareechan to carry on his education in the indigenous fashion uninterrupted under Kunjan Asan.

Even as a small boy Vareechan was a voracious reader. Books in Malayalam was a rare commodity in those days. Whenever he came in possession of some reading material in Malayalam he read it thoroughly from its beginning to the end. He also memorized many of the lines from the *thullal* works of Kunchan Nambiar, which he had occasions to hear from Kunjan Asan. He was endowed with the faculty of instant versification even when he was a small boy.

He was a free bird and in his leisure hours walked along the narrow ridges of his father's paddy fields enjoying the beauty of the landscape occasionally expressing his aesthetic pleasure

in the free verses he composed. P.K. Kochappan, a childhood friend of his remembers some of those verses:

*kaakkeem kaakkeem kaakkattampuratti  
oolaam naaliyum pannippulacciyum*

It is just a list of the birds he saw around him, but in rhythmic sequence providing it the soul of musicality. The whole nature was rhythmic for him; he would never tolerate the all - pervading rhythm obstructed. This intolerance often got him into trouble. Once, at the age of eight years, he heard a man in the country boat bound for Kottayam, passing through the river near his house, singing a song with no regard to its music or rhythm. He rebuked him as follows:

*kottettinu pokalleetaa  
paattingane paatalleetaa  
thandittu pizhakkalleetaa  
thalappizha kaattalleetaa*

(Do not go to Kottayam, do not sing like this. Do not mishandle the oars, do not spoil the rhythm)

The boatman became annoyed and looked at the boy angrily. Those who were with him recognized the boy and prevented the boatman from giving vent to his anger telling him in a hushed voice that the lad who rebuked him was the son of Eapachan, the Mutalpidi.

Setting aside the reservations the Church had about English education and also the traditions of his community, Eapachan saw to it that his son got proper education both in Sanskrit and English. Under Kunjan Asan the local scholar, Vareechan learned the rudiments of Sanskrit and got familiarised with texts like *Siddharoopam*, *Amarakosam*, *Sreekrishna vilasam* and *Raghuvamsam*. The interest in literature stimulated by works like *Raghuvamsam* led him to the treasury of Malayalam works by Ezhuttacchan, Kunchan Nambiar and other major writers. After Vareechan finished his studies under Kunjan Asan, he joined the English School at Thukalassery near Thiruvalla. The school was run by the Church Mission Society. There was a

feeling among the Syrian Christians that the C.M.S. Missionaries will brainwash the children studying in their schools and draw them to Protestantism, a continuation of the concept that familiarity with the Hindu religious texts will draw Christians sway from the Christian faith. Eapachan had not subscribed to this view and Vareechan proved that his father was right. The orthodox Christians were also of the view that English language was just a requisite of those who wanted to take up missionary work in the Anglican Church. There was also a feeling that English was being popularized as a means to convert orthodox Christians into Protestantism. The Protestant missionaries had a really difficult time to get freed from this misconception.

Among the subjects taught at school, language and literature were of special interest to Varghese. He used to compose verses even at that young age and it earned him special recognition among his classmates, as well as teachers. After completing primary education at Thukalassery he had his studies at the C.M.S. High School, Kottayam. Subsequently he joined for the F.A. Course at the Government Arts College, Trivandrum. At college, Malayalam was the subject he liked most. He became a favourite of his classmates particularly because of his poetic talents. They had even given him a nickname; 'the poet'. His over enthusiasm for literature however, proved harmful to him in higher studies. Mathematics was too difficult a subject for him. He could not get through the F.A. Examination even after two attempts and had to bid goodbye to formal education.

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## Into Professional Streams

The failure in the F.A. Examination did not suppress Vareechan's thirst for acquisition of knowledge. He realized that his interest lay in literature and pursued it quite seriously. He enriched his knowledge of Sanskrit under the discipleship of the eminent teacher Vilvattathu Raghavan Nambiar and refreshed his familiarity with the masterpieces in Malayalam literature. Contrary to the common practice among Christians, he took keen interest in the translations and adaptations of the Hindu epics. He was particularly fascinated with the *Bird Songs* of Thunchattu Ezhuthacchan, the Thullals of Kunchan Nambiar and the Attakkathas of veterans like Kottayam Thampuran, Vidwan Koyil Thampuran and Unnayi Warriar.

The ideas acquired through vast reading and the techniques of writing assimilated strengthened his literary abilities, as evidenced in his Attakkatha *Darpavicchedam* a major work he wrote during these days. This Attakkatha was later staged several times by the Kathakali Yogam at Thiruvalla.

It was at this juncture of his life Varghese got his first assignment as a journalist. Devji Bhimji, an enterprising industrialist from Gujarat settled down at Cochin, had started a printing press and was on the look out for a proper person to edit a weekly journal he wished to publish under the name *Keralamitram*, 'friend of Kerala'. Kochu Varkey, a former classmate of Varghese who came to know about it, recommended the latter's name for the post. With the blessings from his parents twenty four year old Varghese left his native place and on the first day of the first month of 1881 took up the editorship of *Keralamitram*.

The editorship of *Keralamitram* was more an education for Varghese than a profession. It gave him sufficient practical knowledge on the various aspects of journalism, its artistic and scientific dimensions. It also gave him occasion to acquaint himself better with the social, political and literary trends in Kerala as well as those who were at the helm of affairs in these fields. It served as a laboratory where he could freely experiment with his modern ideas which subsequently enabled him to become one of the most successful journalists Kerala has ever produced. Those were days when journalism in Kerala was still at its infancy. The general public was not conscious of the relevance of journals; those who published them were not sure how to make its relevance felt either. There were no proper facilities to gather news as we have today. Special care had to be taken in the presentation of news items. The general impression of the public regarding journalism was rather unfavourable. English was considered as a language of an alien intruder, the British, and journalism was a product of the English language. The fact that most of the journals were run by Christians or with the support of Christian missionaries who were viewed with suspicion also had its negative reflections. The kings and chieftains who were ruling the country had their likes and dislikes regarding men and matters and any attempt to question them or interfere with them meant disaster.

Literature was not taken seriously except by a few and to get a review or an article worthy of publication was extremely difficult.

Varghese was particular not to succumb to these hazards. He strained every nerve to accomplish his journalistic ambitions in *Keralamitram*. He travelled far and wide in search of news. Along with news items, he published in the columns of the journal articles on literary, social and political topics on the basis of the information he could gather during his travel. He also wrote critical reviews of books one of which was on the translation of

Kalidasa's monumental work *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* by Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Thampuran. The review while appreciating the effort of Kerala Varma in translating the classic work of Kalidasa, objected strongly to the Sanskrit vocabulary profusely used in the translation. Quite befitting his stature, Kerala Varma appreciated the approach adopted by Varghese, which later led to a close companionship between the two. Varghese was also keen on changing the journalistic trend of catering to needs of the communal denominations which ran the journals. He wanted his journal to be secular, in the true sense of the term. He also strove hard to change the indifferent treatment given to Malayalam by the literates who considered the language and literature of Sanskrit alone was worthy of proper study and appreciation.

Though Varghese succeeded to some extent in his efforts to make *Keralamitram* a creditable publication, it did not give him the job satisfaction he craved for. He could not also appreciate the attitude of the proprietor, Devji Bhimji, to journalism in general. The remuneration he was given for his work was meagre; on it he could not settle down in Cochin, nor could he even make both ends meet. Daily travel from his native village to Cochin in a country boat resulted in the deterioration of his health. After serving in *Keralamitram* for a little more than a year he bade goodbye to it, mainly under pressure from his parents.

Returning to Karuttalil, Varghese had a try at the 'Muthal-pidi' office at Chengannoor. But it was not to his liking and he did not remain there for long. He spent most of his time in his village home reading and writing. He indulged in some social service activities as well. True to the saying 'charity begins at home' he organized the local members of the Syrian Christian community and formed an organization under the name 'Sadachara Sahodara Sangham' (society for good conduct and brotherhood). The main programme of the Sangham was to

arrange talks on topics concerning development of the mental and physical faculties of young men.

The 'Sadachara Sahodara Sangham,' had stipulated that its members should add the honorific title of 'Mappilai', elegant son, to the names of its members, resulting in the name Varghese getting changed as Varghese Mappilai.

Varghese Mappilai secured an assignment as a Malayalam teacher at the C.M.S. High School, Kottayam, his alma mater. He liked this assignment and he could have continued peacefully in it carrying on his literary activities. But somehow he wanted to take up something more challenging, more in tune with his dynamic personality. It turned out to be journalism; the sweet and bitter tastes of which he experienced as the editor of *Keralamitram* lingering in his dreams.

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## Dream Comes True

**D**reams, according to the ancient belief, come from heaven. They are sent by God to His devotees to brighten their future devising ways and means for achieving prosperity. Varghese Mappilai was one bestowed with such a dream. The starting of the *Malayala Manorama* was the fulfilment of that dream.

Many were the drawbacks in Kerala which required immediate rectification. Kerala, extending from Cape Comerin in the south to Gokarnam in the north, remained in those days as three separate entities, namely Travancore, Cochin and Malabar with relationships more enemical than friendly. The people of Kerala were not described as Keralites - they were Travancoreans, Cochinites, and Malabarais, separated administratively as well as emotionally. The social structure was caste-oriented. Under the Brahmin domination people were segregated into *savarnas* and *avarnas*. The *avarnas* as a whole were untouchables, the degree of untouchability varying according to the social level each subsect maintained. In the *savarnas* too there were *subsects* - the Nampootiris, the Kshatriyas and the Nairs, each living in a world of its own. Education was restricted to the *savarnas*. The *avarnas* were not considered fit for education and as such majority of the people were illiterates. English schools were getting encouragement, but those who benefitted from the education imparted were very few.

The stage for change had however set in. The Indian National Congress under the impressive leadership of Mahatma Gandhi was gaining support from all corners developing in the people a sense of self respect and patriotism. New ideas of



democracy and liberalism were disseminated by English education. Reformation movements initiated by Sri Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal and others made people conscious of their rights and instilled new aspirations in their minds. The need of the hour was just proper leadership and guidance. Kandathil Varghese Mappilai, with his dynamic personality, sincerity and dedication to purpose was a proper person to provide this. He undertook the task of striving to do what he could in this line. The *Malayala Manorama* was for him an effective tool for liberating the people from their age-old customs and false beliefs and to equip them towards a brighter future.

