

Kerala Varma (1845–1914), known all over Kerala as Valiya Koyil Tampuran, hailed as Sahityachakravarti and Kerala Kalidasa, symbolises renaissance in Kerala. An eminent poet in Malayalam and Sanskrit, he was a pioneer in Malayalam prose, fiction, biography and literary criticism. -

Mahakavi Kumaran Asan said: "We do not think that in Kerala there is any great man other than Kerala Varma whom all Malayalees, love, respect and remember with gratitude. When will it be possible for us to see again a combination like this of qualities such as scholarship; poetic talent, goodness, generosity, and character of the highest standard"—a rare tribute from one great man to another.

P.K. Narayana Pillai (b. 1910), recipient of a number of literary awards including the Kerala Varma Gold Medal, the Kalidasa Award and the Sahitya Akademi Award, has numerous publications in Malayalam, Sanskrit and English to his credit.



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KERALA VARMA

The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Śuddhodana 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, 2nd century' A.D.

Courtesy : Naational Museum, New'Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

KERALA VARMA

P.K. NARAYANA PILLAI

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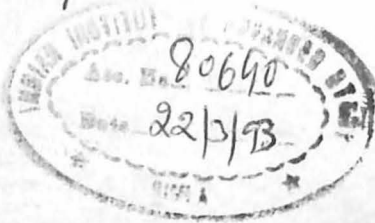
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1

Life, Education and Marriage

Kerala Varma is known all over Kerala as *Valiya Koyil Tampuran*. This title has got its own historical as well as social significance. Literally it means the consort to the senior princess of the Travancore royal family. *Valiya* means senior and *Koyil Tampuran* denotes a member of the Kshatriya community of the same nomenclature with which the Travancore royal family maintains marital relationship. Since this royal family has adopted the matrilineal system of inheritance, the ruler becomes entitled to the throne by virtue of his or her being born of a princess of the family. The status of the father of the ruler is only that of consort to the mother of the ruler and he does not enjoy any royal status as such.

Kilimanoor palace and Lakshmipuram palace are the two distinguished *Koyil Tampuran* families whose male members used to be selected to marry the Travancore princesses. The ancestry of these two families could be traced respectively to Beypore and Parappanad families, the two branches of a royal family called Parappoor that flourished in South Malabar. The Parappanad branch known also as Aliyakot was attacked by Hyder Ali during his invasion of Malabar in the latter half of the 18th century and Kunjikkutty Tampuratti, a female member of the branch, fled from Malabar to Travancore with her five daughters seeking protection at the hands of Kartika Tirunal, the Maharaja of Travancore.

The generous ruler welcomed the Tampuratti and party and allowed them to stay in one of his palaces called Valiya Koyikkal. Later on, the Neerazhikkettu palace at Changanacherry, a town about 140 km north of Trivandrum, which once belonged to the Tekkumkoor royal family, was allotted for their permanent stay.

In course of time palaces were built for the first four sisters at Gramam, Tiruvalla and Pallam and they got settled down there leaving the palace at Changanacherry to their youngest sister Injanji Amma. A grandson of this lady by name Rajaraja Varma married princess Lakshmi Bai of the Travancore royal family. Rama Varma Swathi Tirunal the celebrated musician and composer of South India who ruled over Travancore from 1828 to 1846, was the son of this royal couple. At the instance of this princess a new palace was built in 1811 for her consort's family and it was called Lakshmi-puram after her. Kerala Varma was born in this illustrious family on 19th February A.D. 1845 as the second son of Deviyamba Tampuratti and Mullappalli Nampootiri.

Kerala Varma's father and mother were highly cultured as well as learned. The father belonged to a Nampootiri family of great Vedic tradition at Talipparamba in North Malabar. The members of this family were distinguished scholars and they were recipients of awards at the Taliyil Tanam, the scholars' assembly, which used to be held under the patronage of the Zamorins of Calicut. Kerala Varma's father was one who inherited the scholarly traditions of his family and he was a specialist in the branches of ancient learning such as grammar, astrology, religion, medicine, etc. With his deep knowledge in astrology he could predict the eminence to which his son would rise in future life. His father being a grammarian it is no wonder that Kerala Varma acquired an erudition, the hallmark of which was deep scholarship in Sanskrit grammar.

His father with his erudition and spirituality exerted great influence on Kerala Varma, but his mother's influence was greater. Kerala Varma's nursery education was under the care of his beloved mother gifted with literary talents and proficient in Puranic lore. She was thorough with the stories in the epics as well as mythological works and she took special interest in narrating them to the child. He not only followed the stories, but really entered into their spirit and very often got moved by them. Here is an instance to illustrate the point. Once the mother placed the child in her lap and began to describe the heroic march of Bhimasena with mace in hand through hills, forests and valleys to secure the Saugandhika flower. It is said that the child got so much imbibed with Bhima's mood that he became agitated and jumped out of his mother's lap imitating his movement and gestures. The tremendous influence those well-told Puranic stories exerted on the child in the formation

of his character may easily be imagined. These lessons inspired Kerala Varma's interest into novel-reading in later life. The mother dinned not only stories into the child's ears, but also verses of high moral and ethical values which were very often compositions of great authors and occasionally her own. She was not only a learned lady, but also an adept in child psychology.

After the informal nursery training at the hands of his enlightened parents, Kerala Varma was formally initiated into studies on traditional lines in his fifth year by Tiruvarpil Rama Warriar, a sound scholar and a seasoned teacher. In those days the text books generally followed for initial studies in Sanskrit were *Siddharupa*, *Amarakosa*, *Sriramodanta*, *Srikrishnavilasa* and *Raghuvamsa*. In the course of about five years he studied these primary texts under Rama Warriar and acquired enough proficiency to appreciate the ornate poetry in Sanskrit. As a student, his power to grasp lessons was extraordinary and that made the teacher very much enthusiastic in imparting instructions to him. It is said that even before he was ten years old, he could recite the whole of Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa*.

On the completion of his early education, his uncle Rajaraja Varma who was consort to Princess Lakshmibai, the sister of the then ruler Uthram Tirunal Martanda Varma, took him to Trivandrum in 1855 when he was ten years old, for further education and training. This was a turning point in Kerala Varma's scholarly career as well as personal life. He welcomed the guardianship of his uncle with enthusiasm and his uncle cherished great expectations about his nephew. He put Kerala Varma under intensive training, both moral and intellectual, as if in an ancient *Gurukula*. The ward rose to the occasion and willingly subjected himself to the strict discipline under his revered uncle. Except for essential intervals, the time fixed for study was from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. everyday. With such intensive instruction for about five years, Kerala Varma could cover a curriculum for which normally a student would have taken at least double the time. In the course of this intensive study he gained mastery over epic poems like Bharavi's *Kiratarjuniya*, Magha's *Sisupalavadha* and Sri Harsha's *Naishadhiya*, in addition to works like *Ramayana Champu*. Rhetorical works such as *Kuvalayananda*, *Citramimamsa* and *Kavyaprakasa* were also among the texts which he diligently studied. It was during that period that he mastered *Siddhantakaumudi*

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and *Praudhamanorama*, two advanced texts in Sanskrit grammar. His studies progressed well to the great satisfaction of his uncle-teacher but the latter did not give any indication of his appreciation lest his nephew should feel complacent about his academic progress. Kerala Varma could successfully undergo this strenuous course of study by his extraordinary intellectual capacities, the sound academic footing he gained from his first teacher Rama Warriar and the missionary zeal with which his uncle taught him. Side by side with studies in Sanskrit, he received instructions in English also in which he soon acquired sound basic knowledge. Thus the solid foundation for the future edifice of deep scholarship was laid by his uncle Rajaraja Varma by the time he was only fourteen years old.

His uncle passed away in 1859 causing him deep sorrow and disappointment. Kerala Varma cherished his memory with profound gratitude and reverence and was never weary of expressing his indebtedness to his uncle, in his future compositions. In his first Sanskrit poem entitled *Tirunal Prabandha* he admits that it was due to the showers of his uncle's compassion that poetry sprouted in him. Almost the same sentiment is expressed in his *Sringaramanjari-bhana*. In *Hanumadudbhava*, a Kathakali work too he paid homage to his mentor.

There are evidences to show that in taking Kerala Varma with him to stay at the royal household at Trivandrum, Rajaraja Varma had not only the intention of educating his nephew on sound lines, but something more vital that would benefit his family. Since his nephew was quite handsome, intelligent and alert, he was sure that he would create a good impression on the members of the royal family.

In the palace, Kerala Varma got frequent chances not only to meet the ruler, but also to mingle with the princes Ayilyam Tirunal and Visakhham Tirunal.

Rajaraja Varma's wife Rani Lakshmibai passed away in 1857 after giving birth to Sri Mulam Tirunal and as a result of this the royal family ceased to have a female member in it. To remedy this want, the Maharaja adopted two princesses from the Mavelikkara palace. Among them Lakshmi was senior and she was about ten years old. The princess was exquisitely beautiful and gifted with various talents particularly musical. Rajaraja Varma ardently wished that his nephew might be selected to marry the senior princess. This clearly indicates that the uncle was not only educating

his nephew as his own ward, but was consciously shaping him as a befitting consort to a princess.

Circumstances proved to be very favourable for the marriage of Kerala Varma to princess Lakshmi and almost all welcomed the idea, particularly in view of the outstanding qualities and gifts of both. Rajaraja Varma's health faded and he became bedridden. Maharaja Martanda Varma visited his brother-in-law in his sick-bed and at that time Rajaraja Varma requested him for the favour of this marriage, as his last wish. Rajaraja Varma passed away not long after. The king fully convinced that Kerala Varma was the most eligible bridegroom available for the senior princess and giving due consideration to the last request of his brother-in-law, conducted the royal marriage on the 24th of April 1859 in all pomp. This marriage with the senior princess of Travancore elevated Kerala Varma to the title of *Valiya Koyil Tampuran* which became an integral part of his name ever since.

2

A Versatile Genius

Marriage into a royal family will normally be an opportunity for luxurious life and enjoyment in the case of an ordinary young man; but that was not so in the case of Kerala Varma. The pleasures of the royal household could not make him swerve from the path of rigorous discipline and hard work in which he was trained by his uncle Rajaraja Varma. He exploited all the privileges and facilities available in his new status as the consort of the senior princess, for the acquisition of scholarship and the all-round development of his personality. The Maharaja's continued patronage helped him realise his scholarly ambitions. In the court, the king had several distinguished proteges and many scholars used to come to him for patronage. The king saw to it that Kerala Varma was constantly in contact with them and that he got the benefit of their deep erudition in his advanced studies. In fact, for every branch of higher learning such as *Vedanta*, *Tarka*, *Vyakarana*, etc., he had eminent teachers who took special care in adding depth to their ward's scholarship. Kerala Varma strictly adhered to his own time-table for his studies as well as other duties. With such unremitting industry and his native gifts, Kerala Varma developed into a versatile genius by the time he reached the prime of his youth.

Among the personal tutors to Kerala Varma, who gave him instruction in Sanskrit *Sastras*, Ilathoor Ramaswamy Sastrikal was the foremost. This great scholar of Kerala had visited various parts of India and held his own in *Sastraic* discussions with eminent scholars in Benares, Kumbhakonam and other places of learning. He adorned the assembly of scholars in the court of Utram Tirunal Maharaja and was respected by all, including the princes Ayilyam

Tirunal and Visakhham Tirunal. Sastrikal was also a great poet. Since in *Visakhavijaya* the disciple refers to his teacher as *brahnavidyopadeshta* and *sahityadesika*, it is clear that he taught Kerala Varma mainly Vedanta philosophy and Sanskrit poetics.

Ramaswamy Sastrikal was not only an ordinary teacher to Kerala Varma but he was his spiritual preceptor too. The learned Sastrikal was a staunch follower of Tantra cult and a master of *mantrasastra*. In due course Kerala Varma also became a believer in Tantra cult and followed his preceptor in his spiritual practices. Due to the close relationship in the spiritual realm, Sastrikal exerted great influence on his disciple's life also. When the *guru* passed away, Kerala Varma felt very much bereaved and in a Sanskrit verse he wrote to his elder brother that *Srimadanandanath* was as eminent as Sri Sankara and united with *Srimodini* reached *Sripura*. The terms in italics are of special significance in the Tantra cult. This faith in the Supreme Mother as well as religious practices following it, formed an important aspect of Kerala Varma's life.

Next to Ilathoor Ramaswami Sastri in importance, the scholars who gave regular instruction to Kerala Varma in *Sastras* were Subba Dikshitar, Sinu Ayyangar and Pandit Ramaswami Sastrikal. The first two taught him *Vyakarana* while the third taught him *Tarka*. Ilathoor in his *Kirithivilasa champu* has paid glowing tributes to these great scholars for their masterly exposition of their respective *Sastras* and the dexterous manner in which they vanquished their rivals in academic discussions. The eloquent way in which he describes the performance of their scholastic life impresses the reader with the high standard which the scholars used to maintain in the display of their erudition in the court assemblies. From this one can more or less imagine the depth of knowledge in these Sanskrit disciplines which Kerala Varma acquired by his training under such giants.

In all the *Sastras* mentioned above, Kerala Varma acquired equally deep scholarship and it is not possible to make a comparative assessment in this regard. Yet from his contributions it may be inferred that it was *Vyakarana* that gained the pride of place among those disciplines. Referring to his extraordinary erudition in the subject, Mahakavi Vallathol once said that "the grammatical soundness of a word can never be questioned if it is used by Kerala Varma." He was aware of the linguistic and literary potentiality of

even the minutest part of a word and he has made use of that awareness in his works to the dismay of scholars. That he was in charge of the Palace Manuscripts Library was of great help to him in developing his knowledge in every branch of Sanskrit lore. In a way, he was the last of the titans in the field of traditional scholarship in Sanskrit in Kerala.

Utram Tirunal Maharaja who extended his gracious patronage to Kerala Varma in his studies passed away in 1861 (M.E. 1036). Though the Maharaja's death was very painful to Kerala Varma it did not affect his life very much, since its foundation was already well laid. But somewhere about that period there arose disputes among the members of his family at Changanacherry; his mother, elder brother and a few others were forced to settle down in a place called Karthikappally. Further disputes also occurred there and under the leadership of his elder brother Rajaraja Varma, the branch of the family to which he belonged shifted to Harippad and lived in a palace named Anantapuram built with royal favour. Since then Kerala Varma came to be known as a member of that palace instead of Lakshmipuram palace. Such a dislocation in his family did not affect Kerala Varma in any appreciable manner as he was well settled in the royal household at Trivandrum and enjoyed the patronage of Maharaja Ayilyam Tirunal and his younger brother Prince Visakham Tirunal.

Kerala Varma's talents in the art of versification were extraordinary. With marvellous command over vocabulary and highly developed metrical sensibility he could compose verses with startling speed in different metres. Once Kerala Varma was present at a ceremonial worship conducted by His Holiness Sringeri Sankaracharya at Trivandrum where he sojourned as a royal guest. As the Acharya poured the *tirtha* (holy water) into the poet's hand he composed and recited a stanza on the spot which meant as follows:

Vasudeva and Vamadeva are two gods known in the world. O! World Guru, when the truth regarding them is realised the difference will only be that between the syllables *su* and *ma* in their names.¹

¹Vasudeva iti Vamadeva ityasti daivatayugam kshamatale
Vastutattvavicitau Jagadguro! vastutastu sumabheda eva hi.

The poet uses the word *suma* to indicate the syllables *su* and *ma*. As this word conveys the meaning of flower, the poet also suggests that the difference is only between the flowers offered to the gods while they remain the same. In the stanza, Kerala Varma brought out the central idea of unity so dominant in the Advaita philosophy preached by Adi Sankara whose follower the Sringeri Sankaracharya was. The Acharya was immensely struck with the philosophical thought and craftsmanship reflected in the stanza and he expressed great appreciation for the poet.² The demonstration of capability for *ashtavadhana* by Kerala Varma had on many occasions astounded his admirers.

Many used to come to him for the privilege of receiving verses, spontaneously composed by him. From among them he would make eight people sit in a row and he would first ascertain the theme as well as metre of everyone's choice. Having done so he would go near the first in the row and utter in his ear the first letter of his verse. Then he would go to the second person and utter the first letter of his verse. After giving everybody the first letter of his verse in this manner, Kerala Varma would in the same way give the second letter of the verse to everyone and complete everybody's verse in the quickest time possible. In this feat, his brain had to work on eight different subjects and eight different metres simultaneously without any interval. By the time the stanzas were completed, all felt astonished and moved with admiration for the great scholar.

There was a glorious tradition of linguistic talents in the royal household of Travancore Kings. For instance, Swathi Tirunal, the well known musician-king of the family, was a scholar in languages like Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi, Hindustani, Persian and English. Kerala Varma's own patron Utram Tirunal Maharaja was proficient in not less than six languages—Sanskrit, Malayalam, Tamil, Hindustani, Marathi and English. This tradition as well as the necessary facilities stood Kerala Varma in good stead in mastering not less than five languages by taking immense pains. In one of his lyrics, *Sri Padmanabha-pada-padma-sataka* Kerala Varma says: "I have studied four or five languages with great care and sparing no pains."

²I owe this information to His Holiness Swami Vimalanandaji Maharaj, Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Nettayam, Trivandrum.

Among the Indian languages, other than Sanskrit Kerala Varma studied Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Hindustani. As has already been indicated he gained a sound basic knowledge of English very early in life. In continuation he studied the languages under his tutors Dr. Warring and Sri Annaji Rau in the palace. Close contact with Sir T. Madhava Rao, a reputed teacher of English, and with prince Visakham Tirunal, an ardent student of the language, proved very helpful to him in improving his studies in English substantially. As he was found to have attained a fairly high standard of proficiency in the language, Maharaja Ayilyam Tirunal used to engage him for discussion with the British Resident on official matters. Once it so happened that the Resident indicated that Kerala Varma's English needed improvement. Quite consistently with his enterprising nature he took it up as a challenge and bent his energy, with determination, to gain mastery over the language so as to outwit even an Englishman. The result was marvellous. Kerala Varma came to use King's English with great ease and precision. It is recorded that he used to carry on correspondence in English with highly placed Englishmen, including British Residents and big officers such as Dewans and High Court Judges. An extract from his introduction to the translation of Valmiki's *Ramayana* by Mahakavi Vallathol is quoted below to serve as a specimen of Kerala Varma's English style:

"Leave the divine element which can possibly appeal only to the Hindu, and view it if you chose, as even a work of art, pure and simple—the *Ramayana* still remains grand, inimitable and supreme—a faithful portraiture of all that is good and noble in man. It is beyond doubt, the high water mark of human imagination. Small wonder that it guides the thoughts and shapes the conduct of the vast majority of the population of this country. It enters into the very marrow of their bones and is, unto them, alike preceptor and law. One can well understand Murari and Jayadeva when they say that it is the theme and not the poet that is responsible for the selection. Just cause has India to be proud of Valmiki and his immortal poem, and if one fact more than another has contributed to elevate the Hindu nation to higher and higher eminences from age to age, it is the presence in the literature of works like *Ramayana*, every syllable of which breathes a spirit of the purest morality and loftiest truth."

Kerala Varma's English handwriting too was beautiful, but not so beautiful as that in Malayalam. That he came to have an artistic hand in writing Malayalam is also a result of purposeful training. Once his uncle expressed dissatisfaction over his handwriting in Malayalam. Since then he began to practise copywriting every day till his last days. This exercise developed into artistic transcription work, specimens of which are available in the Kerala University Manuscripts Library. Special mention may be made of two of such transcripts with star-like round letters scrupulously written avoiding all possible errors. The well-bound transcript of his own poem the *Mayurasandesa*, presented to Maharaja Sri Mulam Tirunal is quite fascinating one. It was the practice of Kerala Varma to prepare copies of his works in his own handwriting and present them to his well-wishers. The second of the transcripts mentioned above is that of Melpatur Narayana Bhattatiri's masterly work in grammar *Prakriyasarvasva*. It contains a few elucidatory footnotes which reveal a peculiar habit of Kerala Varma. In the course of transcribing a work it was his practice to offer comments wherever found necessary.