To run a journal was not easy. It meant a lot of money as capital and for the infrastructure. Varghese Mappilai was not rich enough to meet these requirements by himself. But he had taken the decision and there was no question of going back. The friendship he had established at Kottayam proved useful. There was encouragement from all corners including offers of financial help for establishing a press which was felt as the first requisite in starting a journal. Varghese Mappilai took into confidence his brothers and discussed with them his plans. They wholeheartedly supported the move. The problem was how to secure the consent from his father. The proposal involved a lot of financial commitments with the profit prospects rather unpredictable. Whether Eapachan will approve such a project was doubtful. Varghese Mappilai sought the help of one John Vakil and Kannukuzhiyil Kuruvila who were close friends of Eapachan in presenting him with the proposal. Their dialogue with Eapachan began with the difficulties Varghese Mappilai was facing in carrying out a decent life with the meagre salary of Rs. 15 he was getting as a school teacher and ended in the suggestion that starting a small company similar to the recently started Punaloor Paper Mills will ensure a better future for him. Eapachan had not only heard about the Punaloor Paper Mills, but also had taken

shares for Rs. 500 in it as desired by the Divan. An Englishman by name Cameron had floated the company with assistance from the Government of Travancore for manufacturing paper. The byelaws of the company was more or less the same as those prescribed by British India Company Law, with minor modifications. Eapachan had with him in his capacity as a shareholder copy of the byelaws. Being thus acquainted with the running of company affairs and yielding to the compulsions of his friends he gave his consent to proceed with the project. He also volunteered to take a few shares of the new company which was to be started with small sums collected from those interested.

As the first step for starting the newspaper, Varghese Mappilai registered in 1888 the Malayala Manorama Company. It was a joint stock company, the first of its kind in Kerala formed by natives. The capital of the company was just Rupees Ten Thousand. The Byelaws of the company were almost the same as that of the Punaloor Paper Mills. Moral and financial support came from relatives and friends including the Orthodox Syrian Christian Metropolitan Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius, founder of the M.D. Seminary, Kottayam. The Metropolitan magnanimously donated one of the buildings he owned in the Seminary compound for installing the press. With the necessary capital and infrastructure secured, Varghese Mappilai earnestly moved on to the next step. He sought advice regarding the policy to be adopted by the journal as well as its presentation aspects from his well wishers, the first among whom was Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Thampuran. With the lessons learned from *Keralamitram* he also appointed reporters in various places. Varghese Mappilai was one who never wanted to change himself according to the conditions around, but to change the conditions around as he desired. With his will power and imaginative faculties coupled with dedication to his purpose, he strained every nerve of his to this end and released the first issue of the *Malayala Manorama* on 22nd March 1890.

The journal was named *Malayala Manorama* on the advice of Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Thampuran. It literally means that which pleases the mind of Malayalees. The auspicious time for its release was fixed by Vilvattathu Raghava Asan, one of Varghese Mappilai's preceptors. The insignia which accompanies the name Malayala Manorama was a contribution from Sree Moolam Thirunal, the then king of Travancore. Beneath it was the inscription *dharmo'smat kuladaivatam* which means Charity our Household Divinity.

The day of release of the first issue of *Malayala Manorama* was one of jubilation for the whole Kerala. The Tirunakkara temple of Kottayam was having its 'Aarattu' festival on that day. An exhibition of bullocks was going on at the nearby stadium. The town was filled with people from different parts of Kerala who came to participate in these and a festive mood prevailed. The new journal reached the hands of the public early morning providing a new dimension to the festivities. The starting of *Malayala Manorama* was a landmark in the history of journalism in Malayalam. A statement the editor had published in the first issue explicates in clear terms the purpose with which the journal was started. Its primary aim was "to fill the vacuum arising out of the absence of a proper newspaper within the boundaries of this land ruled by our great king and his obedient servant Diwan Ramarayar who is most interested in the welfare of the people". The statement continues as follows: "There must be others too who are thinking in this line. But they are not interested in getting involved in such a serious matter. While the result of such involvement is clear through experience why we should take this strain, is a relevant question. Let our lives be the proper answer to this. We cannot assure this general newspaper will fulfil every purpose expected of it. We assure without fear that as far as possible we will be careful not to get involved in any improper act. Therefore let the *Malayala Manorama* stepping humbly into the midst of you all, actresses and actors of varying stature, do justice to its name, we pray."

There is a short play by Vayaskara Aryan Narayanamoos containing the entire history of the origin of the *Malayala Manorama*. The play is titled 'Malayala Manorama Vijayam'. The major characters in the play are Manicka Vachakar, Ramaniyakkan, Vairaveeran, Achakudi, Patrasenan and Manorama. The character Manicka Vachakar represents Varghese Mappilai. Achakudi is the printing press, and Manorama is the heroine. The play visualises goddess Saraswati takes incarnation on earth as Malayala Manorama.

*Malayala Manorama* had set apart from its very first issue a column for Malayalam poetry. Varghese Mappilai had his inspiration for this gesture from *Keralamitram*. The few who were at least for name's sake concerned with the language Malayalam were the poets. It seems he felt that if they are not given due importance in the journal, it will affect the running of the journal. In the first issue of the journal he issued a call to poets inviting contributions on any acceptable theme for publication in the journal. Three *samasyas* requiring filling up of the fourth lines of *slokas* also were given. The latter was there in the issues that followed too. Verses for translation also began to be published in the journal. Gradually there were other innovations too. In those days poets even wrote letters in verse form. *Malayala Manorama* has published several such letters.

Along with encouraging traditional poetry, *Malayala Manorama* did yeoman service in the development of modern poetry which deals with themes drawn from real life. In a letter addressed to the veteran poet K.C.Kesava Pillai Varghese Mappilai sought his opinion on encouraging the latter type of poetry through the columns of the *Malayala Manorama*. He also suggested certain topics: museum at Trivandrum, Tevalli palace, the canal in Channankara, Anchutengu, the Quilon Thread Mill and the East Fort Gate. The length of the poem has to be not more than ten and not less than five stanzas. Each issue will contain composition of one poet only. What was required is not mere description of everything that crossed the poet eyes.

After reading the poem one should feel 'Oh why did it not strike my mind!'. He also asked Kesava Pillai to contribute a composition of his own. It is not clear whether Kesava Pillai responded to this letter. It is possible he did not, for no contribution of this sort from him has appeared in the *Malayala Manorama*. Varghese Mappilai was not discouraged by K.C.'s silence. He wrote a similar letter to Naduvattacchan Nampoothiri. As a result a poem on Chalakkudi River in ten stanzas found place in *Malayala Manorama* without delay.

The service *Malayala Manorama* rendered to the general public in those days is significant. The policy of the journal was framed in such a way as to be beneficial to both the government and the people. Even when criticising the government vehemently, Varghese Mappilai was particularly careful not to make any personal attacks. The government used to enquire properly about the allegations made and punished those found guilty. The journal also encouraged government officials who deserved it. When another journal once made some false allegations against an honest officer on account of personal prejudices *Malayala Manorama* investigated into it and proved the innocence of the person concerned. Varghese Mappilai in his editorial article the next day pointed out that allegations made about government officers based on personal prejudices will create hatred towards newspapers in the minds of the people which will affect the future of journalism and entreated newspapers in strong terms to eschew such practices.

In matters concerning social issues the *Malayala Manorama* adopted a progressive view. It was in the forefront with the less privileged in encounters involving caste and communal discriminations. It was from its very beginning, a public newspaper. News was its primary concern, its elicitation and presentation in a most effective manner. Without being detrimental to the interests of the elite in verse, it strived to develop a prose style capable of effective communication. "Those who

are capable of writing good prose deserve more respect than those who write bad verse”, Varghese Mappilai observed once.

It was Kandathil Varghese Mappilai who gave a new dimension to the journalistic activity in Kerala. With his initiative and organizational ability and the space provided in its columns to poetry, it turned out as a forum where the creative abilities of all could come together, irrespective of communal and caste differences. The forum served in stimulating interest in men and matters in the general public and led to better understanding of one another’s cultural traditions. Besides Varghese Mappilai’s works on Christian and Hindu themes non-denominational hymns like those by K.C.Kesava Pillai also found place in the *Malayala Manorama* commencing an era of cultural cross fertilization which gathered momentum in subsequent years, resulting in works like ‘Magdalana Mariam’ by Vallathol Narayana Menon and ‘Kalvariye Kalpapadapam’ by Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai. Following the path of these veterans belonging to the Hindu community who wrote on Christian themes, those from the Christian sect like I.C.Chacko and O.M.Cherien made best use of the Hindu *puranas* in their linguistic and literary endeavours.

When *Malayala Manorama* started publication there were many who thought it was another medium for promoting Christianity. There were during this period about a dozen newspapers in Kerala. Some of them were run as weeklies, some as fortnightlies and a few as monthlies. They were run either by missionaries or on behalf of missionaries with the main aim of spreading the ‘gospel’. Varghese Mappilai did not follow this path. His familiarity with western Newspaper models and his conviction that a newspaper should be a tool for the progress of all, made his approach different. Though a religious man, Varghese Mappilai did not want his allegiance to religion to interfere with his fixations and duties as a journalist. Journalism was a different missionary work for him; a missionary work for

the establishment of a new era free from everything which curtailed the people's progress. He adopted an objective scientific approach to problems, both in their analysis and in arriving at solutions, and expressed his views with a rare sense of integrity. He did not bother about the displeasure the disclosure of truth is likely to cause. The topics on men and matters which appeared in the issues of *Malayala Manorama* even in its infancy amply illustrate this approach. Topics like 'Government's responsibility' (21.6.1890), 'Bribery' (16.8.1890), 'Courts' (30.8.1890), 'Atrocities of the police' (16.8.1890), 'Women's education' (17.1.1891) and the 'Low castes in Kerala' (3.6.1892) to list a few, continue to be relevant even in these modern days.

The experience Varghese Mappilai had gained as the Editor of *Keralamitram*, proved as an asset to him in the running of *Malayala Manorama*. In spite of its limitations *Keralamitram* was interested in people's life-social, literary and political. Varghese Mappilai was highly influenced by this outlook, and it created in him an awareness of the need for reforms. The plight of the weaker sections of the society, the so called low castes in particular, had aroused utmost sympathy in him, and he took it as his responsibility to champion their cause. The very first issue of the *Manorama* contained a trenchant editorial article on the need for imparting education to the Pulayas, the agricultural labourer community, perhaps the most downtrodden among the so called low castes in Kerala. Varghese Mappilai also was an ardent champion of women, who too belonged to the weaker sections of society, and made use of the columns of his newspaper for their emancipation. He highlighted the necessity for granting them equality with men. When the Malabar Marriage bill seeking a proper marriage law for the Nair women was introduced by Chettur Sankaran Nair in the Madras Legislative Assembly he offered his journal's whole hearted support to it.

Varghese Mappilai was also a strong critic of the practices of corruption in Government offices. In a scathing article on the corruption at Government offices he enumerated the various ways of bribery as follows:

1. Ask directly and take money.
2. Buy things without paying or paying less than the price.
3. Take money from those of the lower cadre and never repay.
4. Make cuts from the pay of subordinates.
5. Give out contracts at higher rates on commission basis.
6. Provide relatives with court commission orders.
7. Misappropriate funds intended for temples and charity homes.
8. Arrange parties on false pretences and collect money for the expenses. He winds up, with a sarcastic note:

There are other methods too; but how to expose them? There were other practices including immoral traffic of which many of the officials were guilty. Varghese Mappilai's delicate tastes forbade him to mention them.

The need for economic progress was another issue to which Varghese Mappilai paid serious attention. *Manorama* advocated the abolition of the bizzarre Travancore coinage under which the Travancore rupee fetched 28 *chakrams* against 28  $\frac{1}{2}$  *chakrams* of the British rupee. It pressed for the extension of steam boat facility in the place of the country boat mode of transportation and argued vehemently for introducing railway services in the State.

Whatever be the issue, Varghese Mappilai saw it presented in a lighter vein with a touch of humour, without offending any one. His style of presentation is discernible in the following passage in *Malayala Manorama* dated 18th October, 1890(given in translation).

“People in this State who enjoy so many privileges and comforts do not know whether a train-*teevanti*, ‘fire vehicle’ in



Malayalam, is a carriage made of fire or vehicle intended for transporting fire from one place to another or what on earth it is. Probably systematic education in a school might clear this doubt. However, the convenience and comforts that can be enjoyed if train services are introduced cannot be had through mere lessons on trains.”

Varghese Mappilai knew well that the primary function of a newspaper was to publish the latest news. To cater to the tastes of the readers who belonged to different strata of society, he published news of all types, varying from increase in salary of the Huzoor Secretary, translation of *Indulekha* by the Collector of Calicut, abduction of women, thefts, murders, suicides, a tiger in Madhyapradesh carrying away a District Collector on tour, need for developing the town into a municipality and so on. Varghese Mappilai had an extremely kind disposition towards the contributors of his journal. K.P.S.Menon in his reminiscence gives an incident illustrative of this attitude. In response to an invitation for literary contributions one Puthenveedu Krishna Warriar had sent him a poem. Varghese Mappilai found the poem quite substandard, full of superfluous words. He did not have the heart to reject it. The poem was published, but below the poem he added a note: “It would be appreciable if poets avoid meaningless words.”

‘Strength of Habit’ was a pet phrase for Varghese Mappilai. In one of his editorials (dated 1890 March 22) he explained what he meant by it: “Strength of habit is the heroic nature to do boldly whatever our conscience dictates us to do even against the wish of the emperor, at the risk of incurring heavy losses. Wherever the people have strength of habit in abundance there will be unselfish actions and graceful progress; wherever it is absent it will be just the reverse.” Varghese Mappilai was making clear through these words the proposed policy of his journal. He ran his journal in strict adherence to this policy.

In a period when means and methods of mass communication were not so developed as today the printed word was the most powerful tool to fill the minds of people with new thoughts and ideas. People took everything in print to be true and read and reread it until it was fully understood; they allowed themselves to be influenced by it, they absorbed the ideas and applied them in their daily life to the maximum extent possible. The power of the printed word being of such a magnitude, it was the responsibility of all who worked with it to see that its authority and sanctity are adequately maintained. According to modern concepts, the function of the press is fourfold: to inform, instruct, inspire and entertain. As pointed out in the canons of journalism adopted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1923, its opportunities as a chronicle are linked with its obligations as teacher and interpreter. Information on events and ideas around equips the reader to lead a better and fuller life as an individual and as a member of the society. Mere supply of information will not suffice. The ability to exercise judgement and arrive at sound conclusions vary in individuals. As such the press has to combine information with proper interpretations enabling the reader to formulate opinions, thus acting as his guide. The entertainment element provides for relaxed reading, but essentially it aims at instructing and inspiring the reader. Unlike most of his predecessors in the journalistic field, Varghese Mappilai was committed to fulfilling the above functions. He had the necessary resources and strength of freedom to fulfil them. The only factor restricting his activities in this line was his own sense of decency and public morality. With 'malice towards none, and charity for all' he undertook the task of unfolding truth and preserving the best of values keeping good faith with his readers, as any journalist worthy of the name has to do.

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## 6

### New Horizons

Varghese Mappilai knew well that apart from providing news, a major function of any journal is to act as a watchman of the welfare of the people, whenever occasion calls for it. It is in this role that the press becomes the guardian of democracy. People consider the preservation of values essentially precious. This is sought to be attained through vigilance and timely action for rooting out all sorts of injustice, corruption and other evils. The crusading may be against the government or against certain sections of people. It may also be against certain ideas. That Varghese Mappilai was conscious of this function is evident from the editorial articles he wrote of Pulayas, demanding equal social status to this traditionally downtrodden section of the community published in the very first issue of the *Malayala Manorama*. He said: "If the cattle folk which were maintained by their owners had as much knowledge about their masters as the Pulayas had, they would have made their owners feel more for them."

According to Varghese Mappilai the ills prevailing in all sections of people, both the upper and lower social strata, should be cured. Diagnosis of the illness is the first step towards its cure. Varghese Mappilai diagnosed the various social ills and shared his diagnosis with his readers. Least bothered about the displeasure he may incur from vested interests he wielded his powerful pen in his journal stressing the duty of the Government, the responsibilities of the members of the Legislative Assembly and the Governmental Departments like that of Revenue and the Police to administer justice. He was for eschewing bribery,

favouritism and other ills of the officialdom and pointed out the necessity and usefulness of education to all irrespective of caste and sex. Endowed by nature with the noble trait of simplicity, he was against all man-made complexities. The reformation of script was of special interest to him as one who had experienced its complications. He wanted to reduce the number of alphabets used in printing to the minimum and implemented his original ideas in his newspaper. A major innovation he implemented was separating the clusters into their constituent units thus avoiding the conjugated representations. Naturally enough, he had to face stiff opposition from many for deviating from the accepted norms. In spite of it he could make a start in this area, which was later seriously taken up by his successors.

With the *Mahabharata* aphorism *dharmo'smat kuladaivatam* as the declared motto of his newspaper, Varghese Mappilai was particular that *Malayala Manorama* should be deeply rooted in Indian culture that visualised a unified human race devoid of differences in the name of caste, creed and region. He found literature as the most effective means for this purpose. The literature in Malayalam in those days was, however, far from what it should be. It was neither a reflection nor a criticism of life. It did not have a healthy vision of life either. Most of what we had as literature were translations and adaptations from Sanskrit particularly from the epics *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavata*, more a product of the head than of the heart. The form of presentation also was in line with Sanskrit traditions. Verse was the most cherished form of literary manifestation; prose, the more powerful medium of expression remained rather neglected. The number of writers who could write prose properly were few. Even those who could write good prose were not deemed respectable. Poetry was held in much higher esteem.

Varghese Mappilai wanted a drastic change in the above state of affairs. Fully aware of the sepcial attachment the writers

of the day had towards Sanskritic themes as well as their presentation in verse, Varghese Mappilai moved cautiously. In the first issue of *Malayala Manorama* he had announced that there will be a special column in the journal for those who are making good use of their literary talents on any desirable topic and their works will be appropriately published. Evidently the announcement indicated his preference for new themes. The column turned out as an ideal forum for the expression of ideas on literature, both its form and content. All the major poets of those days contributed to this column, the contributions varied from *samasya* compositions to letters written in verse. To make better use of the skills of those interested in literary pursuits, a proper forum for writers is a must, Varghese Mappilai felt. He discussed with his friends the feasibility of forming such a forum. The discussions culminated in a write-up by Kumaramangalam Neelakanthan Nampoothiri published in the *Malayala Manorama* under the title 'Bhasha Kavisamajam'. An extract from the same is given below:

"It is evident from the columns of the *Malayala Manorama* that we have several native poets. Regional differences and varying backgrounds make their contributions considerably different. Regional differences in language is a universal feature. In the written form of language, however, there should be some uniformity. This can be achieved through conscientious efforts. If the writers who are presently in contact through journals alone can come together physically it will be more beneficial to them. The general public also will get its benefits by way of attaining a better form of language..." The write-up ended with a call to major men of letters like Valiya Koyil Thampuran and Kodungallor Kochunni Thampuran to respond. The response was quite encouraging which led to the formation of the 'Kavisamajam', 'assembly of poets' at a meeting held at the *Malayala Manorama* office premises under the chairmanship of Mariappally Valiya Koyil Thampuran. An executive

committee with C. Krishna Pillai, the then chief inspector of Malayalam of the Kottayam range as convener, Varghese Mappilai as joint convener and eminent writers like Chirattamon Moos, Nidhiyirikkal Kathanar and Kottayathu Thampuran as members also was formed. It was Varghese Mappilai's name which was at first proposed for the convenership, but he rejected the offer. He argued that C. Krishna Pillai will be the best choice for the post in view of his official status and the high esteem he enjoyed among the public. Varghese Mappilai knew well that whoever was in the top official position, he will have to shoulder the responsibility of the Samajam.

With the support gained from all concerned, the activities of the Samajam started in full earnestness, and was soon in full swing. It was decided that there shall be a literary meet under the auspices of the Samajam. The venue of the meet was fixed as Vaikkom. The programmes envisaged included several literary competitions of which one was in 'drutakavita', instant versification. It was suggested by Varghese Mappilai supported by Valiya Koyil Thampuran, but was opposed by Vayaskaramoos. He was of the view that it is not in the interest of encouraging good poetry. The general consensus was, however, in favour of Varghese Mappilai. Boosted by this support he insinuated all his faculties for the successful conduct of the meet. With Kerala Varma Valiyakoyil Thampuran, A.R. Rajaraja Varma, Kodungalloor Kunhikuttan Thampuran, Punnasserri Nampoothiri and other veterans playing active roles in the deliberations, the meet which lasted for three days was a grand success. It was unique in that it provided for the first time an opportunity for poets from all over Kerala, who hardly had an opportunity to know one another, for exchange of ideas and establishing contacts. For the general public it was an opportunity to meet in person the poets they knew through the columns of the *Malayala Manorama*. The topics like linguistic identity, literary experimentations and prospects of improving

publication facilities which came up for discussion opened new vistas in the minds of the writers. The competitions served in bringing talents which remained unknown or less known earlier, to the forefront.