"He claimed literary talents from goddess Saraswathy as his right; musical expertise he wrested from her using the might of a Kshatriya." This is what a knowledgeable person who was a junior contemporary of Kerala Varma said about him. There appears to be an element of truth in this. If industry can secure a thing, no doubt it was within the reach of Kerala Varma as he was industriousness embodied. It is doubtful whether he had as much natural aptitude for music as he had for literature, but the fact remains that he developed himself into a connoisseur of music and wrote even valuable articles on the art. In this respect also, circumstances were favourable to him. His elder brother Vidwan Koyil Tampuran was an expert in the art and from him Kerala Varma learnt elementary lessons early in his childhood. That Lakshmibai, his spouse, was an accomplished musician was another happy coincidence in his life. However, it is not known whether he tried vocal music in public. It was in instrumental music that his talent was cultivated. Fiddle, *sarangi* and *veena* were the instruments he practised on. He took tuition regularly under Venkatadri Bhagavatar and Kalyanakrishna Bhagavatar who were the most outstanding *veena* experts in those days. O. Chanthu Menon, the well-known novelist, recorded that Kalyanakrishna Bhagavatar was

was the most outstanding among *Vainikas* in those days, had a very high opinion about Kerala Varma's performances on *veena*. Further, it is known that he along with the princess had played on *veena* in the presence of Ayilyam Tirunal. As a composer also he distinguished himself. In addition to innumerable songs in his Kathakali texts, he had composed songs in Telugu, Kanarese and Tamil off and on.

Sir T. Madhava Rao came to Trivandrum as the tutor to the Princes Ayilyam Tirunal and Visakham Tirunal and later on he was appointed as the Dewan of Travancore. During the tenure of his office in the State, Kerala Varma came to know him intimately and remained friendly with him even after he left Trivandrum. While Rao was functioning as the Regent in Baroda State, he requested Kerala Varma to send a paper on geography as contemplated in Hindu Puranas. To oblige his friend, Kerala Varma got a sufficiently big globe prepared in wood with the help of carpenters and demarcated the boundaries of land and water in an attractive manner. Many other things of geographical interest were also indicated on it with artistic beauty. On the whole, the globe was very useful for those interested in Puranic geography and it was sent to Rao along with a thesis elucidating Kerala Varma's theories on the subject. No doubt, Kerala Varma had studied the subject deeply and he had formulated his own views which he used to discuss with friends, one among them being T. Madhava Rao.

Kerala Varma was interested in technical subjects also. As an instance the proficiency he had acquired in examining the qualities of diamonds, may be pointed out here. He was proficient not only in assessing the merits of precious stones but in evaluating them also with precision. Whenever precious stones were purchased in the royal household he used to be consulted in the matter. Once on seeing his wife's finger decorated with a ring mounted with a diamond selected by him, he composed a verse wondering whether the ring decorates the finger or vice versa.

Lakshmibai being the senior princess had a principality of her own to administer, which was called Sripadam. In addition to this, she had many other royal responsibilities. In the proper discharge of her various duties, Kerala Varma assisted her as a trusted minister. First of all he reorganised the Sripadam administration and enhanced its efficiency bringing in better order and discipline. Malayalam was the language of administration. He made the

official terminology apt and comprehensive with his linguistic acumen. Appreciating his administrative talents the then Maharaja made him a non-official member of the Legislative Assembly of the State and he served it for three years with distinction. Kerala Varma himself has put on record that he used to be consulted by Maharajas and their Dewans on important administrative matters.

Kerala Varma was an accomplished horseman. He felt perfectly at ease on the back of a horse and even composed verses while riding at a great speed. It was his practice to go out on long rides every morning and he enjoyed it very much. These morning rides were made use of by him to take the horses newly acquired for the palace stables. He could control any unruly horse and make it gallop with great speed so that at the end of the ride it would have got simply tired out and tamed. In his personal diary he has recorded that he used to revel in this game. As he was an adventurous and bold rider, Ayilyam Tirunal subjected him once to a rather merciless test. A newly-acquired and uncontrollable horse, not provided with reins and saddle, was sent to him for his morning jaunt. He took up the challenge and immediately after girding up his loin cloth, without caring to wear even his riding dress, mounted the horse and galloped away catching hold of its mane. It was indeed a dangerous adventure on the part of Kerala Varma as he was risking his life in the course of the ride. After the ride he submitted to the Maharaja that he should not be put to such tests in future, lest the Maharaja himself would come to grief. He was so crazy about riding that he used to persuade youngsters who came to him to practise it and become good riders. Kerala Varma's literary writings also reflect his keen interest in the subject. Here is an English version of his descriptions of mounted soldiers in *Mayurasandesha*:

The mounted troops with their colourful costumes as well as helmets and holding gleaming swords in their hands and galloping forward in all pomp emanating tumultuous sounds will make you O! dear friend, feel overjoyed in that city.

It will also be interesting to note that he has used his personal experience of controlling naughty horses as a standard of comparison in his epic poem *Visakhavijaya* (2.11).

Another hobby of Kerala Varma was hunting in which too he distinguished himself. According to his own memoirs, interest in hunting was kindled in him for the first time when, as a boy of eight years, he happened to witness his grand uncle shooting down a crocodile that appeared in a tank near his residence. Having come to know of his interest in hunting prince Ayilyam Tirunal presented him with a pistol, to his immense joy. According to Kerala Varma himself, with a rifle which he acquired later he could "shoot down even very small birds seated at the top of lofty trees". At a shooting competition held at Quilon in 1882 in which Europeans also participated, Kerala Varma won the second prize. In a letter sent to him by Visakham Tirunal it is said, "Today evening Col. Stewart mentioned to me about the extraordinary skill you have acquired in shooting."

Kerala Varma was fortunate to have been trained in the game of hunting at the hands of two experts who were his distant relations belonging to the Kilimanoor family. He acquired from them expertise in the game including the skill to shoot at the chest of a person without doing him any harm. About this, Kerala Varma says in his work entitled *Reminiscences of My Hunting*; "I could not make myself bold to experiment the art of shooting a bullet at a man's chest in such a manner that it would just touch him and fall down. Therefore I tried it on a folded cloth which was hung on a wall. The bullet fell down without causing any damage to the cloth."

Another skill acquired by Kerala Varma in this direction was to make any pistol or rifle silent with his magic powers. It so happened that once his usual prayer was unwittingly obstructed by the consort of the junior princess as he was shooting continuously using a pistol. Annoyed Kerala Varma immediately stopped the action of the pistol using his occult powers. Without being conscious of what had happened the owner of the pistol continued to shoot but was very much baffled to see that it was of no avail. Then as desired by Kerala Varma, the pistol was handed over to him and the normal functioning was restored to the great surprise of those present there.

The most astounding demonstration of Kerala Varma's occult powers in hunting is perhaps the one which he himself has described in these words: "The consort to the junior princess and other companions of mine knew that I had received instruction in getting the target to a spot using magic powers and shooting at ease. On an

evening when I was taking a little rest after hunting birds, they compelled me to give a demonstration of that mystic art. Since I had not yet put into practice the skill which I acquired at the feet of my Guru and uncle Kotorman (Goda Varma) of Kilimanoor palace and since I found it impossible to evade them, I decided to attempt the game strictly on the lines on which I had been instructed. Then I thought about my Guru's feet in reverence and recalling to my mind the actual words of instruction I began the performance. Meanwhile the companions enjoyed themselves in sports of their liking. Within ten minutes, a huge pole-cat appeared on the top of the garden-wall in a completely exhausted condition and I shot it immediately with my rifle that was kept loaded."

A graphic description of his first experience in hunting in a wild forest is also given by him in his reminiscences. One day after fixing up an appointment with the professional hunters, he reached a forest area teeming with boars and leopards at Kulathur, a few kilometres away from Trivandrum. A team of twenty-five hunters that assembled there in advance received him and the leader took him to a spot which the boars were wont to visit. This was indicated by the wet foot prints of the animal which the hunters noticed in the course of their reconnoitering. Kerala Varma says that on hearing the report of the hunters he was reminded of a description of Kalidasa in *Raghuvamsa*. The stanza that occurs in the ninth canto of the epic means: "The king followed the path of the agitated boars that came out of the muddy lake, the path that stood clearly indicated by their wet foot-prints long apart."

The royal hunter sat there for two to three hours confident of getting a target but the delay made him so impatient that he left his station and went to the leader of the hunting party very impatiently. The leader rebuked him strongly and asked him to remain in his place without making any motion or sound. In ten or fifteen minutes he saw signs of an animal's movement and the leader made him understand by gestures that the boar would certainly come to the place where he was standing. The shouting of the hunters and the noise caused by the swift movement of the animal made his knees tremble a bit. But as he saw the boar dashing towards him he did not at all feel frightened and stood firm looking at it. Observing his steady look, the animal began to run in a different direction. He availed himself of that opportunity and shot at its collar-bone. Suddenly it came dashing against him, but being

well hit it soon fell down and died. About this experience Kerala Varma says; "I felt immensely gratified at this successful conclusion of my first hunting expedition in the wild forest. The hunters expressed the unanimous opinion that none who went out hunting for the first time had attained so much success."

As vouchsafed by Kerala Varma himself, he had a number of such thrilling experiences which he had not put in black and white even though he proposed to do so. He maintained keen interest in hunting throughout his life as could be gathered from his own statement in his *Mayurasandesa* ('The Pea-cock-Messenger'):

In the forest full of animals on the side of the hillock, I had gone in sportive enthusiasm along with other hunters and enjoyed chasing and killing numerous leopards and boars. My interest, O! friend, in the game of hunting is still great.

A description of a hunting party of Europeans in the *Mayurasandesa* may be interesting in this context:

With the prospect of securing tasty food as well as interesting pastime the Resident accompanied by his companions will be searching for prey in that vast garden. O! friend, you should, then keep away from their sight lest you should meet with untimely death. Mind you, provided with good guns as they are, they will never miss their aim. (1.39)

The party is supposed to have been led by the British Resident in the game sanctuary in his residence at Quilon. Of what significance was hunting in the life of Kerala Varma is borne out by the signal words (*mudravakya*) in the same poem (2.68):

Once in my enthusiasm for hunting O! dark-eyed damsel, I shot down the male bird from a pair seated together in our garden. Obviously moved with sympathy did you not immediately ask me to bring an end to its distressed mate too.

From the fact that Kerala Varma chose this touching anecdote as a signal event binding himself with his beloved, one can imagine what store he set by hunting in his life.

Kerala Varma was very much fascinated by sports also. He was an expert in swimming and boating which he enjoyed very much. As there were not enough facilities for these games at Trivandrum, he used to go to other places for the purpose. Aranmula on the banks of the Pampa river, a place well known for boat race, was his favourite resort. In one of the palaces he used to sojourn at times and enjoy swimming and boating along with the members of a family interested in the games.

The hero also used to participate in the famous Aranmula boat race - an annual event during the national festival of Kerala, Onam. The boat race is organised on Uthattathi day as an offering to God Parthasarathi installed in the famous temple there. Many snake-boats as well as ordinary country boats used to participate in the race and people from all over the State came to witness the event. Among the snake-boats the most important is the *Palliyodam* which is the sacred boat belonging to the temple. At the helm of the boat, experienced oarsmen will be positioned to steer its course and to speed up its movement. They will be standing over six feet above water level holding in their hands wooden oars about eight feet long. Once Kerala Varma got into the boat and expressed his desire to propel the boat standing at the top, holding the long oar. At that time the senior member of the Aranmula palace was functioning as the leader of the boatmen. Knowing fully that inexperienced people would not be able to propel the boat, he advised Kerala Varma not to attempt it and warned that there would be a chance of his being thrown aboard as the boat dashed forward. Kerala Varma insisted that he should be given a chance, but finding himself unequal to the job for want of experience, he handed over the oar back—a very rare occasion on which Kerala Varma admitted his incompetence in such matters. Kerala Varma's interest in this matter is reflected in a description of a sort of boat race in his *Mayurasandesa* (1.32):

Locating another boat following their own in great speed, the oars-men in their anxiety to forge ahead with greater speed would ply their oars more quickly and tumultuously in a spirit of keen competition.

Another sport in which Kerala Varma revelled was a fight with a ram. It may better be described as resisting a ram that advances in

all force to hit him. For this purpose he reared a strong ram and kept it in full vigour. Once the game begins the ram moves away from the hero and dashes towards him fiercely to hit him. As it comes close, the hero holds out a plank to prevent being hit. This is a game which requires not only physical prowess, but long training also. Once a mighty man known as Saktan Tampuran, a member of the Pandalam palace, came to visit Kerala Varma. As he gave his guest an idea of the game with the ram, the latter evinced interest in it and wanted a go at it. Kerala Varma agreed and the guest came the next day at the appointed time for the sport. As the ram began to move back gradually, the plank for resisting it was handed over to the guest to be held against the animal. Within a few minutes the ram advanced towards the guest in its usual terrific speed. At that sight the guest known for his physical might got unnerved and caught hold of the ram throwing away the plank for resistance. Kerala Varma who felt amused, somehow separated the fighters. The hero was also an expert in sports like running, jumping and somersaults.

The heroic role he played in extinguishing two outbreaks of fire which would have caused devastating damages is also interesting. Once the library in which very valuable ancient manuscripts were deposited caught fire and on seeing the fire blazing up Kerala Varma without even waiting for changing the cloth which he was wearing, rushed up to the spot and not only gave leadership to the palace servants gathered there, but personally helped in extinguishing the fire. The other incident happened when he was sojourning in his palace at Harippad. A roof connecting the two main parts in the building suddenly caught fire. While people were blinking at the fire, Kerala Varma just toppled down the roof giving it a powerful push with his shoulders and averted what would have otherwise been a calamity.

Another sport which Kerala Varma practised regularly was weight-lifting. For this purpose he had kept at his residence a heavy iron ball. Shri Vidyadhiraja Chattampi Swamikal, the well known saint and social reformer of Kerala, came to know that Kerala Varma was a weight-lifter too. Shri Swamikal too was a versatile genius who developed not only his spiritual powers but physical strength as well. He was also interested in weight-lifting and naturally he became curious about the standard which Kerala Varma attained in it. One day, accompanied by one of his close associates,

Shri Swamikal went to the residence of Kerala Varma and succeeded in lifting the heavy iron ball.

It is well known that Kerala Varma was a patron of literary men, but the patronage he extended to wrestlers is seldom recognised. He was a good wrestler and he made it a point to invite every wrestler who came to Trivandrum to his residence and wrestle with him. After wrestling, it was his wont to honour his rival with valuable presents, with the result that the wrestlers of those days used to hold him in great respect.

Kerala Varma was also an outstanding cricket player and it was he who organised the first Cricket Club in Trivandrum. The same was the case in regard to chess also. He played chess well and it was his privilege to sponsor an organisation of chess players in Trivandrum for the first time. That he could wield various kinds of weapons also stands to his credit. It is also interesting to note that once he said that he preferred the game of *katunthuti* throw to the task of literary creation. He was well versed in gymnastics. Taking exercises daily in a systematic manner he came to possess a body rendered most attractive by the harmonious development of its parts. In those days, learned people used to quote Kalidasa's description of King Dilipa in referring to Kerala Varma's physical appearance, in these words:

With his chest well developed, shoulders similar to that of a bull, body as tall as a *sala* tree and long arms, he appeared to be the Kshatriya might so embodied as to be competent to discharge its duties.

If, however, a comparison can be made, one may compare him with Sir Philip Sydney of English literature for his all-round attainments, both physical and spiritual, his literary and courtly graces.

As Kerala Varma was shaping himself into a versatile genius, his wife Lakshmibai became a lady of outstanding attainments. The tributes Kerala Varma paid to her later in *Mayurasandesa* were literally true. She was a princess of unsurpassed beauty, and music was her forte among cultural attainments. He depicted her in these words:

There is none in this world comparable to her in point of beauty; so is the case in heaven too on account of her great qualities praised by men of wisdom. Her form, the dancing home of pristine beauty, would cause delight to the eyes of those lucky enough to see her. (2.35)

He described her musical talents in the following stanza (2.41):

Making the onlookers wonder whether Vani, the goddess of music has come down on earth in all hilarity my beloved with beautiful eyes like those of a deer, would play on the *veena* with dexterity. You would then remain there dumb-founded in great ecstasy.

The Princess taught her consort lessons in music not for nothing. Kerala Varma paid her back in lessons in literature. Lakshmibai could easily compose songs in Sanskrit as well as in Malayalam. To the 'Peacock Messenger' the hero says:

The learned lady will compose many a religious lyric and she will sing them in order to bring delight to her pensive mind. At that time your ears will get spontaneously immersed for long in the ocean of mirth. (2.42)

Another art in which the Princess acquired proficiency was painting.

The blessed couple lived a happy and prosperous life in the palace. It is known that Kerala Varma used to read the biography of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's consort, drawing the necessary inspiration from it.

Revolt Against the Ruler

The close association Kerala Varma had with the Princes Ayilyam Tirunal and Visakham Tirunal has already been adverted to earlier. In spite of their royalty and seniority in age they treated him as their equal on account of his extraordinary qualities and deep erudition. The princes too were eminent personages of high intellectual standards and cultural attainments. The elder brother was a man of learning, well versed in many languages, appreciator of fine arts and musician of high calibre. He was also a literary man and to his credit stands the first translation of *Sakuntalam* into Malayalam prose. He extended patronage to artists and literary men and "his geniality was profound and unaffected; but inside the silk glove was the iron hand."

Both the Princes were wards of Sir T. Madhava Rao. But it was Visakham Tirunal who derived the maximum benefit out of his tutorship. With his deep scholarship in English, Rao introduced the prince to the different channels of its literature as well as branches of modern scientific knowledge which helped him to develop a progressive outlook. None the less, he was proficient in Indian literature including Sanskrit. Unlike his brother, he developed an academic attitude and a flair for original writing, particularly in English. This genuine interest in literature naturally made him attached to Kerala Varma even before his marriage to his niece, Lakshmibai. Further unlike his brother, Visakham Tirunal set much store by character and remained a perfect gentleman holding great moral values and ideals. With such facets of his personality, he struck a sharp contrast with Ayilyam Tirunal.

By qualities and attainments, Kerala Varma was the fittest bridegroom for Lakshmibai. Yet Ayilyam Tirunal was opposed to the

selection of Kerala Varma. But after becoming the ruler he did not show any trace of ill-feeling against Kerala Varma. He used not only to invite Kerala Varma to the palace, but also to go to his residence, Thevarathu Koyikkal, and remain there long engaged in conversation with him on various subjects. Another instance of encouragement given to Kerala Varma may also be pointed out here. Once the Maharaja came to his residence and asked him to accompany him on a horse to the sandhill known as Pancharakkundu, from where it was about a mile to the Sankumukhom beach. On reaching the hill he asked him to compose a verse while riding close to him. The Maharaja was travelling in a royal carriage drawn by four swift horses. As they were about to start the Maharaja suggested that the verse should be a description of the sea. In a few minutes, both reached the beach at the same time. Kerala Varma immediately recited the verse he composed while riding and the Maharaja who appeared to be pleased asked him immediately to compose another stanza also on the spot on the same theme. In no time the great genius composed another stanza on the surging sea with high sounding words of onomatopoeic effect. Then the Maharaja in all ecstasy presented Kerala Varma with a *Vrasrinkhala*, an emblem of royal recognition, to his great surprise and satisfaction.

That he could purchase any number of books for his personal library at the expense of the palace, was a royal favour enjoyed by the hero. It is recorded that once the King presented him with a beautiful revolving bookshelf. Another royal present he received was a *veena* made of jackwood, cut from the palace garden. Yet another royal gift was a walking stick made of ivory. The Anantapuram palace to which Kerala Varma's family shifted from Karthikapally palace was constructed with a royal grant. As the Maharaja used to show such favours to Kerala Varma, he on his part used to praise him with felicitatory poems on special occasions. One among such poems was *Tulabharasataka* composed in 1865 during which year the King presented the hero with a ring decorated with six valuable diamonds. The Maharaja also used to take Kerala Varma with him during journeys to distant places. The hero accompanied his royal patron in his tour to Madras in 1865 to meet the Duke of Edinburgh and participated in all the grand functions held there. When a committee was constituted in A.D. 1867 (1042 M.E.) for the preparation of Malayalam text-books,

Kerala Varma was appointed as one of its members and later on in A.D. 1868 as its Chairman. Not only due to intimacy, but because of his regard for his political wisdom the King used to consult him on State matters and depute him as his representative for discussion with the British Resident on crucial matters as stated before. Such patronage accounted to a great extent for the all-round development of Kerala Varma's personality.

Ayilyam Tirunal was fortunate to have such a brilliant administrator as Sir T. Madhava Rao as his Dewan and such an enlightened brother as Visakham Tirunal who co-operated with him. As a result the first part of his reign proved to be a golden era for the State of Travancore. It was marked by the development of wise and enlightened principles of administration and Travancore came to be placed in the "First Rank of Native States". In recognition of his administrative abilities and attainments the British Government conferred on the Maharaja the high distinction of "Knight Grand Commander of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India". But during the later part of his reign Ayilyam Tirunal proved to be despotic and corrupt.

Due to the degeneration in the administration and the indifference of the Maharaja to the well being, even of the royal family, his brother Visakham Tirunal ceased to take interest in the affairs of the State and the co-operation between the brothers gradually waned. The King grew envious of his brother for his greater accomplishments and wider popularity among the people. Meanwhile the Dewan also fell into disfavour with the King as he could not fully carry out all the royal behests. This naturally brought the heir-apparent and the Dewan nearer to each other. Regarding certain administrative reforms proposed by the Dewan, the Maharaja could not see eye to eye with him, but in such matters, Visakham Tirunal lent his support to him. In that situation, Visakham Tirunal sought royal permission to go to Madras. Ayilyam Tirunal was naturally not willing but he could not reject the request owing to the strong stand taken by the Dewan in favour of the Prince. The success of the tour irritated the Maharaja very much and he got angry with the Dewan. Finding the continuance of Madhava Rao in Dewanship intolerable, Ayilyam Tirunal made him relinquish his office in 1872 (1047 M.E.) and appointed Sir Seshayya Sastri as Dewan. Following this, Visakham Tirunal contributed an anonymous article to the

Calcutta Review praising the qualities and attainments of Madhava Rao as an administrator and making Ayilyam Tirunal an object of ridicule. This article came to the notice of Lord North Brook who was the then Viceroy of India and he appointed Madhava Rao as the Regent of Baroda. At this act of hostility the Maharaja became enraged and thenceforth he began to persecute his brother like Ravana who persecuted Vibhishana as described by Kerala Varma, later in his epic poem *Visakhavijaya*.

The demoralisation of Ayilyam Tirunal's rule and his growing hostility to Visakhram Tirunal had their natural repercussion on Kerala Varma and his spouse. But both of them behaved prudently and maintained good relations with the Maharaja. All the same, the fact remained that for various reasons they were in their heart of hearts more loyal and attached to Prince Visakhram Tirunal than to Ayilyam Tirunal. The Maharaja, in spite of his suspicion regarding their loyalty, continued to be kind and helpful to them. In fact in that situation the Maharaja consciously tried to keep Kerala Varma on his side by pleasing him with valuable presents and bestowing other favours on him. Further the Maharaja insisted on Kerala Varma's presence in the palace whenever scholars or experts in different fields of art and culture came seeking royal grace. Observing such cordial relationship between them, others who coveted royal favours became jealous of Kerala Varma and they began to carry tales to the Maharaja. But it did not apparently influence the Maharaja in any way. In A.D. 1872 (M.E. 1048) he wanted Kerala Varma as usual to accompany him in the journey to Benares. The latter availed himself of this opportunity to visit Bombay and other places also. At Bombay he could meet John Stratchey and visit the world famous Elephanta caves. From Bombay, travelling via Nasik, they reached Benares and stayed there for more than a week. There he could meet many scholars who received him with respect particularly as they knew about his scholarly eminence in advance through Ilathoor Ramaswami Sastri. During his sojourn at Benares, Kerala Varma visited a few institutions, one of them being the Sanskrit School managed by Babu Harischandra for which he sent a liberal donation and some valuable books on getting back to Trivandrum. He took the ceremonial dip in the holy waters of the Ganges and worshipped at the temples there including the one dedicated to Goddess Durga. On his way back, he visited Poona and there it was his privilege to meet the great

scholar Bodhayanacharya. With the royal entourage he came to Shornur on the way back and from there he went to his family palace at Harippad taking leave of the Maharaja.

After a stay for about a fortnight at Harippad, Kerala Varma returned to Trivandrum to see a marked change in the atmosphere prevalent in the court. The attitude of the Maharaja towards him had undergone a change and he did not receive the usual cordiality from him. The reason was that the Maharaja got clear evidence that Kerala Varma and Lakshmibai had cast their lot with Visakham Tirunal. From Benares, Kerala Varma wrote a letter to Lakshmibai to say that "there was no objection to her meeting the heir apparent in person". The Maharaja happened to see the letter as soon as he returned after the Benares tour. Now that it was proved that Kerala Varma was hostile to him, the Maharaja thought it futile to favour him any more and he decided to wreak vengeance on him. There was no abrupt breach of cordiality between the two, but Kerala Varma's visit to the palace gradually came to a stop. By that time the Dewan Sir Seshayya Sastri also fell into disfavour with the King. Sastri was an upright man and could not cater to the proclivities of the Maharaja to the extent he expected. In that situation Visakham Tirunal, Kerala Varma and Seshayya Sastri naturally formed an inimical group against Ayilyam Tirunal and he made up his mind to disqualify the first to succeed him to the throne and to drive the second away from the portals of the palace in addition to sacking the third from Dewanship.

Perhaps the public in general and officers in particular became discontented at the dispositions and corruption of the Maharaja, but due to the fear of becoming a prey to his wrath they did not put up any resistance. On the other hand, time-servers gathered round the ruler and stood by him in all his misdeeds. There used to be weekly parties in the palace to which such sycophants were invited. At one of such parties the Maharaja made a tirade against the Dewan, charging him with disloyalty and indirectly instigated his henchmen to do away with him, if necessary, by poisoning. Kerala Varma himself having heard the words of the ruler felt really sorry for his friend, the Dewan, and informed him of the impending danger for his life through an anonymous letter. This fact is stated by Kerala Varma himself in his epic poem *Visakhavijaya* (3.36-37). The Dewan in his great perplexity, without considering the matter in all its aspects, handed over the

letter to the Maharaja. At the very sight he identified the author of the letter as he was familiar with Kerala Varma's handwriting and welcomed it as a handle to get rid of his enemy from the palace. He kept this as a top secret till he got the handwriting indentified officially by the Fingerprint Expert under the Madras Government. The Maharaja immediately charged him with treason and in all haste sought for necessary permission from the Madras Governor to proceed against him.

Sensing his brother's intention to punish Kerala Varma, Prince Visakhram Tirunal tried his best to save him from the royal wrath. He even met the Maharaja and suggested that Kerala Varma might be detained in the palace itself under strict restriction of contacts and movements. Further, he assured his brother that he would advise Kerala Varma not to behave like that in future. But the Maharaja told him that the matter was out of his control as he could act only according to instructions from the Governor. Without much delay the Governor's permission to deal with Kerala Varma just like any other criminal was received and the Maharaja made up his mind to arrest him and put him in jail. For this purpose, silver handcuffs were got ready and a date was fixed secretly. The Maharaja wanted to have the sinister pleasure of inflicting a shock on Kerala Varma by arresting him without any warning.

The date fixed for Kerala Varma's arrest was 21st Karkatakam 1050 according to the Malayalam calendar (4th August 1877). On the day at about 10 a.m. without any notice a senior police officer reached the residence of the Maharani and produced the arrest warrant against Kerala Varma for treason. Observing that the officer was behaving in a rather discourteous manner, the Maharani asked him to clear out of the palace lest he should be beaten by her servantmaids with brooms. Then Kerala Varma pacified the Maharani by pointing out that it was not befitting her to get angry with an officer doing his duty under royal command, and the Maharani insisted on following Kerala Varma to the unknown places to which he was to be taken. On being told that the royal pleasure was not in favour of that, she took the firm position that she would not allow her husband to be taken out of the palace and stood there catching hold of Kerala Varma's hand. But ultimately she yielded on being told that if necessary force would be used to take Kerala Varma into custody.

Kerala Varma was first detained at the penitentiary at Alleppey for a period of about fifteen months and at the instance of the Maharaja he was treated very badly by the officers in charge. Once it so happened that the Maharaja fell ill and he had to request for medical advice from Kerala Varma's elder brother who was a well known physician. At that time Kerala Varma's mother made a request to the Maharaja to transfer him to Harippad and keep him under house arrest in the Anantapuram palace so that she could see him occasionally at least. Probably being softened as a result of illness the hard-hearted king consented and Kerala Varma was allowed to stay in his own palace with all the restrictions imposed on a prisoner, but for the freedom to worship at the temple dedicated to Subrahmanya.

At Harippad, Kerala Varma utilised part of his time to teach a few youngsters including A.R. Rajaraja Varma and Thuravoor Narayana Sastri who later on distinguished themselves as great scholars. He taught them *Kavyas* and *Natakas* first and then *Vyakarana* and *Alamkara*.

The miserable life as a prisoner in his own house made Kerala Varma regret very much his past deeds and he thought of appeasing the Maharaja by writing a poem entitled *Kshamapanasahasra* (A Thousand Apologies). It is a wonderful work consisting of 1,000 Sanskrit stanzas with all the literary beauty of an epic poem. On completion the poem was submitted to the Maharaja, but he did not go through it, probably to guard himself against being moved by Kerala Varma's muse. The manuscript was ordered to be kept secretly in the palace library. Being convinced that the Maharaja would not relent Kerala Varma thought that the King's death alone could come to his rescue. Therefore, mustering all his mystic powers, he began to propitiate the God of Death by composing the dreadful poem *Yamapranamasataka* (A Century of Verses in Homage to Yama). He used to compose one stanza every day and prostrate before the God of Death turning south which is said to be his quarter. It is believed that astonishingly enough the King met with his end after a short illness on the very day (19-10-1055) on which Kerala Varma completed the hymn by composing the hundredth stanza.

Having interned Kerala Varma in the Alleppey jail the King wreaked his vengeance on Lakshmibai by restricting her personal freedom and curtailing many of her royal privileges. She was not

permitted to go out of the palace but for worshipping at the Subrahmanya temple at Ulloor and the Padmanabhaswamy temple in the fort. After imposing all these restrictions, the King compelled her to marry a second time and even nominated the new consort. "I have not yet become a widow to marry again" was the categorical reply given to the King by the heroic Maharani. Kerala Varma has made a reference to this in his *Mayurasandesa* (2.60).

As has been mentioned earlier, the Travancore royal house follows the matrilineal system of inheritance according to which the consort to a princess is selected by the ruler. In this situation, for a princess to turn down a matrimonial proposal by the Maharaja requires extraordinary fortitude. Further, it may be taken into account that Kerala Varma was under punishment for treason. An ordinary woman would never have dared to thwart the will of such a powerful monarch as Ayilyam Tirunal. With this great act of hers, Lakshmibai upheld the greatness of Indian womanhood and won a place in the galaxy of heroic women of India.

In Peace with Royalty

Maharaja Ayilyam Tirunal passed away in A.D. 1880 after ruling the State for a period of nineteen years. When Visakham Tirunal and Lakshmibai called on him as he was sinking, he expressed regret at his action against Kerala Varma and asked the former to release him after his (Maharaja's) death. The end of Ayilyam Tirunal marked the end of Kerala Varma's woes too. Visakham Tirunal ascended the throne in A.D. 1880 after completing the rites on the death of his brother. The first official order issued by him in his capacity as the Maharaja was to release Kerala Varma from prison. The hero was enabled to come to Trivandrum immediately accompanied by his nephew A.R. Rajaraja Varma even before the release order was formally issued. Kerala Varma was welcomed with all royal grace.

In the prison, Kerala Varma resolved not to shave his face till he became free and he stuck to his resolution. Soon after he settled down in the palace and regained his peace of mind, Kerala Varma composed a eulogical lyric of four beautiful quartrains and submitted it to Visakham Tirunal. Thus in a peaceful atmosphere, Kerala Varma started again his varied literary activities with redoubled vigour and enthusiasm under the patronage of Visakham Tirunal, his friend, philosopher and guide.

Visakham Tirunal Maharaja was anxious to develop Malayalam as a suitable medium of education and to enrich Malayalam literature on modern lines. The Maharaja found in Kerala Varma the fittest scholar to translate his ideas into action. Realising the importance of Maunder's *Treasury of Biography* in moulding the character of young students, the Maharaja thought of translating

it into Malayalam himself and completed the translation of five of the biographies.

But owing to other pre-occupations and ill health he assigned the rest of the work to Kerala Varma and wrote to him as follows: "A few years ago I started summarising in Malayalam the brief biographies of great and noble men and women belonging to all times and climes collected in his *Treasury of Biography* by Maunder. I thought that if such a book was presented as a text-book by pointing out various illustrations of goodness and greatness it would be possible to develop the latent element of noble and righteous thought in our young men and this would ultimately result in inculcating a sense of morality in them. But my indifferent health and other pre-occupations proved to be obstacles in the way of making enough progress in this effort. I am forwarding herewith a few drafts which I prepared initially to serve as a model. I wish that you may find a way out for me to continue this effort and make it a success." In addition, Visakham Tirunal sent to Kerala Varma materials for writing certain other biographies which were not included in Maunder's book. Kerala Varma took up this project in all earnestness and started working on it by himself.

As the work was in progress the Maharaja revived the Book Committee that became defunct after Kerala Varma's imprisonment and he appointed him as the Chairman. He was given all the facilities for the effective functioning of the Committee and this new environment made him more enthusiastic in the work. The Maharaja himself used to give new suggestions for enriching prose literature. In a letter dated 27th July 1880 Visakham Tirunal wrote to Kerala Varma as follows:

"The book entitled *Akbar* forwarded herewith is a novel regarding India. The character of that great emperor Akbar is delineated in this in a very interesting manner. It is so excellent and captivating that going through it I felt disappointed that I did not have the privilege to live during his time and to spend at least a day with him. In case Akbar's life is not included in the *Treasury of Biography* you may gather the necessary information regarding him from books on Indian history and supplement it with a summary of his character as reflected in this book so that it may be included in the proposed book. This novel deserves to be translated in its entirety into Malayalam."

It is seen that in another letter the Maharaja brought to Kerala Varma's notice a brief biography of Ahalyabai that appeared in the *Calcutta Review* and expressed his wish that it may also be included in the proposed series of biographies. All these indicate clearly that Visakhram Tirunal Maharaja provided a very peaceful and congenial atmosphere for Kerala Varma, to enrich Malayalam literature. During the Chairmanship of the Committee he finished not only the work of *Mahatcharita samgraha*, but also of *Sanmargavivarana*, *Sanmargapradipa* and *Lokathinte Saisavavastha*. In A.D. 1897 the Government curtailed the scope of the activities of the Committee and in A.D. 1898 formulated another scheme which bore little result. However, in that year Kerala Varma was appointed as Adviser to Government regarding the local languages.

After ascending the throne it was usual for a Travancore King to conduct the ceremony known as *Tulabhara*. On the occasion of Visakhram Tirunal's Tulabhara, Kerala Varma wrote a panegyric to commemorate the ceremony. In addition to that, he composed an epic poem in Sanskrit based on the life and works of the Maharaja entitled *Visakhavijaya*. In it, Kerala Varma has depicted the pattern more or less on the lines adopted by Kalidasa in depicting Dilipa in the *Raghavamsa*. Out of the twenty cantos in the poem the Maharaja lived to read and enjoy only fourteen.

A manuscript library was organised in the palace during the reign of Maharaja Swathi Tirunal. Owing to his deep interest in the development of scholarship, Visakhram Tirunal took effective steps in augmenting it and systematising the work carried on by it. Kerala Varma was put in charge of this institution and was given facilities for its development. At that time he was closely following the activities regarding the collections and publications of ancient manuscripts under the auspices of the Governments of Bombay, Bengal and Madras. He used to read the publications issued in the series such as *Bibliotheca Indica*, Calcutta; *Bombay Sanskrit Series*, Bombay; *Anandasrama Sanskrit Series*, Poona; *Bibliotheca Sanskrita Mysore*; *Kavyamala*, Bombay; *Advaitamanjari Series*, Kumbhakonam; *Vizianagaram Series*, Benares etc. Drawing inspiration from such activities, afoot at different parts of India, Kerala Varma bent his energies to the collection, transcription and publication of Oriental Manuscripts belonging to different languages. He ransacked all important family manuscripts libraries in Kerala for this purpose,

and secured copies of manuscripts from libraries outside. As a result of this strenuous effort, the palace manuscript library became a repository of many valuable ancient works. Being a hard worker, Kerala Varma transcribed many manuscripts by himself in his beautiful and steady hand. He presented a transcript of *Prakriya-sarvasva* prepared by himself to Visakham Tirunal as a mark of his gratitude to him. *Sukasandesha* with *tippani* and *Maharajaprasasti* by *Melputtur* were the two Sanskrit books which Kerala Varma edited and published from the Library. It may also be pointed out that a part of *Sukasandesha* with *tippani* was published in the series of Royal Asiatic Society by him. Malayalam works which he edited include *Astapadi* by Ramapurattu Warriar, *Naishadha Campu*, *Bharata Campu*, *Chellurmahatmya n Campu*, and *Ramayana Campu* (part I only). It was Kerala Varma who published the prose works of Ayilyam Tirunal for the first time. He continued to be the Superintendent of the Palace Manuscripts Library till his death.

In his capacity as Superintendent of the Manuscripts Library he carried on correspondence with outside scholars and he became well known in the scholarly world. His guidance did bring the library also to the forefront among such libraries in India. In the work connected with the library he was assisted by T. Ganapati Sastri who later on distinguished himself as the discoverer of Bhasa's plays. It was the training under Kerala Varma that enabled him to win world renown as the editor of *Trivandrum Sanskrit Series*. In appreciation of the assistance that Sastri did to the Manuscript Library, at Kerala Varma's instance the Maharaja gave Sastri a *Virasinkhala*. And the scholar whom Kerala Varma used to consult on matters regarding publication of ancient works was Prof. Sundaram Pillai, at that time Hon. Director of Archaeology. On Prof. Pillai's passing away prematurely in A.D. 1897, Kerala Varma wrote to a friend that it was an irreparable loss to Travancore as well as to him personally.

Reference has already been made to the great qualities and attainments of the Maharani Lakshmi Bai. But due to the misfortune into which she fell they remained unrecognised for a long time. During the reign of Visakham Tirunal all her miseries were wiped off. In A.D. 1881, Queen Victoria conferred on her the title of C.I. as a mark of recognition of her personal and royal eminence. When the news regarding this honour came the Maharani was sojourning at Attingal where she had gone with Kerala Varma for the annual

worship in her family temple. They were indeed overjoyed to receive this news. The possibility of conferring such an honour on the Maharani was anticipated in *Mayurasandesa* by Kerala Varma.

The insignia regarding the honour was presented to Maharani Lakshmibai by the British Resident at a Durbar held at Trivandrum in 1881. In the same year Maharaja Visakhham Tirunal got a new palace constructed and the house-warming ceremony was celebrated in all royal pomp. Kerala Varma submitted to the Maharaja a poem of nine stanzas.