The Samajam did a good job conducting literary competitions, holding discussions on different aspects of literary compositions and seeking ways and means for developing literature further. Making best use of the contacts he had established with the writers including veterans in the field like Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Thampuran and following the best traditions of the past, he made it a forum for literary development. In the true spirit of the ancient Sangham period when it was customary for writers from all over Tāmilakam to assemble at the Pandya court and discuss in detail the works they produced and in the traditions set by the Zamorins of Calicut and the kings of Cochin who provided proper forums for the get-together of poets and encouraged them with awards, Varghese Mappilai organized the Kavisamajam.

The scope of Kavisamajam was wide enough to include not only poetry but every type of literary activities. However, the bickering started with the issue of 'drutakavana malsaram' had not subsided. The competitions under the auspices of the Samajam were interpreted by a section of the poets as a means to project the editor's own people. They wanted to change the entire nature of Kavisamajam widening its activities to include literary pursuits other than poetry as well. Even the name Kavisamajam should be changed, it was proposed. Kerala Varma Valiyakoyil Thampuran explained that the Kavi element in Kavisamajam need be taken in its *abhidha* sense only as indicated in the axiom *dhiro manishinja: prajna samghyavan kavi*, but it did not satisfy the dissident group. Varghese Mappilai and his supporters yielded to their demand thus avoiding a possible spilt among the writers.

The nomenclature Kavisamjam 'Assembly of Poets' was accordingly modified as 'Bhashaposhini Sabha' forum for the betterment of the language with the declared objectives of promoting literature of all categories and forms and also their publication and preservation, providing its functioning a wider perspective as an association instituted for the development of language as a whole giving equal importance to prose and verse. In an editorial article in the *Malayala Manorama* after the meet Varghese Mappilai wrote as follows:

"...There is a feeling among some that it was not proper to encourage only poets in an organization intended for the development of language. To conduct competitions like those for instant versification was considered very bad by several respectable persons. However, for those who have been following the activities of the Samajam from its inception there are no grounds for complaint. Among the English educated natives who consider themselves as quite civilized, there are not many who can contribute to the development of the native language. There are some among them who even ask without shame why they should bother about the native language when there are languages like English at their disposal. The native language can develop only by the effort of poets. We are quite certain that in these days the only way to make them come together is by conducting competitions".

Interestingly, there are two works in Malayalam based on the theme Kavisamajam. The first is a play titled 'Kavisabha ranjanam', written by Changanacherry Ravi Varma Koyil Thampuran and the next is a poetical composition 'Kavisamaja yatra satakam.'

Bhashaposhini Sabha which took shape in 1892 was an extension of the Kavisamajam. Valiya Koyil Thampuran was elected as its Chairman and Varghese Mappilai as Secretary unanimously. The first meeting of the Sabha was held at Trichur under the patronage of Kunhikkuttan Thampuran and Venmani



Mahan Nampootiri. Competitions including those in versification were held as in the Kavisamajam meet. The meeting approved the bye-laws of the Sabha and took important decisions on the activities of the Sabha. A major decision was regarding starting of the journal 'Bhashaposhini'. the journal was to be published once in four months and be distributed free of cost among those who became members of the Sabha paying an annual subscription of Rupees two only.

Bhashaposhini Sabha did reasonably good work providing a common platform for writers of Kerala irrespective of caste, creed or religion to exchange ideas and enrich themselves with the new trends in literature. It was to further the efficacy of the Association the journal *Bhashaposhini* was started, which later turned out as a landmark in the development of Malayalam Literature. It provided proper venue for many a healthy literary debate like the one on 'dviteeyakshara prasa', and debates connected with ancient texts like *Malati Madhavam*. In addition to making the literary scene lively, it had far reaching impacts in developing a new approach to literature. Particular mention has to be made of the *dviteeyakshara prasa* debate. Its central issue was whether rhyming in the second alphabet of the lines in a verse is essential or not. With Kerala Varma Valiyakoyil Thampuran leading those in favour of the rhyming and no less a person than Koyil Thampuran's nephew and an erudite scholar A.R.Rajaraja Varma leading those against it, the debate attracted considerable attention. Though described by later scholars as 'a storm in the tea cup', it cannot be denied that it instilled into the writers an insight into the principles of poetry. Undue stress given to formal aspects of poetry will stifle its scent. Form has its place, but it is the sensibility expressed that determined its greatness.

A galaxy of poets made their appearance in the columns of *Bhashaposhini* A.R. Rajaraja Varma, K.C. Kesava Pillai, Mooloor Padmanabha Panicker, Kuttikkunju Thankachi,

Moorkothu Kumaran, Kottarathil Sankunni, Naduvattu Nampoothiris, C.V. Kunjuraman, Oduvil Kunjikkrishna Menon, Oravankara Raja and Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer are prominent names worth mentioning in this connection. Without dampening their aptitude for Sanskrit literature and its traditions Varghese Mappilai renovated their sensibility. As a result these poets succeeded in giving a new dimension to the literary pursuits in Malayalam. Modern ideas on men and matters were disseminated and traditions on a variety of subjects were altered. Writers like I.C. Chacko, Malabar Sukumaran, R.Eswara Pillai, O.M.Chcrian, K.R.Krishna Pillai, M.Rajaraja Varma and Moorkothu Kumaran were actually products of *Bhashaposhini*. They wielded Malayalam prose with consummate skill. Moorkothu Kumaran acknowledges his indebtedness to Varghese Mappilai:

“To find out those with literary talents and ability to write, and to encourage them with money and appreciation was what Varghese Mappilai was doing. And in this he never considered regional and communal differences. Without Varghese Mappilai’s encouragement I would not have entered the field of Malayalam literature.”

Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, poet and literary scholar in his monumental *History of Malayalam Literature* commends:

“Kerala has not seen so great an editor as Kandathil Varghese Mappilai. The help Malayalam literature gained from him is boundless and without end.”

Varghese Mappilai knew well that society becomes alive and meaningful only when communication is effective. In our daily life a major part of communication is carried out through the speech of ordinary people. It is in prose. Our literature from its early days however, was mostly in verse. Verse and its rhythm helped in transmission of ideas from generation to generation. With the new enlightenment in the area of information and the need for its insemination to masses, a conscious effort was given

to make prose more dynamic. It is true, Malayalam had its prose form of writing even from its early days. We have at least a dozen prose texts in Malayalam written before 15th century, mostly narration of Puranic stories, including works like *Brahmandapuranam*, *Nalopakhyanam* and *Dutavakyam* to list of few. They were possibly used as scripts for the exposition of Puranic themes at the temple. The prose thus popularised was just functional rather than imaginative and could not serve as an effective medium of literature where emotional and imaginative elements are of special significance. When the Catholic Missionaries started their work in Kerala, they evolved a prose style close to the colloquial speech of the masses. Its primary aim was spreading the message of the New Testament and Christian doctrines. Many of their religious texts, in later days were written in this prose style, popularly referred to as 'Paatiri Malayalam', implying it is a nonstandard dialect of Malayalam. With its obsolete vocabulary and alien syntax it could not serve as an ideal means of effective communication and self expression.

In 1867 Kerala Varma Valiyakoyil Thampuran was deputed by the king of Travancore to head the newly constituted Text Book Committee for preparing books in Malayalam for the newly started vernacular schools. Kerala Varma wrote books on various topics included in the primary school syllabus. He collaborated with the king Visakham Thirunal in compiling a volume containing the biographies of eminent men. He also introduced forms of prose literature as original works. The prose thus popularised also had its defects. It was Sanskrit oriented, unintelligible to the common man. Varghese Mappilai had definite views on prose. In an editorial in *Malayala Manorama* dated 5.3.1890 he clarified his stand as follows:

"The books needed most in Malayalam since long are not books in verse but in prose. In the traditional type of education, learning was done through books of verse, but modern education demanded the use of books in prose, and they were not available. Pioneer work in this field has been done by Eu-

ropean missionaries. The Text Book Committee instituted by the Government also has produced some useful books on different subjects. But their language is too tough for children. Moreover most of the books are translations.”

In short, the prose style adopted by the Text Book Committee headed by Kerala Varma Valiyakoyil Thampuran was not suited to the purpose. What Varghese Mappilai wanted was a type of prose; lucid, simple, intelligible to all throughout Kerala. Varghese Mappilai set an example to what he preached by writing editorials and articles in a lucid, simple and attractive style. He also invited writers like Moorkothu Kumaran, C. Anthappayi, I.C. Chacko, Kottarathil Sankunni and others to contribute articles on different topics in this modern prose style.

*Bhashaposhini* gave more importance in its columns to compositions in prose than in verse. Articles on aesthetics, Grammar, Education, Anthropology, Biology and other sciences along with book reviews enriched its issues.

Varghese Mappilai was fully aware of the necessity of standardizing a literary style in Malayalam, which abounded in regional and social dialects. Better contacts among writers of different regions and social strata would help in reducing dialectal differences and in evolving a homogenous style of communication. *Bhashaposhini* Sabha and its journal *Bhashaposhini* strove to achieve this. The role journalism could play in the standardization of language was explicated by Varghese Mappilai in one of his editorials as follows: “The variations in Malayalam dialects, are discernible in the Malayalam of Mangalore Christians and Trivandrum Hindus. Removal of such variations and development of a standard form of language acceptable to all is possible only through the spread of journals. If journals are published from different parts of the country and if they maintain sufficient contacts with one another the saying that ‘each area has its own Malayalam’ will necessarily lose its meaning.”

Varghese Mappilai's approach considerably helped the process of standardization. The prose writings of those from Southern Kerala came to be enjoyed by Northerners with the same interest with which the writings of those from Northern Kerala were appreciated by Southerners. The language presently found in most of our prose works maintains to a large extent maximum homogeneity. The enthusiasm with which Varghese Mappilai encouraged modern forms of prose writings is evident from his response to *Indulekha* by Chandu Menon, the first novel worth its name in Malayalam (1889). He published three editorials in *Malayala Manorama* on *Indulekha*. The first two gave expositions of the work and the third was an evaluation of the novel: "*Indulekha* will be treasured as a classic in Malayalam on a par with the works of Ezhuttacchan and Kunchan Nambiar", a prophecy which has come true.