Impressed with the greatness of Visakhham Tirunal, Kerala Varma composed the epic *Visakhavijaya*, but he was not satisfied with it and he thought of writing a biography of the King in Malayalam to serve as a model for others. Kerala Varma obtained the necessary permission from his royal patron and began the work without delay. But it appears that he did not proceed with the work for reasons not specifically known. Probably he was deterred from the attempt as the Maharaja's autobiography was published by then.

In August, 1882, Kerala Varma made a journey to Madras and paid a visit to Mr. Grant Duff, the then Governor of Madras. After that he undertook a long tour that lasted for about a month to North Malabar mainly to meet his relatives and scholars in various places. He went to Quilon first where Visakhham Tirunal was camping at that time and stayed there with the Maharaja for a few days. From Quilon he went to Harippad where he worshipped at the Subrahmanya temple. Then he visited the palaces at Mavelikkara, Ennakkad, Tiruvalla and Changanacherry. He next visited Vaikom and Parappanangadi. Kerala Varma stayed there for a few days and after worshipping his tutelary deity at Niramkaitakkotta temple he started on his return journey. On the way he worshipped at Guruvayur temple where he offered a *Virasrinkhala* on his own behalf and at Kodungalloor temple a golden *Tali* ornament on behalf of his mother. Then via Ernakulam he returned to Trivandrum. The tour gave Kerala Varma an opportunity to know that the people of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, the three regions that comprised Kerala, held him in great respect and love.

The Government of India decided to confer the title of G.C.S.I. on Maharaja Visakhham Tirunal in recognition of his administrative abilities and intellectual eminence. The insignia of the title was to be presented to him by the Governor at Madras. Kerala Varma

accompanied the Maharaja in his tour to Madras in February 1882 to receive the title. For decorating the Maharaja with the much coveted title, the Governor held a huge banquet at which many distinguished persons in addition to officials, were present. During his stay in Madras in this connection, Kerala Varma met Sir Seshayya Sastri, the former Dewan of Travancore and other friends. From Madras along with the Maharani, Kerala Varma went to Tirupati to worship in the Venkateswara temple. On that occasion he could visit Kanchipuram, Chidambaram, Madhura and other important places and worship at the famous temples there in the company of his wife.

The University of Madras nominated Kerala Varma as a Fellow of the University in 1883 and as a member of its Senate. His education was throughout non-formal and he did not get any opportunity to be an alumnus of a college. In spite of that in recognition of his great scholarship and reputation in academic society, the University which was one of the earliest to be established in India honoured him with its membership.

On receiving the information, he expressed his gratitude to Visakham Tirunal in verse, the gist of which is that even as Lord Hari rescued the elephant (Indradyumna) from the clutches of the crocodile and gave it *sarupya*, Visakham Tirunal released Kerala Varma from prison and even caused the conferring of the status of F.M.U. on him, which the Maharaja too possessed. A congratulatory telegram was received from Sir. T. Madhava Rao which was forwarded to the Maharaja. The Maharaja wrote to Kerala Varma as follows: "I am returning Sir Madhava Rao's telegram with many thanks. The concerned copy of the *Fort St. George Gazette* will be forwarded to you as soon as received here. I am happy to know that the little help I did for you in obtaining this title by making a recommendation to Mr. Grant Duff has come up for so much of your appreciation. I remember with what elation I read the letter of Sir William Denison, Governor of Madras, twenty-one years ago nominating me as a Fellow of the Madras University. Now I stand first among all Fellows who are Indians. Bishop Caldwell, Mr. Carmichel, and Mr. Fowler are the only three European Fellows who are senior to me. Among them the latter two are to leave for England soon. In this capacity I again congratulate you for getting a membership on the Senate."

Kerala Varma used to address the University Senate very often emphasising the necessity to give an important place to Indian languages in the curriculum. He was a member of the Board of Studies for Dravidian languages. On the whole, his membership on the Senate proved to be very helpful to Indian languages in general and Dravidian languages in particular to gain a strong foothold in the University at a time when they stood totally neglected.

After a glorious reign for a period of five years Visakhram Tirunal Maharaja passed away on 4th August 1885 leaving his subjects, particularly Kerala Varma, in deep sorrow. He was succeeded by his nephew Sri Mulam Tirunal, the son of Kerala Varma's uncle Rajaraja Varma. The new Maharaja continued to extend the patronage to Kerala Varma but it was not so unreserved as that of Visakhram Tirunal. The reason was obvious that there was no scope for intellectual affinity between them, as the Maharaja was neither a scholar nor a pronounced patron of scholars. Yet they maintained very cordial relationship till Kerala Varma's death.

One of the significant favours which Sri Mulam Tirunal had shown to Kerala Varma was the publication of *Visakhavijaya*. It was published in the *Bombay Sanskrit Series* in 1889 under the editorship of Dr. T. Ganapati Sastri. The Maharaja wanted the editor to exclude the first five *sargas* which practically form Kerala Varma's autobiography upto the re-union with Lakshmibai after imprisonment. This portion had already been read and approved by Visakhram Tirunal. Yet Sri Mulam Tirunal took objection to it. But Sri Mulam Tirunal also accepted him as the authority to recommend scholars for royal honours.

Kerala Varma's fame as a scholar and a Sanskrit poet spread among savants outside India also by that time. In those days, Membership of the Royal Asiatic Society was an honour coveted by Oriental Scholars. Fully appreciating Kerala Varma's claim to be a member of that august body, the world renowned Sanskrit Scholar Sir Monier Williams recommended his name giving a tribute to his eminence as a scholar and the title M.R.A.S. was conferred on him.

The most important assignment that Kerala Varma had during Sri Mulam Tirunal's reign was the establishment of the Sanskrit College in Trivandrum. From the very beginning, Kerala Varma was the guardian angel of the College. The Government of Travancore appointed a committee under his chairmanship with

Subba Dikshitar and Viraraghava Achary as members for making proposals to set up the institution. On the basis of the recommendations of the committee, the College was established and it started functioning in 1889. The syllabus for the courses in the institution prepared at the instance of Kerala Varma by A.R. Rajaraja Varma and Thuravoor Narayana Sastrikal was scrutinised and approved by him with the necessary modifications. The question papers for the examination used to be set and answer scripts valued under his supervision. It was indeed a great privilege for him to see that his favourite students Rajaraja Varma and Narayana Sastrikal become principals of the college.

By that time, Kerala Varma's fame as a scholar spread all over India through his Sanskrit compositions and the efforts he took for the propagation of Sanskrit education. It was at this time that the illustrious Malayalam periodical *Malayala Manorama* came to be started from Kottayam. Through the columns of this periodical many a skilled poet including Kerala Varma attained fame.

The Dominant Literary Figure

In the beginning of the renaissance in Malayalam literature the Bhashaposhini Sabha and its official organ *Bhashaposhini* played a very significant role. Kerala Varma was elected in absentia as its life-president. In performing his functions as the President of the Sabha, Kerala Varma had the dynamic assistance of Varghese Mappilai who was its Secretary.

Ever since Kerala Varma became President of the Sabha, he bent his energy to realise its three-fold objectives, viz. standardisation of the literary language in Malayalam both for poetry and prose, popularisation of useful textbooks, collection, preservation and publication of ancient manuscripts after careful editing.

Kerala Varma's contemporaries held him in great admiration for his scholarship and in reverent regard for his noble qualities. O. Chanthu Menon was perhaps the most outstanding among them. He was a pioneer in the field of Malayalam novel and a Judge in the British service. It was Kerala Varma's Malayalam translation of Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam* that made Menon admire him in the beginning. In course of time, they developed an ideal friendship with each other. As desired by Menon, Kerala Varma translated *Amaruka Sataka* a famous classic in Sanskrit, into Malayalam. Menon's admiration for Kerala Varma seems to have reached its climax when he read his *Mayurasandesa* which appeared in *Bhashaposhini*.

A.R. Rajaraja Varma a great scholar and the first Professor of Oriental Languages in the Maharaja's College, Trivandrum also held Kerala Varma in great esteem throughout his life. Kerala Varma not only shaped A.R. Rajaraja Varma as a great scholar, but also helped him in his official career. In order to make available Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam* to Malayalees in a diction simpler than

that used by Kerala Varma in his translation. Rajaraja Varma wrote *Malayala Sakuntalam* and dedicated it to Kerala Varma.

Kodungalloor Kunjikkuttan Tampuran who became famous as 'Kerala Vyasa' through his translation of the *Mahabharata* into Malayalam, was lost in admiration for Kerala Varma. Mahakavi Ulloor reports: "The great poet Kodungalloor Kunjikuttan Tampuran who could compose poems in Sanskrit as well as Malayalam with amazing spontaneity came to Vaikom in 1911 to participate in the Bhashaposhini Conference. At that time that eminent scholar, an abode of humility, did not sit down until Valiya Koyil Tampuran pressed him three or four times. I, in my curiosity, enquired of him: "Why are you so nervous as not to sit in his solemn presence. I can understand this if this is due to your being junior in age." His apt reply was: "In the presence of that great man, an embodiment of scholarship in grammar and poetic talent in Sanskrit, how could I sit?" Both of these literary luminaries used to write to each other in poetry, Kerala Varma's usual medium being Sanskrit while Tampuran's was Malayalam. Mahakavi Vallathol Narayana Menon was another sincere friend and admirer of Kerala Varma.

It is well known that Kerala Varma's translation of Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam* into Malayalam for the first time was hailed throughout Kerala as a great contribution. The literary world spontaneously decorated him with the title "Kerala Kalidasa". It was justified in view of the theme of the work as well as the superior poetic talents of the translator. But some admirers of Vallathol thought that the title would suit him more than Kerala Varma and they moved for changing it. Vallathol in his wisdom and sense of propriety immediately intervened and openly declared that the move was thoroughly ill-advised as well as unjustified. After this incident, Kerala Varma once wrote to Vallathol, "I value your sincere friendship above everything else."

While others revered Kerala Varma, there was a great scholar and poet who actually adored him. It was none other than Mahakavi Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer. Ulloor came under Kerala Varma's influence in 1910. At that time Ulloor was thinking of pursuing his post-graduate studies in English. But Kerala Varma felt that Ulloor's tastes and talents could much better be harnessed to the development of Malayalam and persuaded him to acquire the M.A. Degree in Malayalam and Tamil. Ulloor accepted the advice and became a devotee of Malayalam language and literature.

Kerala Varma and Ulloor developed an intimacy to the advantage of both. While Ulloor was benefited by Kerala Varma's patronage and scholarly guidance the latter received the loyal assistance of the former whenever necessary. With reference to their close association, Ulloor says: "It was my good luck to have got an opportunity to serve that great man from A.D. 1910 onwards as his secretary in literary matters." It is well known that Ulloor translated Kerala Varma's *Mayurasandesha* into English in such an elegant manner as to receive encomium from a literary luminary like R.C. Dutt. In writing his famous epic *Umakeralam* Ulloor got inspiration from Kerala Varma and when the work was completed he wrote an introduction to it comparing Ulloor with Sri Harsha, the illustrious author of *Naishadhiyacharita* in Sanskrit. Estimating Ulloor's contributions to Malayalam poetry, Kerala Varma said: "His writings have to a large extent been responsible for raising Malayalam verse to the level of Sanskrit poetry."

Ulloor cherished so much adoration for Kerala Varma that he never referred to him as Kerala Varma but only as Kerala Varmadeva.¹ To him this name was so sacred that he considered it as a *mantra*.

All literary luminaries of the time including the great poets Kumaran Asan, K.C. Kesava Pillai, the eminent novelist C.V. Raman Pillai, the well known Sanskrit scholar Punnasseril Nampi Neelakanta Sarma, the famous lexicographer Sreekanteswaram Padmanabha Pillai, a veteran collector of folk tales Kottarathil Sankunni, the illustrious editor of *Swadesabhimani*, Swadesabhimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai, were Kerala Varma's ardent admirers. There was no literary aspirant at that time who did not long for recognition at the hands of Kerala Varma in the form of an introduction to a work or a testimonial. Kerala Varma had also many friends and admirers outside Kerala who included literary men as well as statesmen.

In 1895 Kerala Varma received the title F.R.H.S. from Queen Victoria. For this imperial award, he was recommended to the Queen by Mr. Grigg, a great educational expert who was the British Resident at that time. The insignia of this award was presented by Mr. P. Thomson, the then Resident. To felicitate Kerala Varma on this distinction, a public meeting was held at Trivandrum when he replied as follows:

"Guided by my revered uncle who was a great scholar and a

dignified personage it was my privilege to acquire knowledge in Sanskrit and English. In the wake of that, I thought of directing my effort to the development of my mother-tongue according to the ideals set by him. But I could not do anything substantial towards the fulfilment of my desire. In my capacity as the President of the Book Committee, I could write some books in the form of translations and imitation. I could do a little to give encouragement for the development of Malayalam. But when I imagine what remains to be done in this direction, what has already been done looks like a drop of water in an ocean. It was only by chance that I could inaugurate the branch of dramatic literature by translating *Sakuntalam* into Malayalam."

In his presidential address at the Bhashaposhini Sabha held in 1898 he expressed great gratification on the receipt of this award.

In spite of his growing desire to pursue a spiritual way of life, Kerala Varma continued his literary pursuit. It was not possible for him to retire from literary work as he once stated: "Even if I want to leave Malayalam literature it does not leave me." But the death of his beloved mother whom he held in great respect caused an interregnum in his normal literary work. His mother passed away in 1898 leaving the whole family, particularly Kerala Varma, in deep sorrow.

Kerala Varma had two great misfortunes in life—the indignity he had to face during imprisonment and the agony he had to suffer on account of childlessness. Kerala Varma consoled himself, imagining that *Visakhavijaya* was his son and *Sakuntalam* his daughter. But on the advice of friends and relatives Maharani adopted two young girls from Mavelikkara palace as the princesses of the Travancore royal family. The adoption took place in 1900 and Kerala Varma was appointed by the Maharaja as the guardian of the princesses. He loved them as his own daughters and taught them literature, music, painting and other subjects and paid attention to the shaping of their lives. After the adoption the Maharani lived only for about a period of ten months and she passed away in 1901 leaving Kerala Varma's life in utter gloom. This bereavement adversely affected Kerala Varma's literary activities. He wrote as follows to the great scholar-poet Manavikraman Ettan Raja in the form of a verse:

O! great poet, due to poignant separation for ever with my beloved, my faculties are getting weakened everyday. Therefore, I am not able to write or compose poems as before.

Kerala Varma completed sixty years of his fruitful life in 1905 and the occasion was celebrated in a grand manner. As described in the *Bhashaposhini* at this time it was a "Shashtipurti" celebration for the whole of Kerala. The poets of Kerala among them are A.R. Rajaraja Varma and Vallathol—vied with one another in composing poems felicitating him on the occasion. It was in connection with this celebration that Ulloor published his translation of the *Mayurasandesa*. It is said that it took months for him to complete replying to his well-wishers. The most important among the felicitations in prose came from the pen of K. Ramakrishna Pillai. The following is a quotation from it:

"That great personage who has been working for the last fifty years with single-minded devotion for the development of Malayalam language has today completed his sixtieth year. This great personage has attained that glory and satisfaction which are beyond those of an emperor who reigns supreme after establishing an empire by conquering all the four quarters with irresistible physical powers, formidable military strength and unlimited divine grace. When we remember that this great personage who has established an empire in the realm of Malayalam language with his unusual literary genius, matchless compositions and highly developed poetic taste, is celebrated as the modern Kalidasa not only in Kerala but in India as a whole. Travancore, the State to which he belongs, is entitled to be overwhelmed with ecstasy. It is only appropriate that we consider the completion of sixty years of age on the part of this great man who by virtue of his beautiful imagination and facile diction is an embellishment to Kerala that brings delight to the *Sahridayas*, as a festival of the consummation of the fortune of the people of Kerala as a whole."

Contribution to Sanskrit

Poetic intuition, training under a connoisseur, expertise acquired by observing life and deep study and industry are held by Sanskrit rhetoricians as essential for a poet. All these requirements were satisfied by Kerala Varma by his early education. All his natural gifts and high accomplishments helped him win the reputation of a great poet. But another factor that enlivened his important poems was the autobiographical flavour in his poems. His poetic works in Sanskrit belong to the categories of epic, lyric, drama and the like. The beginning portion of *Visakhavijaya*, the epic based on Visakhram Tirunal's life, is more or less Kerala Varma's autobiography too up to the end of his life in prison. Among his works next in importance is *Kshamapanasahasra* which is a lyric of epic proportion giving vent to his repentance of having crossed swords with Ayilyam Tirunal. The third in importance is *Yamapranamasataka* which is a passionate prayer to the God of Death to destroy his royal enemy. In his religious lyrics he pours out his devotional feelings. The panegyrics he wrote in praise of kings too have a ring of sincerity on account of his genuine respect for them as well as relationship with them. In this perspective one would be convinced that the important appeal of his works is mainly autobiographical.

Visakhavijaya

Kerala Varma was so much impressed with the greatness of Visakhram Tirunal that he found a hero in him suited to an epic poem. In addition to his being a benevolent ruler the Maharaja was a great patron of art and culture. The pursuit of knowledge was a favourite hobby of his and many scientific societies of the West

honoured him in recognition of his attainment. He was a great scholar in Sanskrit and Malayalam and an author of distinction, particularly in English. Above all, his character was very noble and he called himself a *Rajyasramamuni* (an ascetic ruler). It was indeed a great theme that Kerala Varma chose for the epic. In composing this poem, Kerala Varma could be sincere to the very core for he was portraying the life of one whom he knew intimately for about three decades and whom he came to adore for his noble qualities. In brief, the greatness of the theme, the proper mood of the poet and his highly developed poetic talents, have combined in harmony in the production of the poem.

The poem comprises 1307 stanzas in twenty cantos of which Kerala Varma completed the first fourteen when Visakham Tirunal was alive. As the composition was in progress the Maharaja used to read and appreciate it critically. After the death of the Maharaja the poem was completed by adding six cantos. The first five cantos of the poem were only cyclostyled initially with a commentary by Dr. T. Ganapati Sastri. As indicated above, cantos 6 to 15 were edited with introduction and notes by Dr. Sastri and published in the *Kavyamala Series* in 1889. The last six cantos were published in *Vijnanachintamani* and later on, in 1900, a complete edition of the poem was published. Kerala Varma dedicated the poem to Sri Mulam Tirunal Maharaja who was his cousin. The *Visakhavijaya* extolling the life and work of Visakham Tirunal Maharaja may be divided into two parts, the first six cantos dealing with his life upto his coronation and the rest with his important journeys, performances of religious rites and ceremonies, administration, daily life, honours, distinctions, etc. The first part is specially interesting on account of the poet's autobiographical elements so vividly described in it.

In the fifth canto, we come across a moving scene in the final parting of the royal brothers. The remarkable speech which Visakham Tirunal made on the occasion of his coronation is presented fascinatingly in the poem. It reflects the maturity as well as the humility on the part of the king. The speech concludes as follows:

It is not proper for a military chief getting ready for a battle to start boasting. Therefore, I do not proclaim at present anything with regard to my future programme. It will be better, that wise

people observe my action dispassionately and judge them on their merits. My responsibility will be to the people of this State as well as to the British Queen. I shall certainly be alert always in discharging it to the best of my ability.

The presentation of the title G.C.S.I. by the Madras Governor was an important event in the life of Visakham Tirunal. On that occasion a very interesting and touching incident occurred. At the function the Governor stood up holding the precious garland which was the insignia of the title to be presented to the Maharaja. The Maharaja too stood up to receive it. But neither of them moved from his place causing a moment of suspense. Realising the situation, Kerala Varma went to the Governor and got the garland from his hand and decorated Visakham Tirunal with it. In the 19th canto there is an interesting description of a musical concert in which the Maharani and Kerala Varma participated.

In the stanza at the end of every canto, the author refers to his royal ancestry and his exalted position as the consort of the princess of the Travancore royal family. The first half remains unchanged. In the second half of the stanza some useful information is usually given in addition to his own assessment of the poem. This is recognised as the *magnum opus* of the poet and it is bound to have an important place among the *Mahakavyas* in Sanskrit particularly among the poetic biographies.