The credit for evolving the modern prose form in Malayalam is given by many to Kerala Varma Valiyakoyil Thampuran. Undoubtedly Valiyakoyil Thampuran played a significant role in the development of a new prose style in Malayalam. But the contribution of Varghese Mappilai in this line is equally invaluable. It was in the columns of the *Malayala Manorama* that Malayalam prose evolved into a racy, flexible and lucid medium of information and aesthetic delight. The new prose thus emerged had little to do with the highly sensation fixed and decorative style of Koyi-thampuran's prose found in his novel *Akbar*.

The activities of the *Malayala Manorama* founded by Varghese Mappilai was appropriately compared by Vicar General Manikkattannar in one of his speeches to that of the working of a bank. Just as those with extra money in Europe give their excess money to those in need through banks and improve their own as well as other people's income, the writers in different parts of Kerala make others benefited of their talents through the *Malayala Manorama*.

In this four paged journal nearly one page was devoted to topics on language and literature, a major part of which was

publication of verse. The column for verse run with the assistance of Kottarathil Sankunni had the patronage of literary stalwarts like 'Venmani Nampoothiripad', Kunjikkuttan Thampuran and Kerala Varma Valiyakoyil Thampuran. Even the great A.R. Rajaraja Varma gained inspiration for versification from this column, it is stated.

The Bhashaposhini Sabha and its official journal *Bhashaposhini* founded by Varghese Mappilai were projections of the literary column in the *Malayala Manorama*. The Sabha had three main objectives:

1. Unification of the style, both in verse and prose forms, in Malayalam.
2. Encourage writing in modern prose.
3. Collection, preservation and publication of ancient texts.

In the annual meetings of Bhashaposhini held at Kottayam, Thrissur, Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram, Thalasserry and Vaikkom most of the known writers in Kerala participated. The objectives of the Sabha was declared in the first meeting itself. The Sabha could achieve these objectives to a great extent primarily because of the dedicated services of Varghese Mappilai as its Secretary for twelve years making available his body and soul, wealth and influence for the building up and successful working of his brain child.

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## The Man

**M**ooloor Padmanabha Panicker, a contemporary poet of Varghese Mappilai in one of his pen portraits describes him as follows: “graceful and thoughtful countenance, thick moustache, pleasantly flat and rounded body, very fair complexion, sufficiently tall”. Kottarathil Sankunni, one of his close associates goes a step further. He adds to the qualities mentioned above the nobility discernible in his words, his aristocratic attire consisting of the well stitched coat, pure white dhoti, watch with a golden chain and the turban which gave him a gentle man’s appearance. According to A.D. Harisarma, his biographer, his most striking quality was his allegiance to the king. He was an ardent devotee of Maharaja Visakham Thirunal who was then on the throne of Travancore. This admiration is evident from the homage he has offered to Visakham Thirunal in his *Attakkatha Darpavicchedam* mentioned earlier. The above aspect of his personality coupled with the self confidence he had achieved through his own experience and contacts with men of letters around, made him bold enough to take up journalism not just as a means of livelihood but as his life’s mission to better the lifestyle of the society in which he lived.

Varghese Mappilai was particularly devoted to king Sree Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma. The king had won his appreciation through the progressive measures he had taken for the benefit of the people. It was during his reign in 1905, a separate ministry was formed in the Government for agriculture. Establishment of model agricultural farms, sanctioning of loans for the agriculturists and improvement in irrigation facilities were

other useful measures he had taken. Education was another area of special interest to Sree Moolam Thirunal. Help and encouragement to private educational agencies, free education to all in the Primary level, provision for admission of low caste children in Government schools, establishment of technical schools, starting of the Sanskrit College, Law College and the College for Ayurvedic Medicines at Trivandrum were some of the major steps he took in the field of education. Among his administrative reforms, one deserving special mention was the institution of the Legislative Council, the first of its kind in India. It was this Council which later developed as the Sree Moolam Assembly in 1904. Progressive steps of this sort naturally made Varghese Mappilai an admirer of Sree Moolam Thirunal. He never spared any occasion to express his devotion towards him. The practice of issuing 'Thirunal' issues on the birthday of the king was one such means in this effort. The following is an extract from the *mangala patram* Sree Moolam Thirunal was presented in one of the Bhashaposhini Sabha meet.

"The royal rulers of Travancore were always interested in the cultural affairs of the people. Poets like Kunchan Nambiar and Unnayi Warriar owe their fame to the encouragement they had received from the kings. This forum also had the privilege of getting such favours from our lord. We thank the grace for the favours received from him by the Sabha as well as the encouragement given to its journal."

Varghese Mappilai was specially noted for his generosity. True to the axiom 'charity begins at home', he was to the less privileged members of the Kandathil family a 'Kalpavruksham', celestial tree which yields all wishes. Next to his family his interest was in his own community, the circle gradually widening to include the entire humanity. The 'Sadachara Sahodara Sangham' he had founded was essentially an expression of his concepts regarding religious life, as a tool for spiritual, moral and physical development. Religion was to him not for Gods'



benefit but for our own, because by the very fact that we revere and honour God our mind is subjected to Him, wherein its perfection lies. Born and brought up in an Orthodox Syrian Christian family he followed the special beliefs and practices of his community but knew well that all religions have the same source. They are not equally valid because perceptions of revelation and modes of response are different. He considered the non-Christian religions valid in their implicit sharing and practising the values inherent in Christianity.

Though journalism was his first love, Varghese Mappilai's interest was not solely confined to it. He was a versatile personality. It was his activities initiated in the Sadachara Sahodara Samgham, for instance which culminated in the starting of the present English High School at Chengannoor. The M.D. Seminary High School at Kottayam, which later developed into an institution of higher learning is a solid monument of the interest Varghese Mappilai took in this line. The twenty acre site of the school belonged to an Englishman Mr. Crafford by name, who owned a coffee estate. Nidhiyirikkal Thoma Kathanar and Metropolitan Pulikkott Mar Divanasios had bought it in the name of one 'Jathi Aikya Samgham', an organization for communal unity. The Samgham wanted to build a school in the site but it could not get it done. With the initiative taken by Varghese Mappilai, the school was constructed raising the required money from friends and also through a lottery for Rupees one lakh with permission secured from the Government. The Thirumoolapuram School at Thiruvalla also has a more or less similar history. The hilly area where the school is situated was bought mostly with his own money and the buildings constructed with the gain from another lottery for Rupees One lakh.

The organizing capacities of Varghese Mappilai is described by Ulloor as follows:

"He discovered as if through an inner eye youngmen who could serve the cause of language later, showered praises on

those who wanted it and money to those who were in need of it. Without disappointing anyone and making happy everyone he trained many a talented youth to work for the development of literature. He had several dreams, pledged himself to fulfil those dreams, worked hard for them till they were achieved. On such occasions people saw in him the might of ten persons instead of one: and they were convinced there were a hundred followers behind these ten.”

K.P.S. Menon in his introduction to *Samskara Tharangini* evaluates Varghese Mappilai as follows:

“Perhaps his outstanding trait was the catholicity of his outlook. From the beginning he expressed his determination to eschew any reflections on other religions, such as those in which some of the earlier newspapers had indulged. He was as proficient in Sanskrit as in Malayalam and in English, and he acted as a bridge between India’s classical civilization and the new European culture. Among the products and proponents of this amalgam of two cultures, such as Rabindranatha Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru, must be mentioned Kandathil Varghese Mappilai and the paper founded by him, the *Malayala Manorama*.”

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## Creative Writings

The term literature is often used to denote any body of writing. In the strict sense, writings that are primarily informative-technical, scholarly, journalistic are excluded from the rank of literature. Literature mostly refers to those creative writings regarded as an art form and can be attempted only by those who possess special talents. The nature of artistic talents is less easy to define than to recognize. Creative writing is essentially a product of human consciousness which is not a fixed state of observation and reflexes, but is a multidimensional experience of awareness and reflection. Qualitatively it is visionary and takes on forms corresponding to the contexts in which it operates. However, its results depend upon the keenness and intensity with which the sense perceptions act in registering the sensation of being alive. The texture and quality of its manifestation depend on the person, place and time the sensation is faced by or contained in.

Varghese Mappilai who wrote a lot in his capacity as a journalist was definitely a man evolved with the special talents for creative compositions. However, his contribution in this respect is limited. Though proficient in English language and literature, his works are in the dominant classical tradition which prevailed. The number of literary works Varghese Mappilai has to his credit is about a dozen. They belong to different genres of literature; Plays, Hymns, Narrative poetry and Attakkatha.

Varghese Mappilai has written two plays, 'Kalahini damanakam' and 'Ebrayakkutty'. The former and the earlier of the two is a translation of Shakespear's *The Taming of the Shrew*. The purpose of this translation, as the author has stated

in the preface to this work, was to familiarise Malayalam readers with English plays. Such an effort was necessary because it was a period when translations of Sanskrit plays had become popular, beginning with the translations of Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam*. A number of plays were modelled on them. Varghese Mappilai while appreciating Sanskrit plays wanted the readers to know that there were other types of plays also worthy of understanding and appreciation. 'Kalahinidamanakam' was a free translation. Changes were made in the plot as well as in the dialogue to suit the cultural milieu of Kerala. Names of the characters also were changed to fit them better to the Kerala context. It is written in a simple racy style with suitable dialectal variations, and is a creditable work bearing testimony to the literary abilities of Varghese Mappilai. *Kalahinidamanakam* was first published in 1893. The author was not confident about the success of his work and invited helpful suggestions from interested public for rectifying the defects when a second edition is brought out. C.P. Achutha Menon, a major critic of those days, was among those who responded to this invitation. In a review he wrote in the *Vidya Vinodini* (Vol.v. no.2) he commented that strictly speaking it is not a translation of Shakespeare's work; all that can be said about the work is that it generally reflects the content of the original. A major defect pointed out is that no attempt is made to translate the verses in the original text. Only one genuinely endowed with at least a part of the talents of the original writer can succeed in this. Word by word translation does not require so much talents, he observed. It cannot be assumed that *Kalahinidamanakam* is capable of familiarizing the Malayali readers with the merits of Shakespeare. However, it enables Malayalis to understand and enjoy his work. Substitution of foreign personal and place names with local names as well as the racy dialogues and humorous tint in approach enhances the appreciative value. A major defect of the work according to the reviewer is the lack of poetical stanzas. It is agreed that in modern dramatic works there

are too many poetic stanzas. But the view that there should be none of them cannot be agreed upon, he said.

Responding to the above criticism, Varghese Mappilai in his preface to the second edition of *Kalahinidamanakam*, published in 1900, observed that he continues to hold the view that translation of the verse pieces in the original in verse form itself does not in any way add to the gravity or beauty of the work, the prose version makes the work more easy to understand. As such no change was felt necessary in this aspect, though changes like those in sentence pattern suggested by readers have been incorporated. The work is of special significance as it served as a starting point in translation from English into Malayalam. Till this work translations into Malayalam were mostly from Sanskrit. It thus opened a new dimension in the cultural evolution of Kerala.

‘Ebrayakkutty’, a play with its theme drawn from the life-history of Joseph of the Old Testament, is Varghese Mappilai’s masterpiece. Ebrayakutty means Hebrew child. The book was titled *Ebrayakutty* in view of the fact that Joseph was of Hebrew origin and the work deals with the childhood days of this great hero narrated in chapters 37 to 45 of the book of Genesis of the Holy Bible. The play concentrates on the major events in his early life history, starting with how he was sold to Arabs by his jealous brothers, and ending in the refuge he accorded to them when they were suffering under the grip of famine. The drama is written in very simple language. It justifies the attribute assigned to him as the father of modern Malayalam prose style.

Unlike the earlier work *Kalahinidamanakam*, *Ebrayakutty* has in it fifty - six poetic stanzas and a few hymns, probably to suit the tastes of the readers and the views held by prominent critics. The play became very popular and was profusely staged under the auspices of the Manorama Dramatic Troupe, which had also staged *Kalahinidamanakam*.

The work was highly commended by critics like Kerala Varma Valiyakoyil Thampuran. The work is an illustration of the

concept of poetic justice. The series of mishaps the hero had to undergo culminating in his glorious end itself makes this work most appealing, he observed. The aesthetic quality of the poetic stanzas and hymns well suited to the context also won appreciation from most of the renowned men of letters of the period. The play in five acts and twenty five scenes with a well constructed plot and convincing characterization, is even today acclaimed as one of the best plays in Malayalam, particularly on Biblical themes.

A major hymnologic work by Varghese Mappilai is *Keerttanamala*. It is a collection of fifty-one hymns specially composed for worship in the Orthodox Syrian Church. The hymns are suited for different occasions of worship, and are notable for their simple diction and genuine music. The hymns in *Keerttanamala* are in no way inferior to the Hindu hymns, both in form and content, well suited for liturgical purposes. The work resulted from continued demand from the Orthodox Syrian Clergy, including personalities like Fr. Vattasseril Geevarghese and Fr. Konattu Mathen. The compositions won appreciation from persons like Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of the Niranam Diocese. It is under the latter's initiative the hymns were printed in book form around 1901. It had three editions brought out within a period of two years.

In a hundred *slokas* (stanzas in Sanskrit metre) Varghese Mappilai sought to sketch the life of Jesus Christ in *Saccarita Satakam*. He could not compose the last *slokas*. It was Kocheepan who completed it. Each of those *slokas* is delightful and simple. It brings out select aspects of the life of Jesus. The work written around 1903 was published posthumously by his son K.V. Eapen. The work is rich in the religious devotion which Varghese Mappilai had. It is not the fame attached with such compositions, which prompted Varghese Mappilai to devote his time and energy for such works. The only work of a more or less similar theme during this period in Malayalam was the *Misiha Caritam Puthen Pana* by Arnos Padre.

Under the auspices of the Public Lecture Committee, an organization founded under Royal patronage, Varghese Mappilai gave a talk at the Government English School, Trivandrum in 1893 on Drama. The talk traced the origin and development of visual arts and described the place they have in the world of art. It enumerated the different types of visual art forms in Kerala like Chakyarkootu, Thullal and Kathakali and concluded with an evaluation of related works available in Malayalam.

Another work by Varghese Mappilai which deserves special mention is his *Onnam Patham* - 'First lesson'. It is a primer in Malayalam for pupils of the elementary schools. The fourth edition of this book was published from the Basel Mission Press, Mangalore, in 1896. The book, which is the first of its kind in Malayalam, lists the sounds of Malayalam in a systematic manner, classifying them into vowels and consonants followed by the consonant-vowel combinations and consonant clusters, lexical items illustrating their occurrences and sample texts exemplifying grammatical sentence constructions.

*Darpavicchedam* is an Attakkatha which Varghese Mappilai wrote much early. Customarily Attakkathas, the texts for the classical art Kathakali, drew their themes from Hindu Puranic works, particularly the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. What is surprising in this connection is that a Christian writer attempted such a work, at a time when even reading Hindu texts was discouraged in his community. The work is an illustration not only of his scholarship in Hindu texts but also of his mastery of the techniques of Kathakali, which is essentially a temple art.

*Darpavicchedam*, also called *Yadukula Raghavam*, has a puranic theme in a way similar to that of *Kalahini-damanakam*. Both deal with the curtailment of pride, Rukmini, the main consort of Krishna and Garuda, the vehicle of Mahavishnu, had an element of haughtiness in them. The former took pride in her charms, the latter in the speed at which he can

move. Krishna rid both of them of their pride making them realize through experience that many around them are superior to them in the faculties they possessed. The work has a message to convey and ample scope for presentation on the stage. Well appreciated in those days, it is rightly deemed as a substantial contribution to the Attakkatha branch of Malayalam Literature. According to A.D. Harisarma, author of one of the major literary histories of Malayalam, it is inferior to only the best among the Attakkathas. If Varghese Mappilai had continued to write he would have easily be in the forefront of the Malayalam writers of his days, Harisarma observes. Malayalam was fortunate he was more interested in the scheme of leading Malayalam literature to new heights through the realms of journalism.

In the preface to *Saccaritasatakam*, Kottarathil Sankunni, author of *Aitihyamala* states:

“The fact is that Varghese Mappilai who has devoted his whole life for the development of Malayalam is not only encouraging others but also setting out example through works like *Darpavicchedam*, *Kalahinidamanakam*, *Ebrayakkutti* and *Keerttanamala*.

What is implied in the words of Kottarathil Sankunni is that Varghese Mappilai’s major effort was in encouraging writers to contribute to the growth of Malayalam Literature. ‘Even then’, says Moorkottu Kumaran, “the names of those writers follow only next to Varghese Mappilai”. He continues:

“The reputation of Varghese was in his propagation of Malayalam literature. Had he not tried to encourage those with literary talents with the necessary incentives, including cash and kind, they would have withered where they have sprouted. Himself being a writer, it requires certain mental qualities to encourage other writers. First he should be free from jealousy. There should be a real love towards his language. The growth of the language should be given priority to one’s own growth.



He should not be selfish. He should have the ability to discover the talents in others and should be broadminded enough not to consider the differences in caste and creed. Varghese Mappilai had all these qualities... He brought together all writers in Kerala under one roof and provided opportunity to them to get known among themselves and by others. The roof under which they were brought was the newspaper *Malayala Manorama*. That Venmani and Naduvattam Nampoothiris, Lords of Kondugalloor and several other poets became well-known through its columns is an epoch in Malayalam Literature.”

References about a few other books like *Yoshabhoo shanam*, *Portiacaritam* and *Vismayajananam* by Varghese Mappilai have been noticed, but details regarding them are not available.

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## Judicial Critic

During Varghese Mappilai's days literary criticism as a branch of study concerned with expounding and evaluating works had not developed in Malayalam. Theoretical criticism was rather unknown. Practical criticism was confined to impressionistic attempts to express the responses the work evokes in the critic as an individual. Criticism was mostly understood as book reviewing, essentially the least of its manifestations. Even this made appearance only by the last decades of the nineteenth century with the starting of the journal *Vidya Vinodini* in 1889. C.P. Achutha Menon, the editor of *Vidya Vinodini*, had decided that book reviews should be a regular feature of his journal. There was by this time a sudden spurt of literary productions due to the increased printing facilities which led to the emergence of new periodicals, mostly substandard. Achutha Menon had adopted a negative attitude towards them in his reviews. According to him his love for literature and its healthy growth left him with no other alternative.

Varghese Mappilai, who was equally interested in the development of literature, had a different approach quite befitting his inborn generosity. He was an exponent of judicial criticism, which instead of just responding, analyses and explains the effects of a work in terms of its theme, organization and techniques and make judgements based on its general standards of excellence.

A typical example of Varghese Mappilai's critical stance is the lecture he gave on Dramas at the Government English School, Trivandrum in August 1819, the manuscript of which was later published in the *Malayala Manorama*. It critically

evaluates our much acclaimed traditional visual arts like Kathakali, Koodiyattam and the like often included under the genre Drama. According to Varghese Mappilai, Drama is a form of composition designed as a true mirror of the cultural life of a people. It reflects the realities of life the actors taking the roles of characters performing the action. This is what we find in ancient languages like Sanskrit and modern languages like English. The drama, as a rule, should have a message in it, aimed at making man and his life better as an individual and as a member of the society, transmitted in an aesthetic framework. This is lacking in forms like Kathakali with its stereotyped themes and complicated characterization accompanied by unpleasant beatings of the drum *chenda* and other musical instruments. The actor mostly remains mum except for occasional imitative rumblings. Communication is carried out by gesticulations. This involves expertise; but it is difficult to understand why instead of making use of the faculty of speech God has given, people act dumb. Expressions on the face according to varying contexts deserve praise. But this too as the other practice mentioned makes people repel. Extreme sensuousness which is proscribed by Sanskrit Drama from presentation on the stage is given a prominent place in Kathakali. Instead of enhancing religious feelings, these will create abhorrence in the minds of the spectators.

Varghese Mappilai points out that the Tamil dramas are better than Kathakali. At least the tongue is used for communication, instead of limbs. The problem is mostly regarding the undue importance given for songs. It has to be assumed that Tamil dramas are more sophisticated than Kathakali. The harm they cause to the minds of the cultured folk arise out of their non-serious themes and comical approach to life.

According to Varghese Mappilai the only traditional dramatic art in Kerala depicting the true life of people is Thullal. Koodiyattam also belongs to this category, but it is too expensive to conduct and its presentation is confined to special stages.