Kshamapanasahasra

The title of the poem means "thousand apologies". In Sanskrit, just like poems consisting of hundred stanzas (Centuries) there are poems consisting of thousand stanzas also, the *Padukasahasra* by Vedantadesika being a well known example. The first is purely religious while the second is essentially a secular poem intended to appease Ayilyam Tirunal. But it is interesting to note that Kerala Varma has introduced an element of devotion in his poem in an indirect manner. The first stanza is a prayer to Lord Vishnu and the King simultaneously. The last stanza is also similarly composed as a prayer simultaneously to the sun and the King. What is prayed for is *priyadhigamana* (attainment of the object desired) The poem contains another prayer which is a marvel of Kerala Varma's mastery of the Sanskrit language. The wonder here is that when read from the beginning to the end it will yield a sense

with reference to the King and when read vice versa the sense would be with reference to the goddess. When Kerala Varma says:

Like one obedient to your servant's servant fully at your beck and call, I shall live like a hermit in some corner singing your great qualities. (29.12)

One wonders whether the words are really addressed to the King or God Almighty. Further there are many stanzas in the poem which are but echoes of well known *stotras* like *Saundaryalahari*. All these indicate that at the time of composing this poem, Kerala Varma was in a mixed mood of repentance and prayer. Perhaps he wanted to have the satisfaction of praying to God along with the effort to appease the King.

In spite of the element of religious devotion, the poem by and large is secular in character. The poet's main intention was to express regret over his past deeds and to secure his release by appeasing the Maharaja. And he was really optimistic about this as is clear from the following words:

My sins became the Manthara hill for churning the ocean of your patience. First it threw up the poison of your wrath. Thence came the nectar of sympathy. (7.9)

For exciting the compassion of the King, Kerala Varma has harnessed in the poem all devices available for a poet. See how he admits his guilt openly and throws himself at the feet of the Maharaja in a mood of utter helplessness.

While admitting his faults and repenting for them Kerala Varma attributes them to the instigation from the bad company that he had. In his desperate mood he continues to request the King in a moving manner either to put him back in his original prison or kill him. After completing this long poem, as a finishing touch, the poet prays for the mercy of the King.

This poem comprising one thousand stanzas divided into fifty *vimsatis* composed in fifty different metres is a unique piece in literature for various reasons. It was produced while the author was in imprisonment for treason and he might have taken about three years for its composition. Many books have been written in jail; but it was Kerala Varma who thought of writing an apologetic

poem of epic size. His deep scholarship as well as masterly craftsmanship stand reflected in this poem which unfortunately remains unpublished.

Yamapranamasataka

As the name indicates this is a century of verses addressed to the God of Death. It is a thunderbolt of words thrown by Kerala Varma against his arch enemy Ayilyam Tirunal. And it is believed that the King succumbed to this deadly weapon. When the poem of pathetic apology was ruthlessly rejected by the King and the hope of redemption completely shattered, it was only natural that Kerala Varma reacted very violently to it. He was a man of strong will-power as well as deep passion. This poem is the result of his determination to destroy his enemy by invoking the God of Death, in the absence of any other means.

Kerala Varma does not directly pray to the God of Death to destroy his enemy nor does he explicitly mention his name. The poem begins with the following introduction:

The people of Mathura molested by Kamsa, the great oppressor of noble persons, made this prayer of hundred stanzas to Yama.

This device of indirect attack was resorted to probably to avoid the bad taste that would have otherwise become apparent. But the fact remains that it was Kerala Varma himself who propitiated the God of Death with this hymn for putting an immediate end to Ayilyam Tirunal's life.

Each of the hundred stanzas in the hymn ends with the words *esha pranamah* (my salutation to thee). It begins with the following prayer:

O! Lord of Dharma, please cast aside this great indifference of yours; do not forget the autocratic actions of the monarch of all the three worlds. How can you tolerate this smashing of righteousness in this world? Immediately send your men to destroy the enemy of Dharma. I offer my salutation to Thee.

A terrific prayer to annihilate the life of the enemy is cited below:

May your powerful soldiers approach the enemy and destroy his life by assaulting him with deadly weapons. O, sun's offspring

with a face terrific on account of the eye-lids rendered red by the fire of anger emanating from the eyes, I offer my salutation to Thee. (85)

From the Vedic age Sanskrit has been enriched by a large number of hymnal compositions unknown in any other literature. Many are the deities to whom the hymns are addressed; many are the boons sought for, including the destruction of one's enemy. But so passionate and powerful a prayer for the immediate annihilation of an enemy is not to be met within any of such hymns. Through this hymn, Kerala Varma directed all the occult powers possessed by him against his royal enemy and produced an inimitable invocatory poem. *Dandanathastotra* and *Satrusamharaprarthana sataka* addressed respectively to Goddesses Dandanatha and Katyayani are also prayers by Kerala Varma against Ayilyam Tirunal, but they are not so vehement and creative of dreadful feelings as the *sataka*. Further they do not contain such high sounding and strange words that echo a sense of horror. The poem of apology and the prayer to the God of Death indicate that Kerala Varma could be extremely soft and terribly hard as occasion demanded.

Kerala is a land of temples. Kerala Varma had great faith in temple-worship and he had composed *stotras* in praise of deities installed in many temples – Lord Krishna at Guruvayoor, Lord Siva at Vaikom and the divine couple Siva-Parvati at Chengannoor are prominent among them. The *Guruvayupuresastava* addressed to Lord Krishna contains fifty-one stanzas in various metres. This is essentially a prayer for divine grace to bring relief from rheumatic complaint which used to trouble the poet off and on. The poet used to worship at the temple at Vaikom dedicated to Lord Siva annually on the occasion of the Ashtami festival. He composed the *Vyaghralayesasataka* in 1888. In the last decade of verses the poet describes Lord Siva from head to foot.

The hymn to Parvati and Parameswara installed in the temple at Chengannoor or Sonadri, comprises 102 verses in two parts in Arya metre. They were composed in 1909 and published with an introduction by the great Sanskrit scholar Punnasserri Nampi Nilakanta Sarma. It is known both as *Sonadrisastotra* and *Aryastotra*. In composing this hymn Kerala Varma was influenced by Muka, the author of the famous work *Aryasataka stotra*.

Kerala Varma was a follower of Tantric cult and his devotion to the Mother Supreme knew no bounds. So it was only natural that he composed many hymns addressed to Her. *Lalitambikadandaka*, *Lalitambikastotra* and *Trisatyantaram* are the most important among them. The first is modelled on the well known *Syamaladandakam* and it is noted for its musical effect as well as devotional fervour. *Lalitambikastava* is of great autobiographical significance. It was composed while Kerala Varma was in prison and it is a prayer to the Supreme Mother to end his miseries and reunite him with his wife. As in the case of *Yamapranamasataka* this is also composed in an indirect manner as a prayer by Vasudeva for releasing him from the prison in which he was put by Kamsa.

The thousand adjectives were used to propitiate the Goddess which are traditional as well as conceived by the ingenuity of the poet. The *stotra* consists of 117 stanzas and reflect the agony of the author in separation.

Regarding his *stotra* entitled *Trisatyantaram*, Kerala Varma indicates that the hymn was composed at the instance of Ilattoor Ramaswamy Sastri and it is modelled on the original *Trisati*, a text in the Tantra cult. In spite of the fact that the author out of modesty considers this *stotra* as far inferior to the original *Trisati*, it has its own literary and religious merits.

This hymn which is a significant contribution to the Tantric literature consists of 101 stanzas in *anushtubh* metre. The outstanding feature of the work is that it contains 300 attributes of the Goddess which are conceived according to the Tantric tenets and expressed in words overflowing with devotion.

From the eleventh stanza begins the chain of the divine appellations and it runs up to the eighty-fifth stanza. The last sixteen stanzas contain the author's observation on his own work and declaration of unflinching devotion to the Mother Goddess.

With the compositions of such an authoritative and inspired work, Kerala Varma may be taken to have risen to the level of an *Acharya* in the Tantric cult. In addition to this *stotra*, Kerala Varma has composed many short hymns.

It was the privilege of Kerala Varma to enjoy the patronage of kings and that put him under obligation to write panegyrics about them on ceremonial occasions. In 1861 on the occasion of the birthday celebration of Ayilyam Tirunal, the Raja of Parvathipuram at Panthalam called on Kerala Varma on the eve of the celebration

and in the course of their conversation he recited a few quatrains composed in honour of the ruler and enquired whether Kerala Varma had composed any panegyric in that connection. The latter replied that he would send him a copy of it the next day. The fact was that Kerala Varma did not think at all about the matter. That night taking three or four hours time he wrote a short work under the title *Tirunal Prabandham*, eulogising the King in the usual manner. Kerala Varma was only 16 years of age then. Yet it is a readable work reflecting the author's poetic talent and scholarship.

To felicitate his patron on the occasion of the conferment of the insignia G.C.S.I. Kerala Varma composed a poem of 27 verses under the title *Nakshatramala* (A Garland of Stars).

The concluding part of the stanza is reminiscent of Harsha's famous statement in *Naishadhiyacharita* justifying his attempt in writing a poem on such a great king as Naishadha.

The anointment of Visakham Tirunal as the King of Travancore was an occasion of great joy particularly for Kerala Varma because of their close relationship. The release of Kerala Varma from jail and the anointment took place almost together. It was only natural that he felt moved to write a poem in praise of the Maharaja at that time. This poem comprises only ten stanzas; yet the sincerity behind it, coupled with the poetic gift of the author, has made it a laudable piece.

Tulabharasataka is another panegyric which Kerala Varma submitted to Visakham Tirunal who conducted the Tulabhara ceremony in 1885. The greatness of the ceremony, the grand reception given to the guests, the musical concert, and the assemblies of scholars are some of the topics described at length in this poem consisting of ten decades.

To Sri Mulam Tirunal Maharaja also Kerala Varma dedicated a poem entitled *Srimula Ramavarma Maharaja Padaravindasatakam*. The Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria was celebrated in 1887 and to commemorate the occasion, Kerala Varma composed a short biographical poem comprising 108 stanzas.

Kamsavadha is the only *campu* to Kerala Varma's credit and it is one of his early works. The story is taken from the *Dasamaskandha* of the *Mahabhagavata*. Srikrishna's sports, particularly his love dalliances with the Gopis are described in the beginning, followed by Narada's advent to meet Kamsa. The story

up to the death of Kamsa and installation of Ugrasena is covered in the work. It contains 115 stanzas and 15 prose passages.

Even though a product of Kerala Varma's early years, *Kamsavadha* reflects his poetic talents as well as his scholarship in Puranic lore. *Sringaramanjaribhanam* is one of the early works and is perhaps his only contribution to the *rupaka* genre in Sanskrit literature. The author himself was not quite satisfied with the quality of the work and was not very enthusiastic about its publication.

Kerala Varma had great critical insight and he had written critical appreciation of works like *Sukasandesha*. Among such writings his assessment of *Sakuntalam* in verse is a significant contribution. It consists of only twelve verses in *anushtubh* metre which is very convenient for factual statements.

Kerala Varma was a master of Sanskrit prosody and poetics. He uses 50 separate metres in composing the 50 *vimsatis* in the *Kshamapanasahasra*. It is doubtful whether any other Sanskrit poet has employed so many different metres in a poem to compose passages consisting of as many as 50 cantos of 20 stanzas each. In his *Dandanathastava* he has used almost all known metres in Sanskrit. *Visakhavijaya* contains *yamaka* passages which indicate the author's great mastery over vocabulary. In composing *chitrakavyas* also Kerala Varma was an adept as is clear from the *Chitraslokavali*, a *stotra* on Goddess Parvati included in *Kshamapanasahasra*. That the third line in all the 51 quatrains in the *Guruvayupurastava* begins with the consonant *kh*, is really a formalistic achievement in poetic technique. In the same hymn the poet has used many rare single-syllable words and proved his profound scholarship. It is noteworthy that the different groups of the attributes of the Goddess begins with the same syllable such as *ka*, *sa*, *ha*, *la*, in the *Trisatyantara*. In the *Sonadrisastava*, the poet has succeeded in mentioning the name *sonadri* in one way or the other in all the 101 stanzas. Above all, the reader will meet with grand imageries and figures of speech in Kerala Varma's works. In regard to diction, he was an adept in using *vaidarbhi* as well as *gaudi* according to the subject in hand. But one would feel that his preference was for *gaudi* and he revelled in composing poems in that diction. Even as Kerala Varma's poetry is remarkable for its external embellishment, its emotional appeal is not of a mean order. He was conscious of the fact that *rasa* is as good as the

soul of poetry and he has delineated different *rasas* in his poems with remarkable success. On the basis of his contributions which are substantial in character and wide in range, Kerala Varma can easily be considered as one of the most eminent Sanskrit poets of India in recent times.

Enrichment of Malayalam Poetry and Drama

Poetry in Malayalam developed mainly under the influence of Tamil and Sanskrit. The branch under the influential Tamil came to be known as *pattu* and that under the influence of Sanskrit as *manipravala*. Poetry gradually entered another channel as a handmaid to visual arts among which *koothu*, *thullal* and *kathakali* were the main ones. For use in the art of *koothu*, there came to be written *champus* in verse and prose. To accompany the *thullal* dance, songs under the name of *Thullal Pattu* were composed. Similarly to provide the background music accompanying the *Kathakali* dance were written texts called *Attakkathas*. Kerala Varma's early contribution to Malayalam poetry mainly consists of six *attakkathas*, viz. *Hanumadubhavam*, *Dhruvacharitam*, *Matsyavallabhavijayam*, *Pralambavadham*, *Parasuramavijayam* and *Somavara-vratam*. Of these the last work has not yet seen the light of day.

Utram Tirunal Martanda Varma was a great patron of *Kathakali* and in those days the art was performed in the palace almost every day. Kerala Varma who was interested in acting even from his childhood naturally got fascinated by *Kathakali*. Further his uncle Rajaraja Varma introduced him to it by singing certain songs and demonstrating the gestures used to interpret them. With the lesson he got from his uncle, he used to observe critically the performance of the *Kathakali* artists and judge it judiciously. In addition to this interest generated early in his life, Kerala Varma might have found full scope for the display of his musical talents and Sanskrit scholarship in composing *Attakkathas*. Among the six works the first was written when the poet was about nineteen years

and the last missing work was completed during the last stage of his life in prison.

As is usual with *Attakkatha* writers, Kerala Varma also adopted the themes for his works from Puranic literature and he depicted mainly the sentiments of valour, religious devotion and love. While *Parasuramavijayam* reflects the exuberance of valour *Dhruvacharita* overflows with devotional feelings. As a rule the songs are remarkable for their literary beauty and musical appeal and the Sanskrit stanzas that introduce the various scenes in *Kathakali* are notable for their elegant diction and poetic excellence. The poet has embellished the songs in *Dhruvacharita* with alliteration at the end. In spite of his being well versed in the art, Kerala Varma used to consult professional musicians in setting the songs to music. His *Attakkathas* are of considerable stage-effect, but are not popularly staged in these days probably due to the new touches in them and Sanskrit-ridden style. Even though Kerala Varma's *Attakkathas* are the products of his early age they reflect clearly his musical talents and poetic gifts in addition to his deep scholarship in Puranic lore.

Before Kerala Varma became the accredited literary leader, Malayalam poetry was essentially religious and consisted of works based on adaptations and modifications of themes borrowed from ancient epics and *Puranas*. It was he who changed the course of Malayalam poetry by translating books from other languages into Malayalam and by writing original works himself. His translation of *Amarukasataka* was the first of its kind in Malayalam literature. As has already been indicated, O. Chanthu Menon was deeply interested in this work and it was published in 1893 under his supervision. In this translation, Kerala Varma tried his best to minimise the use of Sanskrit words; yet he had to use some which were unavoidable. It must be said to the poet's credit that he succeeded in translating the verses without impairing delicate sentiments suggested in them. He has also made use of suitable alliteration.

Literary men in general welcomed this work, but some critics with a narrow sense of morality felt that Kerala Varma should not have undertaken the translation of this work on the theme of pure love, as according to them it was apt to mislead the ordinary reader. Somebody had also pointed out certain metrical defects in the translation, in an article published in the journal *Kerala Patrika*. The reply which Kerala Varma wrote to this criticism was published

deleting certain portions discourteous to the paper. About this Kerala Varma wrote in a verse:

Do the defects attributed to *Vritta* really hold good to my composition or to *Kerala Parika*.

Vritta by *double entendre* means metre with reference to the translation and character with reference to the journal.

Sri Nilakantha Dikshitar's famous Sanskrit poem *Anyapadesa-sataka* was also translated into Malayalam by Kerala Varma and it was published in 1902. In a lecture delivered at the Bhashaposhini Sabha, Kerala Varma quoted the third stanza from the original and when the lecture was finalised for publication in the *Bhashaposhini* he felt inclined to give a Malayalam version of the stanza instead of the original in Sanskrit. Afterwards, Kerala Varma thought of translating the whole of the original poem to which he had been introduced in his younger days by his uncle Rajaraja Varma. As the translation progressed, his wife also evinced keen interest in the work and gave incentive to him to complete it soon. But it so happened that she passed away in 1901 before it was published. This translation is remarkable for its faithfulness and the dexterous manner in which it is embellished with the punctilious alliteration in the second letter of every line (*dvitiyaksharaprasa*).

It was Kerala Varma's confirmed view that Malayalam poetry should be enriched not only by translations from Sanskrit, but also by translations from English. As a model for the latter he translated one of Tennyson's sonnets into Malayalam. On perusing this translation, Sri Visakham Tirunal wrote to Kerala Varma as follows: "I am indebted to you very much for the stanzas enclosed in your letter. They have come out very well. These verses bring to relief how much our literature would be benefited by introducing into it the noble and pure thought as well as the motif of sympathy met with in the best poems in Western literature. I am not sure whether you have read Tennyson's, "In Memorium and Idylls". They contain many passages which properly rendered in *manipravala* style would bring abiding vigour to our literature." It is not known whether Kerala Varma has translated any other English poem into Malayalam. But the example he set has been followed by many scholars to pursue the line and open new poetic vistas in Malayalam poetry. How deeply he was interested in enriching Malayalam by

the translations of English poems stands further confirmed in a letter which he wrote to the author of *Navaratnamalika* which contains the translations of nine select poetic pieces from English. "I am in due receipt of your letter of the 14th instant, and the copy of the *Navaratnamalika*, which you have so kindly sent me. I feel thankful to you for having sent it to me. You have striven and be it said, successfully, to import to the non-knowing public of Kerala some knowledge of the great treasures of English literature.

At this age of mine and circumstanced as I am, to undertake translations of this type is an extremely difficult task and so far as I can think of, I do not see anyone but yourself who will be both willing and competent to bring out more translations of the kind. The literature badly wants enrichment in the above direction, and your valuable leisure cannot be better spent than in the 'noble' task of supplying this crying demand. *Mens sana in corpore sana* is a divine gift, but it is allotted but to few in this frail world of ours. I heartily congratulate you in this happy possession."

Kerala Varma's original contributions to Malayalam poetry are also considerable. For his creations he adopted themes religious as well as secular. The former category includes *Ashtamirohini Mahatmyam*, *Sri Padmanabha padapadma satakam* and *Stuti satakam*. The first is based on a story taken from *Brahmandapurana* and it contains songs in ten tunes meant for ladies to sing in the course of their group dances. The second is a hymn (published in 1907) addressed to Lord Sri Padmanabha and it is of much autobiographical significance. What is remarkable in the *Sri Padmanabha-padapadma satakam* is the candidness with which he pours out his mind standing in the presence of his Lord. As the light of spirituality began to dawn on him he felt that all his literary endeavours, musical expertise, hunting expedition, fascination for sports and games and other worldly pursuits were all futile in realising the ultimate goal of life. He gave vent to such feelings in the following words:

I found pleasure in literature, music and the like. I was enthusiastic about the game of hunting. In vain I studied four or five languages and enjoyed the beauty of literature for a long period.