Forms like Yatrakkali, Ezhamattu Kali are nothing more than adverse criticisms of certain customs prevailing in the society. None of these come under the purview of the art form Drama. It is only with the translation of Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam* by Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Thampuran drama was introduced in Malayalam. It was followed by translations of *Janaki Parinayam* by Chathukkutty Mannadiyar, *Uma Vivaham* by Kochunni Thampuran and other Sanskrit works. Though these have been approved by scholars in consideration of their aesthetic qualities, their puranic themes make their purpose unfulfilled. Real dramas are those found in English. Presenting them in English itself may not be of much use. They have to be translated into our language. The popularity of inferior varieties of dramas should be discouraged and superior ones should be encouraged, he concludes.

The talk on drama is clear indication of the insight Varghese Mappilai had on art forms as cultural manifestations as well as the criteria by which they are to be evaluated. It may also be noted that he had no reservations in his observations even when they are against the general concepts and likely to cause unpleasant reactions. His primary concern regarding an art form was the truth in its representation of the world and human life, the judicial mode of criticism which first appeared in Plato and remains characteristic of modern theories of literary realism.

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## Last Days

The last days of Varghese Mappilai were the natural culmination of his self sacrifice and tiresome hard work. His health deteriorated. A few deaths in the family including that of his daughter disturbed his mental disposition. Various commitments had affected his financial stability too. However, the most detrimental was the attitude of his fellowmen.

It is often pointed out that Kerala has been remarkable for the harmonious coexistence of different communities. A closer look at the relationships that existed among the major communities, Hindus, Christians and Muslims, however lead us to the conclusion that the picture was not as bright as it is supposed to be. While the different communities adopted a non-interfering attitude to others, each of these communities lived in a world of its own adhering to its own customs and practices passed on to it through generations. Their cultural life as a rule centered on their places of worship, the temples for the Hindus, Mosques for the Muslims and Churches for the Christians. They did not interfere with the activities of members belonging to other communities as long as they felt they were not affected by them. But whenever there were any interventions no effort was spared to put a permanent end to them.

In Kerala, as in most other parts of India, literary activities were considered a special privilege of the Hindus, particularly the *savarnas*. The notable regional literary works in Malayalam have been inspired by works in Sanskrit, particularly great works like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Bhagavata*. Visual arts of Kerala like Kathakali and Thullal also were associated with

temples. They were patronized by a limited minority and any effort by those outside, particularly by the non-Hindus and *avarana* sections among the Hindus, to penetrate into this sphere was viewed with suspicion. Nor were others interested in trespassing into their realms, partly because of the traditions they followed and partly because of the hazards it involved.

Varghese Mappilai in all sincerity had taken initiative to make the field of literature open to all sections. To begin with, he became a serious student of Sanskrit language and literature and persuaded those near and dear to him to follow his example. He strove to standardize the style of prose and gave the necessary encouragement to writers to evolve in them a proper form of expression. He gave the traditional Christian folksongs a classical touch. He did not restrict his cultural activities to his community but extended it to all irrespective of the religions to which they belonged. As attested by many, Varghese Mappilai never discriminated between big and small, lords and commoners, old and young, upper caste and lower caste. His only consideration was whether one has the taste for literature or not.

But his good intentions were mistaken and taken rather unkindly by many. They did not dare to antagonise him openly, because of his close associations with personalities like Kerala Varma Valiyakoyil Thampuran. They sought for any opportunity available to belittle him. In spite of the energy and selfless devotion with which Varghese Mappilai carried out his work, he met stiff opposition to his activities, to the extent of alleging that he was trying to encourage his own people. The allegation caused him considerable agony, he being one above any such sectarian considerations. He tried his best to clarify his secular stand but it was not of much avail. Varghese Mappilai had established himself as an efficient editor and versatile genius through the *Malayala Manorama*. Kavisamajam made him quite famous. With Bhashaposhini Sabha his fame gathered new dimensions. His opponents could not tolerate this. They once

again made their appearance seeking opportunities to tarnish his image. Having failed to secure any other spots of blemish they labelled him as a communalist and alleged that he is making use of the Bhashaposhini Sabha and its journal *Bhashaposhini* for projecting certain members of his community. Varghese Mappilai was disturbed at this turn of events but maintained his coolness. Though many were there to criticize and make allegations those prepared to undertake responsibilities and act were rare. Exposing them would mean incurring more displeasure, he knew.

The Trichur meeting of the Bhashaposhini Sabha had decided that the existing office bearers of the Sabha shall continue. Though disinterested in working for the Sabha, many members were interested in occupying important positions in the Sabha in the capacity of office bearers. It was even argued by some that such positions should be distributed with regional representation. A journal named *Sahitya Saravali* blamed the Sabha in not having anyone from Northern Kerala as office bearer of the Sabha. The fact was that none had attended the Trichur session from the Northern area. Varghese Mappilai was genuinely interested in having people from the northern parts of Kerala. He found them more interested in matters relating to literature than the southerners.

During the next meet of the Sabha held at Calicut there was a concerted move to displace Varghese Mappilai from the Secretaryship of the Sabha. As part of this conspiracy an article appeared in *Vidya Vinodini* severely criticizing the Sabha and its journal *Bhashaposhini*. It wanted the Sabha to stop publishing substandard poetic compositions. Competitions like instant versification should be discouraged, it argued. Varghese Mappilai did not pay heed to such comments taking them as just difference in approaches. He was quite willing to relinquish his official position in the Sabha and hand over the responsibilities to anyone interested in the same. The move to displace him by unfair means, about which he came to know only too late was a

painful experience for him. In spite of his efforts to get relieved from the Secretaryship he had to continue in the same yielding to the requests from his well wishers' like Manavikrama Ettan Thampuran. The defeat did not put an end to the malicious deeds of the dissident group. Its attack took a different turn. The group publicized that the editorship of the *Malayala Manorama*, management of the M.D. Seminary High School, court actions and several public affairs keep Varghese Mappilai too busy to pay any attention to the activities of the Bhashaposhini Sabha. It was also suggested that the Sabha being one with members throughout Kerala, its headquarters should be at a central place.

The dissension in the Bhashaposhini Sabha became more acute during its fourth annual meet held at Trivandrum. The compliments showered on Varghese Mappilai by Parappanad Rama Varma Thamapuram, A.R.Rajaraja Varma, Resident Green and other eminent persons made the opposite camp more hostile towards him. This was found reflected in the entire procedure of the meet. Even some of the writers whom Varghese Mappilai considered as his best friends turned against him. An extract from a paper on language reformation presented at one of the sessions by C.P.Achutha Menon is given below as illustration to this approach:

“.... We know from experience how difficult it is to discuss topics like this at a meet of this sort where representatives from different places do not turn up and the time at our disposal is spent over formalities and instant versification competitions. I am of the view that such competitions should be carried out in advance through the journal. I doubt whether the journal *Bhashaposhini*, as it is run today serves the purpose expected from it.”

The motif behind such a comment in a paper on language development was quite clear. Varghese Mappilai immediately reacted to it by submitting his resignation of the secretaryship of the Sabha. Several members of the forum including the chair-



man tried to make him withdraw the same but he did not yield. "This is a public institution; anybody can be at its helm of affairs. It should not be a single person's property" he said.

An award for the work 'Narayaniyam' by K.C.Kesava Pillai worsened the situation. The unhappy controversies which followed it made him stick on to his resignation. Taking into account the dissent in a section of the members of the Sabha it was also decided that the journal *Bhashaposhini* should be amalgamated with *Vidya Vinodini*, another literary journal published from Trichur under the editorship of C.P.Achutha Menon. Recapitulating the events cited above Varghese Mappilai wrote in the Editorial column of the *Malayala Manorama* as follows:

"An important event which took place at the Trivandrum meet was the change in the secretaryship. Along with it the *Bhashaposhini* got changed as *Vidya Vinodini*. The one who has been running this journal with exceptional ability solely for the development of language was undoubtedly fit for the secretaryship of the Sabha from its inception. Bhashaposhini Sabha is a forum with members from all the three regions of Kerala, namely Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. It has to be run as a combined effort of people from all these areas. It will be beneficial to have the responsibility of the forum shouldered by a person permanently residing in the central part of the country and surrounded by several distinguished friends. Achutha Menon also is a busy man, but since he has taken the responsibility, he will somehow manage to spare his time."

The pungency in some of these statements indicates the intensity of the pain he felt.

After the take over *Vidya Vinodini* appeared with a superscription 'Belonging to Bhashaposhini Sabha'. Its number of pages was increased and the annual subscription raised to Rupees three. Other than the superscription, there was nothing to indicate its relationship with the Bhashaposhini Sabha. It could not maintain the standard befitting the Bhashaposhini Sabha; nor

could it fulfil the improvements Achutha Menon had suggested. No activity of the Sabha was taken up even for name's sake and the superscription too was left out within no time. There was a lot of hue and cry from the well wishers against this deterioration the Sabha was undergoing. Several members of the Sabha wrote to Valiya Koyil Thampuram to rejuvenate and revive the forum by changing the Secretary and bringing back Varghese Mappilai to the key position. If he does not take up the responsibility of the forum its tragic end is imminent, they pointed out. Varghese Mappilai remained as a silent spectator to these developments. While there were many backing the proposal for Varghese Mappilai's return to the Sabha, the opposite camp did not remain idle. An editorial article published in *Keralamitram* strongly supported the stand of *Vidya Vinodini*. It said there is nothing wrong in taking away the superscript 'Belonging to the Bhashaposhini Sabha', as the journal had agreed to publish free of cost the advertisements and announcements concerning the Sabha. Varghese Mappilai felt the moment has come to break the silence he has been maintaining. In an editorial article in the *Malayala Manorama*, he wrote:

"From the *Keralamitram*, it is learned there is disagreement among some regarding the disappearance of the superscript 'Belonging to Bhashaposhini Sabha' from the cover page of *Vidya Vinodini*. It is stated that since the advertisements etc. of the Sabha will be published free of cost in the journal, the Sabha does not incur any special loss due to this. All journals have published the advertisements of the Sabha free of cost whenever requested. *Keralamitram* is not an exception. The boldness exhibited by the 'friend' forgetting even this, makes us surprised. *Vidya Vinodini* was surrendered to the Bhashaposhini Sabha by its owner at a huge gathering attended by several eminent men. The decision taken by the Sabha in this respect was published in *Vidya Vinodini*. The journal was published for nearly an year with the superscript 'Belonging to Bhashaposhini

Sabha'. And now this superscript is left out without asking anybody and without anybody's knowledge. I am sorry to state that I find no way to say other than that a journal which considers such an action something to be happy about though may be a friend of Kerala in general, is an enemy of the Sabha."

A series of write-ups followed for and against the removal of the superscript. At the end Achutha Menon stated that the superscript was left out owing to the loss of Rs.400 *Vidya Vinodini* incurred within a year. Whether this loss was after *Vidya Vinodini* was taken by the Sabha or from its very beginning became the next topic of argument. The controversy finally ended more or less as a 'storm in the tea cup'. Varghese Mappilai regained his reputation which those jealous of his achievements had partially damaged.

Achutha Menon also cannot be fully blamed in this connection. In fact a few leading figures in Cochin who wanted the upper hand in all affairs were behind all these unnecessary happenings. They worked behind the curtain to shift the control over the Sabha and its journal to their own little world. Achutha Menon was just a tool in their hands. He was under the impression that they will always be with him and will be of help to him in building up *Vidya Vinodini* as a proper journal. It was too late when he realized he was mistaken. He got no help from any of his so-called friends either by way of improving the quality of his journal or by increasing the circulation. He was rather depressed at his failure and felt let down by the encomiums showered on Varghese Mappilai. Though Achutha Menon was a genuine scholar and critic, he was not broad minded enough to view dispassionately the rise of any organization or individual in the cultural world of which he considered himself sovereign. Naturally enough, he failed to do justice to or honour the ideals nurtured and held high by Varghese Mappilai and *Bhashaposhini*. He did not even show the courtesy to indicate in the title page of *Vidya Vinodini* the name of Bhashaposhini Sabha the organ of which *Vidya Vinodini* had become.

In spite of his compromising personality, the opposition from hostile competitors and unfriendly attitudes from many of those whom he developed as writers was too much for Varghese Mappilai to withstand. He tried to relieve himself from the responsibilities of the Bhashaposhini Sabha but could find nobody fit to entrust with its task and left it to its fate. His inactivity was detrimental to the Sabha which even his opponents recognized. Consequently he once again took up the stewardship of Bhashaposhini mainly under pressure from Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Thampuran and other well-wishers in Malayalam literary field. The first thing Varghese Mappilai did after taking charge once again as the Secretary of the Bhashaposhini Sabha was to write to all members of its working committee seeking their views on how the Sabha should work. The replies received were forwarded to the Chairman Valiya Koyil Thampuran, and the future programmes of the Sabha were decided as directed by him.

It was resolved to publish *Bhashaposhini* as a monthly under the auspices of the Bhashaposhini Sabha. Accordingly *Bhashaposhini* resumed its publication.

At the fifth annual meeting of the Sabha held at Kottayam in 1897, Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Thampuran in his presidential address paid encomiums to Varghese Mappilai for his creditable work as follows: "The meeting of the Bhashaposhini Sabha held at Trivandrum three years ago was undoubtedly the zenith of the blessedness this forum had achieved. Thereafter as if the entire blessings disappeared, its state became a cause of worry to all interested in its welfare. Its later regeneration was entirely due to the return of Varghese Mappilai who had vacated its secretaryship."

"I am not surprised to see that this Association fell dead when the one who was its soul since its inception left it, revived when he once again returned to it."

The meet did not hold the usual versification competition and the like, possibly to avoid difference of views. It was a dif-

difficult task to get the forum revived after a dormancy of three years. It was an year during which in spite of a handsome donation of two hundred and fifty rupees from the Maharaja of Travancore and Attingal Mootha Thampuran, Varghese Mappilai had to spend Rupees three hundred and fifty from his pocket which indicates the extent of sacrifice he made for the forum.

A major gain of the meet was formation of a new working committee with representation from all over Kerala which could serve as a strong foundation of the forum. Varghese Mappilai's ambition was to build up a proper mansion on this foundation. This however, could not be achieved. He could not regain his health which has been deteriorating since 1899. It became worse after his continuous strain for the success of the meet. In spite of the efforts by experts in indigenous and allopathic medicines his health did not improve. Vayaskara Moos, the noted indigenous physician who had special affection towards Varghese Mappilai tried his best medication in vain. He was taken to Calicut for getting treated by Divan Bahadur Dr. Varghese. The treatment proved effective at first, but back at Kottayam the condition was worst.

The conduct of the Bhashaposhini Sabha meet was getting overdue. Varghese Mappilai felt he is shirking from his responsibility by delaying it further. The meet was held at Trivandrum in 1900. Varghese Mappilai hoped he would be relieved from the secretaryship in view of his ill health. His pleadings for the same fell in deaf ears. Everybody concerned, including his opponents wanted his continuation in the post. He could not resist the compulsion which came from all corners stemming from the respect and goodwill he had acquired through his selfless devotion to work. He however, could not do justice to the post during the next few years. The activities of the Sabha were in stand-still, except for the publication of *Bhashaposhini* and encouragement to writers. There was nobody to assist him and these were the only activities he could do by himself in his precarious health condition.

The next meet of the Bhashaposhini Sabha, which happened to be the last one under the secretaryship of Varghese Mappilai was held at Tellichery in 1904. Kadattanattu Udaya Varma Thampuran had taken the responsibility of conducting the meet as desired by Varghese Mappilai. The meet was held in the Brunnen College premises, with much pomp. An extract from a report published in this connection by the *Malayala Manorama* is given below:

“People came in unusually large numbers to attend the meet. Those who came from distant places were received at the station by members of the organizing committee. They were taken to the venue of the sessions in carriages drawn by horse. The carriages were at the disposal of these guests till their return home. Good food was served. It included large size *pappad*, sugar, banana pieces, *payasam* (pudding) of different varieties and other delicious items for lunch and dinner, coffee and tiffin for breakfast on all the three days. Facility for oil bath also was available. The entire expenses for all these was met by the most generous Kadattanattu Udaya Varma Thampuran.”

In spite of his ill health, Varghese Mappilai had reached Tellicherry sufficiently in advance to supervise the arrangements and was with the organizers through out the meet. At a special function held at the residence of Udaya Varma Thampuran, a special gift of two costly shawls was presented to Varghese Mappilai in appreciation of the service he had rendered to the cause of language and literature. Tears trickled down the cheeks of Udaya Varma Thampuran as he presented this gift. The eyes of everyone else present on the occasion also became wet, foretelling the impending heavy loss destiny had in store for them.

The trip to Tellicherry and the strain it involved were too much for Varghese Mappilai to withstand. It seems he had a sort of premonition that his days are counted. In a letter dated 30th June 1904 addressed to a friend, who used to contribute to the *Malayala Manorama* under the pen name Korappa Prabhu,

after giving details of his health conditions he concluded: “Let everything be according to the will of God.”

On the 6th July 1904, Varghese Mappilai bade goodbye to this world at the age of forty-seven, after a short, yet quite meaningful period of life.

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## The Road That Never Ends

Is death the end of life? May be. It may also be the starting point of a new life. Generally it is presumed as a natural culmination of the human being. Ideally it occurs in the fullness of one's age. Forty seven years was too short a life span for a person like Varghese Mappilai endowed with undiminished powers. His untimely demise was a shock to the whole of Kerala, his being an endearing household name in every nook and corner. The loss it made to the elite is reflected in the Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Thampuran's words: "My right arm is cut off."

In an obituary note published in the *Malayala Manorama*, Kadattanattu Udaya Varma observed as follows:

"Varghese Mappilai was popular by his own stature; his generosity and selflessness made him an *ajata satru*, one without enemy."

During the last days of Varghese Mappilai his main source of consolation was Mammen Mappilai, his nephew. There existed an unusual bond of affection between the two. Mammen Mappilai had by this time graduated from Madras Christian College. He was thinking of entering the Civil Service and wrote to Varghese Mappilai about his plan. The reply he received from Varghese Mappilai, reminiscenced by the nephew was 'terse but heart breaking': "Why do you have to be in Madras to prepare for Civil Service exam? Return at once". He returned home to appeal to his father but the father was of the view that Varghese Mappilai knew what was best for his pet nephew. Varghese Mappilai was genuinely in need of someone he could depend on and Mammen Mappilai with his sincerity, intellectual abilities



and positive vision of life was the best choice, a choice which neither Varghese Mappilai nor Mammen Mappilai ever regretted. To begin with he was made a teacher at the M.D.Seminary School with certain responsibility in *Malayala Manorama* in his spare time. But this could not continue for long. He resigned the Headmaster's post to which he had been elevated and concentrated his attention in the administration of *Malayala Manorama*, providing his uncle with more free time to carry on his literary pursuits. After the demise of Varghese Mappilai, the task of running the *Malayala Manorama* fell entirely on the shoulders of Mammen Mappilai. The odds he had to face were many. Closely following the lofty ideals Varghese Mappilai held high, he succeeded in developing *Malayala Manorama* a force to be reckoned with in the social, cultural and political life of Kerala. Under his stewardship *Malayala Manorama* became a fullfledged daily newspaper acquainting the readers better with the happenings within and outside the country along with making its voice against social evils and inequalities more pronounced.

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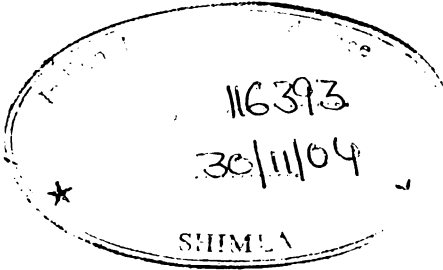
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**Kandathil Varghese Mappilai** (1857-1904) was a pioneer among the masterminds of the nineteenth century who brought Kerala from its socio-cultural backwardness into a centre of achievements in the realm of modernity. The News Paper *Malayala Manorama* which he founded in 1890 and its literary offshoot *Bhashaposhini* put the journalistic and literary activities in Kerala on a sound footing. For him journalism was not just a passive exchange of information, but a dynamic interpersonal process enriching the individual and ennobling the society. In the divisive and communal setting of Kerala during his period, he brought together writers from various cultural backgrounds and infused in them a sense of common purpose pulling down the walls of separation. As pointed out by K.P.S. Menon, apart from the patronage he extended to writers his own writings were a model of clarity, urbanity and vigour.

**C.J. Roy:** Master in Malayalam language and linguistics, retired as Senior Professor and Head of the Department of Malayalam, Madurai Kamaraj University. A scholar and writer of repute, he has to his credit about a dozen books in Malayalam and English, the latest of which is an English translation of *Keralapaniniyam*, the monumental treatise on Malayalam Grammar by A.R. Rajaraja Varma.

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