An interesting instance of his outspoken nature may be pointed out here. In the course of his composing this poem the poet

K.C. Kesava Pillai called on him and regarding the line: "I enjoyed the pleasure of *Kadambari* without any restraint" occurring in the manuscript, the poet pointed out that the word *Kadambari* would present to the reader the meaning of liquor rather than that of the Sanskrit classic *Kadambari* and so the line should be changed. But Kerala Varma said: "It need not be changed; let it be there." "You know that I am writing this for the expiation of my sins." As the poet insisted, Kerala Varma changed the line to mean, "I enjoyed sexual life to my heart's content" as it appears in the text at present.

Even though Kerala Varma crossed swords with Ayilyam Tirunal in principle, he set much store by the royal patronage. While looking back on his dependence with kings he feels that it resulted in sins to his discredit and he prays that the grace of God may destroy them:

May the lotus feet of Sri Padmanabha prove to be an instrument to destroy my sins accumulated by praising these crooked kings without remaining quiet and singing the glories of God.

Such poignant repentance and candid confessions mark the poem. Yet it is satisfying to note that it is perfect in poetic technique, especially in cadence as well as alliteration. Above all the sentiment of religious devotion pervades the work.

The poem consists of two parts of fifty stanzas each and it reflects the author's great spiritual enlightenment and deep erudition in Hindu mythology. The third hymn entitled *Stuti satakam* consists of ten decades addressed to different deities and it also reflects more or less the same sentiments as in *Sri Padmanabha-padapadma satakam*.

Mayurasandesa composed in *manipravala* style is a prominent poem with strong autobiographical flavour, as already pointed out. It is a work belonging to the genre of Messenger-poem inaugurated by the great poet Kalidasa and it follows the 'Cloud Message' (*Meghadutam*) in its form and metre. The theme of the poem is Kerala Varma's sending a message of love through a peacock from Harippad where he was imprisoned, to his wife Lakshmibai residing at Trivandrum.

The period of Kerala Varma's imprisonment was from 1875 to 1880 and the message is supposed to have been sent in 1880 a little

before his release. But the fact remains that the poem was actually composed in 1893, thirteen years after he was released from the prison and it naturally reflects the "emotion recollected in tranquillity". The poet took just two months to complete the poem and it was published in the journal *Bhashaposhini* in two instalments. It was published with an introduction by O. Chanthu Menon. Later 'Malayala Manorama and Co.,' brought out an edition, and then from the northern and southern parts of Kerala many editions were published, the most popular among them being the one containing the commentary entitled *Marmaprakasa* by A.R. Rajaraja Varma. Because of the novelty of the theme and the elegant *manipravala* style embellished with the extraordinary beauty of alliteration, the poem became so popular that many learnt it by rote. Mahakavi Ulloor translated the poem into English in metrical form.*

This is a unique poem among the *dutakavyas* as it is based on the actual experience of separation in life of the hero and the heroine, while the theme in all other poems belonging to the genre including the first work of Kalidasa, are figments of imagination. The poet Kerala Varma himself and Lakshmibai, Senior Princess of Travancore Royal family, are the hero and heroine of the poem and their separation is caused by the imprisonment of the former as has already been described. In the background of the theme there is a leaf of Kerala history with which two eminent princes Ayilyam Tirunal and Visakham Tirunal were connected. Therefore, the theme of the poem has assumed a personal as well as a historical significance unseen in any other messenger-poem. Regarding this Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy, an authority in Indian literary criticism makes the following comment in his introduction to the *Mayuradutam*:

"The apparent frame of a parted husband sending a love-message to his devoted wife far away, through a peacock, is indeed a wornout poetic concept But to a sensitive reader who knows the biographical background of Kerala Varma, an entirely new significance comes to be suggested in a most striking and appealing way. This is the very highway of *Vastudhvani* highlighted

*The present writer published a critical edition of the poem with a historical introduction and an exhaustive commentary entitled *Keralahridayam* in 1965 and in 1984 he published his Sanskrit version of the poem entitled *Mayuradutam* with an English translation.

as a norm of best poetry by no less a critic than Anandavardhana who is admittedly the doyen of Indian theoreticians of poetry."

The selection of a peacock as the messenger is also noteworthy. Kerala Varma, even though kept under house-arrest at Harippad, was allowed to go to the Subrahmanya temple in that locality. In the temple a peacock, the proverbial mount of Lord Subrahmanya, was reared in reverence whom Kerala Varma thought of commissioning as his messenger. The poet who went to the temple for worship naturally happened to see the peacock there, and the thick plumage of the bird made him remember his beloved of dark tresses.

Then the hero appealed to the noble bird to convey his message to the heroine residing far away at Trivandrum. The situation in which the peacock was selected as the messenger is described in a natural manner so as to carry conviction to the reader. But the selection was not such a simple thing as it appeared, for Kerala Varma had a deeper purpose in view in making the same. In a *Dutakavya* in addition to the messenger there will only be two main characters, viz. the hero and the heroine. But by pitching upon the peacock as the messenger the poet has successfully introduced another character in the poem. Visakha (Subrahmanya) being the divine master of the peacock, the poet got enough opportunities to refer to the god in reverence in the course of the poem and those references could apply to Visakham Tirunal, his patron, by suggestion, and indicate his respect to him. Because of the constant reference to God Visakha one would feel that Visakham Tirunal is a lively character in the poem. By the selection of the peacock as the messenger the poet got another opportunity too to indicate his wrath against Ayilyam Tirunal. The peacock is a natural enemy of the serpent which is the symbol of the star Aslesha on which Ayilyam Tirunal was born. In the poem the reader comes across a number of places in which the hero asks the peacock to destroy serpents on the way. These passages indicate the poet's hatred for Ayilyam Tirunal who is symbolised by the serpent. In brief the holy relationship of the peacock with God Visakha and its natural enmity towards serpents have afforded the poet the chance to show his respect towards Visakham Tirunal and hatred for Ayilyam Tirunal throughout the poem. In this respect Kerala Varma has shown a marvellous ingenuity and added considerably to the significance of his poem. The selection of the

messenger was also ingenious as there was a counterpart to the peacock (*Nilakantha*), a trusted officer called Nilakanta Pillai who used to convey message from Kerala Varma to Lakshmibai and vice versa during the period of their separation.

The poem is composed in *mandakranta* metre. It consists of two parts of which the first comprises 68 stanzas and the second 73. After indicating the cause of separation the hero's meeting the peacock is described. The hero asks the messenger to convey the message to his wife and gives a detailed account of the route from Harippad to Trivandrum in highly ornate language.

The poem is written in mellifluous *manipravala* style, conducive to the proper *rasa*. Malayalam and Sanskrit words are so combined that they would appear to belong to one and the same language and as a result the poem has acquired a felicity of its own. Kerala Varma is the greatest among *manipravala* poets in modern times and his *Mayurasandesa* is probably the last substantial *manipravala* work written in Malayalam.

Beauty of sound is an outstanding poetic merit in *Mayurasandesa* and it is appreciated by one and all. This mainly consists of rhyme of different varieties. Rhyme in the second syllable of every line in its exact form is kept up throughout the poem. Sometimes it is seen in the third or fourth or other syllable also at the end of the stanza. In Malayalam poetry the rhyme on the second syllable (*dvitiyakshara*) has come to stay from time immemorial and this poem stands foremost in its excellence in this regard. It is to be noted how the poet has achieved this without impairing the sentimental charm of the poem. This is the main factor that has made the poem popular among literary readers. The poem is rich in imagery also. In the garden attached to the Residency at Quilon the peacock enjoys a little leisure and in that connection the hero in his anxiety tells the messenger that it should not linger in the garden very much allured by the pleasures there:

“There in that bower creepers will shine forth in smiles of blooming flowers like Malli and Jati, and sportive as they are, with their hands of tender leaves will caress you gently. Fascinated by the pleasures of their company you should not stay there long. O! take pity on me and move forward.” (1.41)

In the course of his message of love to the heroine the hero says that he perforce remembers her on seeing the jasmine creeper in the rainy season:

“In this rainy season as I see the jasmine creeper shaken by breeze, wet with drops of water and charming with newly bloomed flowers; O! my beloved, perforce I remember you as you get agitated with anger in love, sullied with torrents of tears and brightened up with graceful smiles in succession.” (2.66)

The charm of this imagery in which the poet strikes a parallel between the various changes on the heroine's face as she assumes the anger of love and the jasmine in rainy seasons, is very enjoyable.

The dominant sentiment reflected in the poem is love in separation even though other moods too reflect as auxiliaries to it. In making the poem suggest the *Vipralambha sringara* in all its grace and poignancy, the poet has succeeded. How moving it is to hear the hero remind his beloved through the messenger as to how unexpected and anguishing their separation was:

“O! peerless beauty, when we were spending happy days in amorous dalliances in our moonlit residence swimming as it were in the ocean of mirth, did we ever think such a fate would befall us? O! my darling, unpredictable indeed is the course of destiny.” (2.57)

The description of the sorrow of separation reaches its climax with the *mudravakya* in the message:

“Once in my enthusiasm for hunting, O! dark-eyed damsel, I shot down the male bird from a pair seated together in our garden. Obviously moved with sympathy did you not immediately ask me to bring an end to its distressed mate too?” (2.68)

This is indeed a hit in the poem. Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy makes a comparison of the peacock-messenger with the cloud-messenger and concludes that they are like twins, the latter perhaps excelling the former by a little margin.

Why did the poet not write this messenger-poem while he was in jail? Even after his release why did he wait for such a long period for its composition? During the period of his imprisonment, in spite of the agony of separation, it was the feelings of humiliation and insult that engrossed his mind, and consequently he sought for ways and means for redress. As a result of that Kerala Varma harnessed his entire capacity to the production of *Kshamapanasahasra* and *Yamapranumasataka*. By the time he got out of the jail he was overpowered with his gratitude towards Visakhham Tirunal who proved to be his saviour and began to compose *Visakhavijaya* to eulogise him. In this poem he could bring out his love and indebtedness to his wife Lakshmibai also. Further the programmes which he took up for the development of literature left him little time to think of composing a poem based on such a love theme of personal interest.

Time drifted like this. But there arose a situation under which he came to be compelled to compose such a poem in due deference to his beloved. The fact that the Maharani in spite of her becoming mature in age did not come to the family way was making the domestic life of the couple gloomy day by day. Yet the necessary medical treatments were continued and religious ceremonies performed unflinchingly. Hoping against hope the couple lived. But at last it became almost certain that they could not have the luck of having a child and as a result of that the Maharani became thoroughly dejected and crestfallen. He was ready to do anything to regain her happiness.

It was in such a mood that the idea of composing a poem that would please her, dawned on him. Its publication when both the hero and the heroine were alive was indeed a unique event. In the poem, Kerala Varma pays a glowing tribute to Lakshmibai by describing her as a heroic woman of extraordinary character and will-power.

There are two more original poems to Kerala Varma's credit *Kairaliprasasti* and *Daivayogam*. Both these poems deal with themes of social significance. In the first the poet pays an encomium to the lady scholars of Kerala and it reflects his deep interest in the education of women. The second published in 1908 consists only of 108 stanzas but the story is long enough and ample for a *mahakavya* or a novel. The title *Daivayogam* means luck and the poem brings

out the luck of the hero Kochuraman in marrying Kochusita his erstwhile master's daughter.

As pointed out by Mahakavi Ulloor in his *History of Literature* this poem in its pattern varies very much from Kerala Varma's usual compositions. The main difference is that the poem does not contain the alliteration in the second syllables of every line, a verbal embellishment which the poet used to insist upon. The reason for this change is given by Kerala Varma himself in the poem in the following words:

I narrate here the story of *Daivayogam* according to the wish expressed by my dear nephew and foremost among my disciples that I may compose a new poem avoiding the practice of employing rhyme. (stanza 2)

This request was made by Prof. A.R. Rajaraja Varma against the background of a literary controversy in which both he and Kerala Varma were involved.

Malayalam poetry was traditionally embellished with the rhyme called *Dvitiyaksharaprasa* or similarity in the second syllable in the lines. This alliteration began to assume more importance under Kerala Varma's influence as he stood for similarity in consonant as well as vowel in the syllable in regard to this type of alliteration. Kerala Varma could easily stick to this verbal embellishment in his poems, but that was not the case with other poets. Moreover the view that strict adherence to this alliteration on the part of the poets would affect the beauty of sense in their poems, also gained ground among literary men. In this regard a controversy was started in the column of the *Malayala Manorama* in 1890, but Kerala Varma kept silent over it. But as he was dragged into the controversy, the following opinion was expressed by him:

"The rhyme which was followed by poets of Malayalam literature from the beginning upto the present time can hardly be eschewed. As there are degrees of variations in the power of composing poetry there are degrees of variation in the capacity to use alliteration. There are not many who use alliteration in a perfect manner in Malayalam poetry. Those who are interested in the subject may examine which are the modern poems that contain the alliteration in the second syllables including the consonant

and vowel. In my translations of *Sakuntalam* there occur many such stanzas. It is enough evidence to show that I am an advocate of alliteration. These who have not got the natural intuition for writing poetry should not try it. In the same way those who are incapable of achieving alliteration without effort should not attempt it."

A.R. Rajaraja Varma who came out with the view that "alliteration has become an obstruction like a fort to the natural flow of Malayalam poetry" translated Kalidasa's *Meghadutam* and *Kumara-sambhavam* into Malayalam without caring for alliteration. In the introduction to the translation of the former the translator stated: "I have not got the least doubt that alliteration adds to the beauty of *manipravala* poetry. I dispensed with this in the translation of *Meghadutam*, so to say, due to my disinclination to take effort or due to my inability in the matter."

The advocates of *dvitiyaksharaprasa* carried on the propaganda that it was due to his inability that A.R. Rajaraja Varma was making such a tirade against it. To this came the rebuttal that even Kerala Varma was not in a position to use alliteration throughout a poem in a systematic manner. This allegation was disproved by the publication of *Mayurasandesam*, but immediately the rivals raised the challenge that even Kerala Varma could not achieve alliteration pure and simple in translation. This challenge was also met by Kerala Varma by translating the Sanskrit work *Anyapadesasataka* scrupulously observing the alliteration on the second syllable in every line. In his foreword to this translation published in 1902 Kerala Varma made the following statement with amazing confidence in his scholarship:

"In my first Malayalam work *Keraliyabhasha-Sakuntala* and in the second one *Amarukasatakamanipravala* even though I have used the alliteration in consonant as well as vowel in many stanzas, that rule was not followed uniformly throughout them. That was due only to my indifference and not inability. In case these words reflect self-praise readers may forgive me. With the view that even the ordinary *dvitiyaksharaprasa* is not desirable, A.R. Rajaraja Varma, M.A., M.R.A.S. my beloved disciple and nephew, wrote *Bhasha Meghasandesa* and *Bhasha-Kumara-sambhavam* to the pleasure of *Sahridayas*. At that time I wrote an

original poem *Mayurasandesa* as an experiment to show whether without abandoning my usual insistence regarding *dvitiyaksharaprasa* an enjoyable poem could be composed. But this work is a trial to find out whether the *dvitiyaksharaprasa* rule could be strictly followed in a translation as in an original work. I believe that *Sahridayas* will get impressed that the attempt that I have made in this direction has become a success without any special effort on my part."

Following this, A.R. Rajaraja Varma wrote a trenchant criticism against *dvitiyaksharaprasa* in his work on rhetoric entitled *Bhasha-bhooshanam* published in the same year. In spite of his strong predilection for the above rhyme, Kerala Varma also began to feel that gifted poets can produce beautiful poems even without adorning it with rhyme. In that situation Rajaraja Varma requested his uncle to attempt such a poem and *Daivayoga* was the result.

Still the controversy continued till under A.R. Rajaraja Varma's mediation, the participants agreed to bury the hatchet and Kerala Varma advised the poets to utilise their time for enriching poetry rather than waste it on trivial matters of rivalry. This controversy has brought to relief Kerala Varma's deep scholarship and dexterity in versification which, to say the least, are amazing. But the fact remains that the position he took giving alliteration, the pride of place among poetic embellishments was unreasonable. Similarly the view held by Rajaraja Varma that *dvitiyaksharaprasa* should be eschewed from poetry was unrealistic. The two views very vehemently brought forward by them were practically overlooked by poets in course of time and later Malayalam poetry flourished giving due importance to *dvitiyaksharaprasa*. But the controversy should not be taken as an exercise in futility as it made the poets more conscious of the real merits of poetry than its verbal beauty.

In addition to his original works and translations, Kerala Varma has done another valuable service for the enrichment of Malayalam poetry by editing a series of seven volumes containing selections from ancient as well as modern poets. Of the seven volumes the first four were mainly meant for recitation by students while the last three served the literature study as adumbrated by Kerala Varma himself in his preface to the fifth volume.

These series have played a significant role in introducing the various channels of Malayalam poetry to the readers in general and

to the student in particular and developing in them an aptitude as well as acumen for the appreciation of good poetry. Further these series proved to be a source of encouragement to modern poets whose poems were selected for inclusion in them.

Kerala Varma came to acquire the credit for enriching Malayalam literature for the first time with a drama through his translation of Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntala*. The translation is Kerala Varma's earliest work. He has the following story to tell regarding his undertaking to translate the drama. "Without understanding the extraordinary beauty of Kalidasa's works for a long time, I looked upon the poem *Kiratarjuniya* and the drama *Anargharaghava* which I studied for the first time as the best specimens of Sanskrit literature. Moreover due to ignorance I ignored *Raghuvamsa* as a worthless poem. As I remained like this, once it so happened that my elder brother who is a connoisseur in literature spoke highly of Kalidasa's works and recited a few stanzas from them explaining their aesthetic beauty. It was from that time that I began to take interest in the great poet's work. The following was the stanza that fascinated me for the first time:

"Let there not be the disrepute that the scholar who has completed his Vedic studies turned to another patron after getting disappointed at the hands of Raghu in securing money as Gurudakshina". (*Raghuvamsa*...)

After that I read those works time and again and that made me realise their peculiar beauty.

I had occasion to read *Sakuntala*, the most outstanding among Kalidasa's works, and forget all my distress both mental and physical. As I thought very often as to how I could repay my debt to him who lives embodied in his glory with an immortal soul reflected in his works, it occurred to me that I could do nothing better than translate the work into Malayalam so that Malayalam reading public who do not know Sanskrit may also appreciate its beauty."

About the version of the original which he adopted for translation, Kerala Varma points out:

In this *Bhasha-sakuntala* I have by and large accepted the readings in the Kerala manuscripts of the original. Further, I

have rejected all the stanzas and prose passages in the northern recension which appeared to be interpolations.

Kerala Varma could fix the text for his translation on these lines as he was in charge of the manuscripts library which included many Kerala manuscripts of the *Sakuntala*, among others.

The translation was published under the title *Keraliya-Bhasha-Sakuntalam* in fourteen instalments in the journal *Vidyavilasini* during the period 1881-1882. The work appeared in the journal under the pseudonym "Oru Keraliyan" (a Keralite). Soon after its publication in the journal was completed, the drama was printed in the Keralavilasam Press and issued in book form in the year 1882 with slight textual variations.

Even when the drama was being serially published it came up for much appreciation at the hands of literary men and Kerala Varma felt very much encouraged by it. In a note which he appended to the last instalment in the *Vidyavilasini* he said:

By God's blessing I have been enabled to fulfil the task which I undertook as a Keraliya more than a year ago. I have been watching with no small satisfaction the interest evinced by the Malayalam reading public in this fresh contribution of mine to the Malayalam literature.

Once the work was published in the book form, it was received with a thrill not only by literary men but also by actors who got interested in staging it. Kerala Varma felt great satisfaction when he saw that the drama was staged in various parts of Kerala by different drama companies coming forward for the purpose. The staging of the drama in different parts of Kerala proved to be a great cultural event that brought people great enjoyment. The drama, entirely different from the *Kootiyattam* and *Kathakali* which the people were used to in those days, did not only attract the public in general but inspired the poets of those days to write dramas on its model. The poets did not only translate other Sanskrit dramas, but also wrote original ones. A spate of Malayalam dramas was the result. The fashion with the poets to produce dramatic composition following the lines of Kerala Varma became so rampant that it had to be quelled by a satirical drama entitled *Chakki-cankaram*.

In spite of the popularity gained by the drama and the recognition it gained among literary men there cropped up a general feeling that it was ridden too much with Sanskrit words and hence not easily understood by the average reader. Kerala Varma also felt inclined to revise the text ridding it of as many Sanskrit usages as possible. The revision done with the help of Rajaraja Varma, was published in 1910 but Kerala Varma was not quite satisfied with it. There appeared a criticism that Rajaraja Varma spoiled the original translation with his tamperings. This led to a controversy which appeared to be an echo of the old one on the *dvitiyaksharaprasa*.

Kerala Varma at last arranged to publish an edition with his own improvements and rejecting most of the corrections introduced by Rajaraja Varma and he changed the title of the book as *Manipravalasakuntala*. In the wake of Kerala Varma's translation, there appeared in Malayalam by this time not less than thirty translations of *Sakuntala*. The translators include eminent scholars like A.R. Rajaraja Varma and great poets like Vallathol Narayana Menon. They have all in their own way succeeded in varying degrees in avoiding defects generally attributed to Kerala Varma's translations, viz. the high percentage of Sanskrit words and deviation from the original in detail. But the fact remains that literary men in general still hold Kerala Varma's translation in high esteem. The reason appears to be the difference in the approach made by Kerala Varma and other translators to the original. Kerala Varma approached it as a drama while others approached it as a poem. That Kerala Varma was a born-actor might have stood him in good stead in making this approach in his translation.

Father of Modern Malayalam Prose

“To gauge the development of a language, the number of prose works in it is to be adopted as the standard. It must be admitted that the condition of Malayalam remains still deplorable. Ancient authors are known to have written only poetic works, not prose works of any appreciable merit. Forty years ago, the Government of Travancore constituted a Book Committee and appointed me as its Chairman. At that time, in the absence of a prose style acceptable to all, I had experienced great difficulties in my work.”

“In these days there are many prose writers. But I cannot say that a prose style marked with qualities such as simplicity, maturity, dignity, lucidity, beauty, brilliance and power has become popular in Malayalam. As in poetry, in prose also, there are differences in styles. While the poetic styles of Ezhuttachan, Unnayi Warriar, Nampiar and others could be distinguished, it is not possible to point out any special feature of a prose writer in Malayalam. Further it is not possible to point out a model prose writer in Malayalam like Addison, Macaulay, Carlyle, Matthew Arnold and others in English.”

Kerala Varma was keen to see an ideal prose style emerge in Malayalam. For realising this purpose, he set to work for a standard literary style, adopting different kinds of prose styles from English.

It does not, however, mean that there was no prose in Malayalam before Kerala Varma's period. Even at the early stage of Malayalam literature, the medium of prose was in vogue. There were prose commentaries on Sanskrit classics and detailed exposi-

tions of theatrical practice. Treatises on technical subjects such as medicine, architecture, gymnastics, etc., were written in prose. Prose was used also for composing religious works like *Brahmandapuranam*, *Nalopakhyanam*, *Ambarishopakhyanam*, etc. The early prose used in these works which probably belonged to the 14th century A.D. is archaic and influenced considerably by Tamil. Since the advent of the Portuguese in Kerala, the Christian Missionaries used the spoken Malayalam for their religious propaganda and as a result they evolved a prose style which came to be called Padiri Malayalam. A few notable works like *Samkshepavedartham*, *Varthamanapustakam*, *Jnanamuttumala*, etc., written in the 18th century in this style deserve mention here. The missionaries later on used this style for writing books on secular subjects also. But the style lacked precision as well as elegance and since it bore the stamp of a separate section of the people, it could not find general acceptance for purposes either educational or literary.

The evolution of a new prose style became a necessity in the wake of the spread of modern education in Kerala. As in other parts of India, it was the Christian missionaries who did pioneering work in regard to the introduction of modern education in Kerala. The prose they fashioned for writing text books for their system of education with a religious bias, had its own peculiarities. Yet, to a certain extent it paved the way for a prose style that would suit a secular system of education. Education was declared to be a State subject during the early decades of the 19th century in Travancore and Cochin and a little later in Malabar also. Thus, by about the middle of 19th century, modern education came into vogue as a State subject with a secular character.

During the reign of Ayilyam Tirunal Rama Varma, many administrative reforms were introduced on the initiative of his active Dewan Sir T. Madhava Rao. At that time, Cullen, the British Resident, happened to make a remark on the poor qualifications of the employees of the lower services in the State. This made both the Maharaja and the Dewan think about the unsatisfactory situation and they decided to give preference to better qualified people in government service. Following this decision, the Vernacular Department was given instruction to conduct an examination for those who aspired to any government job above that of a peon and issue certificates to the successful candidates. For

conducting the examination the necessary syllabus and textbooks had to be prepared and the responsibility was entrusted to a panel constituted in 1867 and called the "Book Committee". Kerala Varma was first appointed as one of the members of the Committee and after some time he was made its President. He served on the Committee for about twenty-three years.

In those days Sanskrit was ruling supreme in the field of education, but Kerala Varma, in spite of his being first and foremost a scholar in Sanskrit, was fully conscious of the need for education through the medium of mother-tongue. He had expressed his view as follows:

"Here some people grope under the illusion that education is nothing but study of Sanskrit . . . No doubt that language deserves to be studied by all who can afford to do so. But it is absurd to think that with that alone education will be complete."

Kerala Varma was also conscious of the limitations of the system of education that was in vogue in schools in those days.

Taking into account the defects of the contents of the course then prevalent in the native schools and the unsatisfactory nature of some available ill-prepared textbooks, Kerala Varma prepared a syllabus including old as well as new subjects and set out preparing textbooks and books for supporting reading. Through intensive study, varied correspondence and constant conversation with Englishmen, he had imbibed the true spirit of English prose following which he proposed to shape a prose style in Malayalam. He immediately realised the inadequacy of Malayalam vocabulary to express modern thought but his great command over the rich Sanskrit language stood him in good stead to surmount every difficulty. In fact, he developed a new sense of Malayalam prose with his scholarly equipment and unremitting exercise. The textbooks which Kerala Varma had written by himself and those which he had scrutinised, played a significant role in standardising Malayalam prose.

The translation of *Sakuntala* in prose by Ayilyam Tirunal was perhaps the maiden attempt of a substantial character in developing a literary style in Malayalam prose. This work which was lying in manuscript form was published by Kerala Varma himself. But its style was clumsy. A comparison of the translation of prose passages

in this work with the parallel passages in the *Manipravalasakuntala*, will prove beyond doubt that Kerala Varma had evolved a much more elegant and natural style than the one used by Ayilyam Tirunal. By the time he completed the translation of *Akbar* into Malayalam, he had cultivated a style almost equal to that of the modern prose, but for some archaisms and a few unusual Sanskrit words here and there. As the textbooks which he prepared got introduced in schools all over the State of Travancore, the prose style he carved out became popular throughout the State. And in due course the style gained currency in other parts of Kerala, viz. Cochin and Malabar.

In addition to textbooks in elementary mathematics, history, geography, health, economics, morality and ethics, Kerala Varma wrote Malayalam Readers for the three classes that used to be conducted in the primary schools of those days. Through the first Reader, he introduced to the students not only the alphabet, words and sentences, but the concept of paragraphing also. For writing the model paragraphs he used various subjects such as punctuality, paper, metals, sun and the value of knowledge. The second Reader is a continuation of the first and it contains short stories and essays suitable to the students of standard two. The stories are written in such a manner as to instil interest in young boys and girls, and they contain valuable moral lessons. The third Reader too comprises stories and essays, but they are of a higher standard and greater length. The stories on the whole are calculated to instil noble qualities such as compassion, ambition, sense of morality etc., and to widen the outlook of children on life. The essays in general help the students to develop their individuality and to shape their social behaviour. These textbooks played a significant role in developing the mental and intellectual qualities of the students. Kerala Varma did not care to include lessons in poetry in these Readers as he realised fully that prose was the need of the hour.

Through planned reading of prose literature in English and by preparing various types of teaching material for use in class rooms, Kerala Varma gained mastery over a prose style and developed a genius for the creation of prose work. But he did not choose to pursue any special branch of prose literature. On the other hand, taking into account the need of Malayalam literature at that time he decided to play the role of a path finder. He made substantial contribution to almost all channels of modern prose and laid the

basis for future development in Malayalam prose literature on similar lines.

Novel: Kerala Varma's *Akbar* is the earliest novel in Malayalam literature, if we are to take into account the date of its composition. This is a free translation of a Dutch novel with the same caption and Kerala Varma commenced the work about seven years before the publication of *Kundalata* which is held to be the earliest Malayalam novel to see the light of day. The original by Dr. Van Limburg Brown was published in 1872 and it was translated into German in 1877 and into English in 1879. This is a historical romance based on the life of Akbar the Great and it reflects the cultural and social conditions of India during that time. For the sake of literary beauty and the requirements of a novel, the author has introduced some characters and events which are outside the purview of history. Visakhram Tirunal who happened to read the English version of the novel got highly impressed with its literary excellence and idealistic significance and passed the book on to Kerala Varma with the suggestion that it might be translated into Malayalam as has already been mentioned in a previous chapter. Naturally, Kerala Varma also got fascinated with the book and he began its translation within a couple of years. But he could complete it only in 1894. Even though it was his idea to publish it as the first novel in Malayalam, a few other Malayalam novels got already published before it. Yet, *Akbar* was hailed by scholars and critics as an important contribution and it remains as the most substantial one among Kerala Varma's prose works.

Even though this novel is only a translation, it passes for an original creation in Malayalam owing to the freedom taken in composition. In translating conversations he remained, by and large, true to the original, but that is not the case with narration. According to his own taste he dropped some narrative passages here and there and added some. He has also changed foreign idioms in the original which will be unpalatable to Malayalam readers. The descriptions in the work look much more natural than the translated passages. On the whole, it may be said that Kerala Varma did not undertake the work as a docile translator but as a literary man of originality wanting to introduce a foreign book to Malayalam litterateurs. As a result, the work affords good material for the study of the problems of translation. There was so much of literary

originality in him that he could only be creative even in translation. His translation of *Sakuntala* too bears out this fact.

It is quite possible that Kerala Varma wanted to make *Akbar* a prose work of a higher standard than the ordinary textbooks he wrote previously. To achieve this goal, he naturally thought of tapping the resources of Sanskrit. He not only borrowed Sanskrit words and idioms profusely, but also adapted the pattern of prose descriptions in it. The description of the evening at the beginning of the novel is an instance. For this description, Kerala Varma used a very pedantic style and he himself was conscious of the fact that it would not be appealing to the average reader. That is why in his foreword to the book he appealed to the readers to exercise patience and to go ahead with reading it and get the literary satisfaction in store for them. In spite of this, some people made a hue and cry over this description condemning Kerala Varma's prose style as too pedantic. However, some litterateurs think it worthwhile to read the book even today.

Children's Literature: The Readers prepared by Kerala Varma may be considered as the first phase of children's literature in Malayalam. As already indicated above, the second and the third Readers comprise stories and essays written to suit the standard and taste of the students. During the period from 1867 to 1870, Kerala Varma wrote more than 100 short stories which are interesting as well as instructive. Through them Kerala Varma can very well claim to have laid the foundation of short stories in Malayalam literature. The stories fall into three categories, viz., original, translation and imitation.

Aesop's Fables form the main source of the stories that are translated. Through this effort, Kerala Varma has incidentally won the credit for having popularised these foreign stories in Malayalam literature for the first time. These stories are not mere translations but recreations reflecting Kerala Varma's efforts to make them look like original compositions. More or less same is the case with stories written in imitation of historical and biographical literature.

Essay: Short essays written by Kerala Varma and published in the Malayalam Readers have already been referred to. Apart from them, he had written many lengthy essays of high standard dealing with different subjects coming under humanities and social sciences. All of them, except the "Reminiscences of My Hunting," were written during the years 1867 to 1869. Education, political consti-

tution, economics and public health were the main subjects on which Kerala Varma focussed his interest.

There are two essays on education to Kerala Varma's credit, one on education in general and the other on the education of women. The first essay begins with a reference to the view *Vidyavihinah Pasuh* (an uneducated person is as good as a beast) held by Sanskrit scholars and as an illustration he points out the difference between the African negroes and the educated people of Europe. In addition to intellectual development, culturing and controlling the mind and stabilisation of character and conduct, Kerala Varma points out cultivation of faith in God as an aim of education. According to him the parents must also take interest in the education of their children and the Government should carry on the necessary propaganda in this direction.

Kerala Varma was a strong advocate of women's education. He pleaded for it as their natural right, for "God endowed man and woman with a power to grasp and retain knowledge in an equal measure." He refutes all the possible objections to women's education. To those men who think that education will make a woman proud he says she will feel proud only when she possesses something extraordinary. Nobody feels proud of possessing a pair of eyes and ears for they are common to all. An educated woman might feel proud only when others are not educated. But education will not make a woman proud when all women became educated in course of time.

In support of women's education, Kerala Varma particularly pointed out in the following words that an educated woman would get better respect from men. "If women imbibe knowledge through education, they can command much better respect from men than at present. Now men look down upon women and make them do menial service. The reason for this is the feeling on the part of men that women are not as enlightened as they themselves." That Kerala Varma gave expression to such progressive views more than a century ago when few in Kerala thought about the need of women's education with any seriousness, deserves special mention.

In five learned essays, Kerala Varma dealt with five subjects of political significance, viz., feudalism, constitutional monarchy, monarchy and democracy. These essays were written to educate Keralites on political matters, with the conviction that "all should

study these subjects with earnestness since the happiness of the people depends mainly on their government and a knowledge about its constitution and duties would be helpful to ward off its defects and to increase its utility." After pointing out that the ruling authority and its executive constitute what is called a Government, Kerala Varma traces its evolution in detail. In spite of the fact that different forms of government have sprung up, according to Kerala Varma "nobody has conceived with any clarity a pattern of government that would assure prosperity to one and all." Further, Kerala Varma says "The government of a country will have to be attuned to the wishes of the people at one time or the other. Otherwise they would disobey it."

Kerala Varma once wrote to a friend as follows:

"The Britishers are but a leech; they will suck some more Indian blood and will disappear."

On economics, Kerala Varma wrote about prices and wages, and on public health about the keeping of health and the nursing of children. He wrote on certain technical subjects like Post and Telegraph also. These are perhaps the earliest specimens of serious essays on modern subjects in Malayalam literature.

Biography: It was given to Kerala Varma to introduce for the first time the literary genre of biography in Malayalam by the publication of *Mahaccaritasamgraha* (brief biographies of great men) in the year 1895. This work is modelled on the famous biographical dictionary entitled *The Biographical Treasury—A Dictionary of Universal Biography* by Samuel Maunders and it contains the life stories of 107 great men who lived during the long period of twenty-eight centuries from 9th century B.C. to 19th century A.D. in different parts of the world.

The great men whose biographies are compiled in *Mahaccaritasamgraha* may broadly be classified into statesmen, intellectuals, artists, religious men and others. They are arranged in the order of their dates, while they are arranged in Maunders' book in the alphabetical order. Even though the biographical sketches ordinarily follow the original, some of them like those of Euclid and Akbar, are found to be enlarged with more details. This makes it clear that Kerala Varma was not mechanically translating the original, but doing some original work also to make the book more useful

and informative. Further, in his own composition as well as the contribution of others which he edited, he made all efforts to make them look original.

In this context, Kerala Varma's memoirs regarding his experience in hunting deserve special mention. Reference has already been made to this long essay entitled "**Reminiscences of My Hunting**". This merits our appreciation not only as the first autobiographical essay but also as the first essay on the subject of hunting, in Malayalam. While the other essays dealt with above were written for the Textbook Committee, this was written for his own pleasure at the advanced age of sixty. At the beginning of the essay, he indicates his incentive for writing it in the following words:

"I believe that it is common to all old people to find pleasure in speaking and writing on things in which they are very much interested but which they cannot do in this advanced age. In my youth I was highly interested in hunting and I strained myself in various ways for its sake. Now for various reasons, I have become incapable of it. To recall my past experience regarding it has proved to be a source of delight in more than one way."

Not only Kerala Varma's imagination, but also his scholarship has lent much literary beauty and value to this essay. He has illuminated the essay with apt quotations from Sanskrit classics. It is disappointing that Kerala Varma stopped with this article. Had he completed a series of essays on the subject it would have due to his experiences and extraordinary capability in describing them, turned out to be a world classic.

Literary Criticism: An enquiry into the roots of literary criticism in Malayalam literature will lead to the discovery that Kerala Varma was the pioneer in this field also. As literature in Malayalam developed on modern lines under his leadership, the responsibility to give due encouragement and guidance to authors in this respect naturally devolved on his shoulders. He was accepted by one and all as the highest authority in literature at that time and literary men sought his patronage for recognition as well as his valuable advice. Eventually, the certificates of appreciation he gave them, the forewords he wrote to their works and the introductions to his own works, became the first phase of literary criticism in Malayalam literature.

Kerala Varma was very liberal in his evaluation of authors and their works. He wrote certificates and forewords not only with a view to bringing out their literary merits but also with a view to encouraging them. He did this conscious of the fact that his role was not only that of a maker of literature, but also that of a maker of makers of literature.

Many of the works submitted to him for scrutiny and opinion were too trivial to receive his critical evaluation. As a result of this, some of his appreciations came to possess little critical value and they turned out to be mere encomia serving the purpose of encouraging the authors in spite of the fact that he was fully conscious that literary criticism consisted of objective assessment based on accepted standards.

Kerala Varma was not averse to making adverse criticism when called for. Some of his articles in the early issues of *Bhashaposhini* will easily bear testimony to this. The critical remarks he made on *Kerala Paniniya* in his introduction to the work is a notable instance in this regard. At the beginning of the introduction, Kerala Varma heartily congratulates its author on his merited success. Then he proceeds to assess the merits and demerits of Panini's grammar as it is accepted as the model for writing the book.

Only a consummate scholar in Panini's grammar who is also well-versed in modern linguistics could make such a critical assessment. The demerits pointed out clearly indicate that *Kerala Paniniya* is also subject to them as it is an adaptation of Panini's work. Suggesting that the approach in writing *Kerala Paniniya* was not sound according to the principles of linguistic science, Kerala Varma points out:

Language is no artificial product, contained in books and dictionaries, and governed by the strict rules of impersonal grammarians. It is the living expression of the mind and spirit of a people, ever changing and shifting, whose sole standard of correctness is custom and the common usage of the community. What is grammatically correct is what is accepted by the great body of those who speak a language, not what is laid down by the grammarian. To extract certain rigid rules from the works of a selected number of writers, and treat everything which does not conform to these rules as an exception or a mistake, is to

train up the young to a radically wrong notion of speech. The first lesson to be learnt is that there is no intrinsic right or wrong in the use of language, no fixed rules as such are the delight of the teacher of Latin prose. What is right now will be wrong hereafter, what the language rejected yesterday she accepts today.

Further it is also asserted that:

“What is wanted, then is that grammar should be written in accordance with the method and results of comparative philology.”

A.R. Rajaraja Varma accepted this criticism and revised his work thoroughly following to a great extent the foot steps of modern linguists like Bishop Robert Caldwell, the author of *A Grammar of Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*. Kerala Varma was essentially constructive in his literary criticism and he pressed into service sound standards for the purpose. It is pointed out that Kerala Varma was not satisfied with a poem that fulfils only the function of delighting its readers. On the other hand, he wanted poetry to serve the purpose of improving social life.

Kerala Varma could also be satirical in his opinion on literary works. Once he wrote to one of his supplicants for recognition as follows:

I do not feel that there is any particular defect in the poem other than those common to Malayalam poetry.

Kerala Varma's literary knowledge was so wide and his critical acumen so great that he could assess with thoroughness any masterpiece in literature irrespective of the branch to which it belonged. He has critically evaluated many substantial literary works including Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, the epic poem *Umakeralam* by Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, and the novel *Dharma Raja* by C.V. Raman Pillai. An examination of this assessment will be helpful to get an idea of the scientific as well as the sober lines on which Kerala Varma set models for literary criticism in Malayalam.

There are two pieces of criticism on *Sakuntala* to the credit of Kerala Varma. One is his lengthy introduction to his translation of the drama and the other is the *Sakuntalaparamya*, already referred to in the chapter on his Contribution to Sanskrit. In a preparatory note announcing the publication of his translation in *Vidyavilasini*, he recalls also how the *Sakuntala* story has become popular in Malayalam literature through Ezhuttachan's *Mahabharata* songs accompanying the Tiruvatira dance and the Kathakali text based on it. In his introduction to his translation when published in the form of a book he deals with the greatness of Kalidasa and his drama in a critical manner befitting a scholar.

It so happened that a certain scholar could not see eye to eye with Kerala Varma in his great appreciation of *Sakuntala* and he wrote an article in the journal *Vijnana Chintamani* to establish that Murari's *Anargharaghava* was the greatest among Sanskrit dramas. In reply to that Kerala Varma wrote 12 *anushtup* stanzas under the caption *Sakuntalaparamya* establishing that *Sakuntala* stood supreme according to all standards of dramaturgy. He argues as follows :

Wise men have invented drama as a means to enlighten even the common man on *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*. Therefore, it is the *rasa* (sentiment) that is the most important element in it. Otherwise the audience will lose interest.

Rasa depends on the manner in which it is developed. For the purpose suitable diction and subject should be chosen. Verbal as well as contextual pomp that mars the suggestion of *rasa* should be avoided. A poet should gather such facts from life, and without overdoing make sincere efforts keeping the suggestion of *rasa* as the main purpose. Only the work of such a poet would prove to be great.

In certain dramas the *rasa* may be brilliant, in others it may be sweet, or otherwise. But no drama would appeal without *rasa*. The poet who observes propriety and avoids impropriety develops the *rasa* on proper lines. *Venisamhara*, *Mahaviracharita* and similar dramas are laudable for the sentiment of *vira* and dramas like *Malatimadhava* for that of *sringara*. A drama depicting any other *rasa* is inferior.

Having made these observations, Kerala Varma establishes the superiority of *Sakuntala* in the last three stanzas on the merits of its conversation.

The *Sakuntala* is beautiful on account of the conversations in it which excel as they enter into the spirit of the *rasa*; which by and large, conclude with laudable advice which are neither too long nor too short; which express only natural thought; which observe the propriety of composition and which are full of sweetness. That is why I give the pride of place to the *Sakuntala* among Sanskrit dramas

The way in which Kerala Varma defended his view so convincingly proves that he was steeped not only in the canons of Sanskrit literary criticism but in those of western literary criticism also.

An introduction of considerable critical significance was provided by Kerala Varma to *Umakeralam* written by Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, which is considered to be the best Mahakavya in Malayalam. It is a substantial poem with a theme drawn from the history of the former Travancore State and it comprises 2022 verses in nineteen cantos. A passage from the introduction is quoted below :

Parameswara Iyer deals with the life and times of Umayamma Rani in a masterly manner, skilfully clothing the dry bones of history with the flesh and blood of romance. In the vividness of its imagery, in the grandeur of its conception, and in the exquisiteness of its workmanship, this great poem of Parameswara Iyer, with its lengthy cantos, may not be inaptly compared to that admirable masterpiece in Sanskrit literature, the *Naishadhiya charita* of Sriharsha, and will be seen not to suffer in the least by comparison. Both these great works are meant not for the ignorant or the careless reader, but for persons of taste and culture who are prepared to make a study of them. While I am of opinion that this is by far the best of the Mahakavyas hitherto published in Malayalam, I doubt whether, since the days of *Krishnagatha*, we have had a poem with such a wealth and variety of imagery.

How Kerala Varma rises equal to the occasion in literary criticism may be demonstrated with his assessment of *Dharma Raja*, one of the masterpieces of the celebrated historical novelist C.V.

Raman Pillai. Acknowledging the receipt of a copy of the book, Kerala Varma wrote to the author as follows :

I thank you warmly for the kind present of a copy of the new work *Dharma Raja*. I feel that it can take rank with the best work of fiction in any language. The plot is boldly conceived and boldly executed in a masterly style, classical and scholarly, and the characters and incidents are touched off in the boldest relief. The Malayalam literary world must be grateful to you for the new vista you have opened for them and the spirit of loyalty pervading every line is a lesson for the aged as well as the rising generations. I am very glad you have so aptly dedicated the book to His Highness the Maharaja who, as you put it, reflects all the greatness and grandeur of character of his illustrious predecessor whom your work must more than immortalise.

From what has been said above, it is clear that there was a master critic in Kerala Varma and that he could have made much more substantial contributions in the field, had he the leisure for it. However, he can claim to have enriched Malayalam literature with the rudiments of literary criticism as well.

The part Kerala Varma played in improving and standardising Malayalam prose was appreciated by M. Rajaraja Varma, an eminent scholar and a junior contemporary of Kerala Varma in the following terms :

In old prose there used to be sentences without any proper connection written in the conversational style or very long sentences which began in one way and ended in a different way. There were also sentences which lent artificial beauty following the pattern of Sanskrit prose. It was Kerala Varma who started a genuine prose style discarding the above obsolete styles. It was that great man who carved a prose style that described matters with sequence and proper construction and with the necessary punctuation for making the ideas clear.

Recognising Kerala Varma as the father of prose literature in Malayalam, Swadesabhimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai says :

It is due to your efforts that prose literature has come into existence in Malayalam. It is difficult to imagine that there were

prose books in Malayalam before you (Kerala Varma). You have attained the title of "Father of modern Malayalam prose literature", truly and deservingly. This alone is sufficient reason for you to be respected with constant and unlimited gratitude by the people of this land who speak Malayalam.

The Symbol of Renaissance in Malayalam Literature

India is a multi-lingual country and every language, either regional or national, has a place and importance of its own. Therefore, an aspirant inclined to serve in the field of language and literature must have a vision of suitable linguistic set up and a mission in which he has full faith and conviction. Kerala Varma had both, as vouchsafed by his presidential address on the occasion of the 9th annual conference of the Bhashaposhini Sabha. In the address *int. r alia* Kerala Varma said:

A view that there might be a mother-tongue for India as a whole, appears to have gained ground in many in these days and that when it becomes a *fait accompli* in course of time, the unimportant regional languages will die away, and that there is no necessity to strive for their development. Such a line of thinking has sprung up in recent times. It is not at all difficult to show that this contention is meaningless. Ramananda Chatterjee who is the editor of the esteemed monthly journal published from Calcutta has logically established that even if a time comes when Bengali or Hindi becomes popular in other parts in India, it can only be a subsidiary language and never the main language. History and the courses of events, do not help us to believe that the Dravidian languages of South India would become practically dead and an Aryan language would become popular all over the area. Further, there is no necessity now to adopt any of the Indian regional languages as a mother-tongue for the whole country. At present, for mutual exchange of ideas, the people of India have three languages viz., Sanskrit, English and Hindustani. The situation

being like this, I make myself bold to say that there is no justification to feel anxious that in course of time some other language would swallow up Malayalam for its span of life is the same as that of the land, Kerala. From what has been said above it is clear that the enrichment of Malayalam is one of our primary responsibilities.

This was indeed the voice of a leader who had full conviction in the importance of Malayalam among the Indian languages and great faith in its development. He was not merely anxious about the development of Malayalam literature, but had full self-confidence in providing it with the proper leadership. This confidence was based on the sound equipment which he had acquired by assiduous studies under the guidance of eminent teachers and independently. But his deep knowledge in English literature which he acquired mainly through his own perseverance equipped him for doing greater service in the literary world.

Kerala Varma was charged with the zeal for the development of Malayalam literature and he had also the equipment for it in an abundant measure. So what was required was only a suitable occasion for him to go into action. And the occasion offered itself when he was appointed as an honorary member and later on as President of the Book Committee under the Government of Travancore.

The then Dewan did not approve of Kerala Varma's proposal to reform the Committee in 1897; on the other hand, he restricted the scope of its work. They fell out with each other and Kerala Varma at a public meeting held at Kottayam criticised the educational reforms of the day for which an explanation was called for from him by the Dewan who was to relinquish the office soon. Normally people might think that the Presidentship of the Book Committee was a bed of roses for Kerala Varma. From several quarters, he had to face opposition due to jealousy as well as rivalry.

Another opportunity which Kerala Varma utilised fully to champion the cause of Malayalam language and literature, was his membership on the Senate of the Madras University. It was through his constant efforts and personal influence that the study of Malayalam got recognition at the University level. In his enthusiasm, he even thought of taking steps for a collaboration between the

University of Madras and Bhashaposhini Sabha for the development of studies in Malayalam at the higher education level. At the 4th annual conference of the Sabha held at Trivandrum in 1894, he mooted the idea of their collaboration.

It was indeed as the President of the Bhashaposhini Sabha that Kerala Varma played the role of a public leader at the helm of literary awakening in Kerala. With him at the top, the Sabha spear-headed the movement for renaissance in Malayalam literature. Kerala Varma conceived the Sabha as a suitable democratic forum for literary development and guided it accordingly. Kerala Varma's interest was not restricted to Malayalam literature. He keenly followed the developments in other modern Indian literatures also and he was upto date in his information regarding them.

As a leader of imagination, Kerala Varma realised the supreme importance of the standardisation of style in poetry and prose in the renaissance of our literature. Kerala Varma was very much concerned about the scarcity of books in Malayalam. So he placed a detailed programme before the Sabha at its session held in 1910 at Vaikom. In his introductory remarks, he made clear his view on the nature of the style to be adopted in literary production. In this connection he quoted Kunchan Nambiar's famous lines translated below:

For arts to be presented before an audience constituted of warrior-class, what is suitable is an elegant and beautiful Malayalam style. In case scholarly Sanskrit language of a bombastic style is used, the warrior-class will not only not follow but will stand up and leave the place immediately.

What Kerala Varma advocated was the genuine Malayalam style with its native sweetness. He was against the preponderant use of Sanskrit as it would be unpalatable to the public at large. But he wanted an admixture of Sanskrit in the style to the extent necessary to lend its beauty and elegance. In short, Kerala Varma stood for a literary style, native in its character and strengthened with an element of Sanskrit.

For enriching Malayalam with books, Kerala Varma suggested two means: one to discover, edit and publish ancient works and the other to write and publish new works:

I need not specially tell you that since our wealth of old literature is very meagre, it is our duty to collect and preserve it without allowing it to be eaten by worms and other creatures. Books as well as *asavas* (Ayurveda Tonic) gather greater importance as they get older and older. To understand the history of literature according to century, books belonging to every century are essential. Therefore, you should understand that even if we write lot of books in future they will not be as valuable as old works, in the estimate of scholars. It is a matter of shame for us that songs of South Travancore such as *Ramakatha Pattu* and *Bharatam Pattu* are still unpublished and are on the verge of extinction."

He impressed upon the members the necessity to publish classical works as well as folk songs belonging to Malabar and South Travancore. He also stressed the great need for developing the branch of Scientific literature. He was not at all satisfied with the novels and short stories, published in Malayalam. The necessity for an authoritative English-Malayalam dictionary and a comprehensive history of literature was also pointed out by Kerala Varma.

How conscious Kerala Varma was about the importance of mother-tongue in civic life is clear from the appeal he made as early as 1910 to Government to make Malayalam the official language. To quote his own words from his presidential address:

From the newspapers it is learnt that in the Sikh State of Patiala, all official correspondence is being carried on at present in the regional language. I do not find any impropriety in insisting that in the State of Travancore and Cochin, official correspondence at least in lower offices, should be carried on in Malayalam.

After a period of about seven decades, Kerala Government accepted this view, but it still remains to be fully implemented. Kerala Varma did not neglect the auxiliary aspects of literary development such as the fostering of sound taste in readers and the necessity of ensuring that the quality of the books produced

maintained a satisfactory standard. In this regard he made a wise observation which is relevant even today:

If people of Kerala were only disinclined to read good books, I would not have felt pity for them. What makes me disappointed is their increasing interest in reading low books which in addition to their being defective in all respects and extremely trivial, seek to inculcate immorality also. There is no end to the youngsters who are ready to purchase and read third rate books on "criminal cases" (detectives), dramatic songs and cheap love lyrics and the same is the case with book-sellers who are prepared to publish such books. Such books run into five or six editions, even before a year expires! And the pockets of their authors swell with money! On the other hand, if a book like *Chandrotsava* or *Rajaratnavaliya* or *Sujatodvaha* is published there is none to purchase it or to appreciate it. How can such a society prosper? It is one of the primary duties of the lovers of literature to educate the people for rejecting such inferior books and welcoming excellent books after duly searching for them.

For the above purpose, Kerala Varma pleaded for the starting of libraries and literary associations which should popularise good books, stop inferior books from vitiating the atmosphere and allow the flow of pure air like Municipalities that ward off epidemics. Further, he went on pleading that "only excellent books which are recognised by learned people should find a place in literature. In the beginning of the literary movement under the leadership of Kerala Varma, there were many who were sceptic about the success of the efforts to modernise the Malayalam literature. Once Kerala Varma optimistically envisaged the future of Malayalam literature with a vision which we may now qualify as prophetic. In the course of his presidential address at the last meeting of the Bhashaposhini Sabha he prophesied as follows:

"If all of us make a united effort in this respect with mutual understanding, I am doubly sure that in course of time Malayalam would become one of the important languages of India and it would receive the encomium which at present people lavish on Hindi and Bengali."

The importance of periodicals in literary awakening was fully realised by Kerala Varma and he encouraged them in all possible ways. His close association with *Malayala Manorama* and *Bhashaposhini* has already been referred to. The publication of his *Mayurasandesha* enhanced the popularity and prestige of the latter. Kerala Varma even mentioned in one of his presidential addresses at the Bhashaposhini Sabha that while composing the poem he had the idea of publishing it in the *Bhashaposhini* journal. He also contributed learned articles to it. The periodical *Vidyavilasini* published from Trivandrum gained recognition mainly through the serial publication of *Keraliya Sakuntala*. The literary services rendered by *Vidyavinodini* published from Trichur and by its editor C.P. Achutha Menon very often came up for appreciation at the hands of Kerala Varma. *Lakshmibai*—a magazine in Malayalam—was published in honour of Kerala Varma's wife and to it also he extended his patronage.

The renaissance in Malayalam is but a part of the renaissance in Indian languages which began in Bengal in the first half of the 19th century. Taking into account the production of authoritative dictionaries and grammar by the European missionaries, the period of the renaissance in Malayalam may be believed to have spread over a period of a century from 1850 to 1950. The most productive and brilliant part of the century was perhaps what is known as "Kerala Varma period in Malayalam literature".

Secularisation: In medieval Malayalam literature there was practically no secular literature worth the name except some *manipravala* love poems. Kerala Varma with his modern literary consciousness, felt it essential to divest Malayalam literature of this religious burden and allow it to develop on its own independent lines. It was not only the infiltration of English ideas that made him think of secularisation, but also his conviction that it was indispensable if his mission of serving Malayalam literature was to succeed. He could easily understand that Malayalam literature could flourish only if it appealed to the people whose mother-tongue is Malayalam. They consisted of the followers of at least three religions—Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, not to speak of Hebrew religion. Therefore, he was convinced that Malayalam literature would have a bright future only if it toed the lines of secularism and he categorically declared his considered view in the

course of one of his presidential addresses at the Bhashaposhini Sabha (1910) in the following memorable words:

Only works written on the basis of common subjects would appeal to the Keralites consisting of the followers of different religions.

In the same lecture he also warned the writers of following the beaten track by choosing themes from Hindu mythology. Further, Kerala Varma exhorted writers not only to liberate literature from the clutches of religion but also to make it reflect human life. He emphasised the necessity for producing useful biographies. Such an approach to literature in general was essential at that time and Kerala Varma boldly advocated it with far-reaching vision.

Research in literary origins: Kerala Varma evinced interest in the collection, preservation and publication of ancient manuscripts. In his capacity as Superintendent of the Manuscripts Library he edited critically a fairly good number of texts and trained others in the discipline. The work done by him in this field was continued by his followers to the great advantage of Malayalam literature.

Translations: Kerala Varma was obsessed with the scarcity of books in Malayalam and thought of many means including translation from other literatures to meet the situation. Naturally, Sanskrit and English were the original sources drawn upon. Kerala Varma translated, as already indicated before, Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, Amaruka's *Amaruka Sataka* and Neelakanthadikshita's *Anyapadesa-sataka*. Following these there came a spate of translations from Sanskrit by enthusiastic scholars and poets. Among dramas more than fifty got translated into Malayalam in immediate succession. His translations from English comprise a poem by Longfellow and the famous novel *Akbar*. This literary activity of translation initiated by Kerala Varma made rapid strides and speeded up the renaissance in Malayalam.

Imitation: Imitation is another important stage in the emergence of Indian literature. Kerala Varma gave lead to imitations in prose as well as poetry in Malayalam. How he standardised the prose style which was but a "grammarless jargon" according to Kerala Varma himself, has been indicated above. How he started different branches of prose literature such as novel, short story, essay,

biography and literary criticism and won the status of "Father of Malayalam Prose" has also been already described. To Kerala Varma goes the credit of writing a prose drama too for the first time in Malayalam.

Poets in Kerala Varma's time were mainly interested in writing Kathakali texts on religious themes or poems of inferior standard. In the Venmani school of poetry there were gifted poets, but they did not take poetry as a serious art. They wrote on trivial themes for their own pleasure and recreation. As they could not be morally serious, their poems did not serve any social purpose. They employed poetry for writing letters and even for conducting journals. In fact, poets in those days were dallying with the muse in a light hearted manner. Kerala Varma with his serious approach to literature could not brook this and he had exhorted the poets very often to feel more responsible to society and bend their muse on more sound lines.

In *Daivayoga*, Kerala Varma dealt with a social theme and made an attack against a social taboo caused by staying in a family belonging to a foreign community. The other one—*Mayurasandesha*—won the appreciation of the literary world for the novelty of its theme and the dignity of its treatment. In his "The Foundations of New India", K.M. Panikkar assessed the poem in the following terms. "In Malayalam, for example, the literary masterpiece of the period was *Mayurasandesha*, a work of merit in the mould of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*."

The brief assessment made of Kerala Varma's contributions to the development of Malayalam literature would show that he symbolised its renaissance till the influence of Tagore began to be felt in Indian literature as a whole. It was a unique qualification which enabled him to render this signal service to his mother-tongue during a momentous period of its history. Kerala Varma's great erudition in Sanskrit and deep study of English literature have already been indicated before. With such scholarly attainments he could combine in himself the best in the literary tradition of India and that of the West. This stood him in good stead in guiding the renaissance which stemmed from the synthesis of the two cultures. Further, the progressive views which he cherished on matters literary and linguistic, were of great help in modernising Malayalam literature. Even though he had his own weakness for

rhyme and *manipravala* style in poetry, he never took a conservative position in regard to literature in general.

Kerala Varma's preparedness to extend a helping hand to literary men in whatever manner possible was another trait which made his leadership meaningful. The most valuable help Kerala Varma rendered to literary men was the close scrutiny of the manuscript of their works submitted to him, not to speak of the encouraging opinions on them.

What a sacrifice it was for Kerala Varma to attend to this scrutiny, denying himself the opportunity for original writing. Kerala Varma was always anxious to give encouragement to literary men, to recognise their merit and service and to honour them on suitable occasions. He included Kumaran Asan's *Veenupoovu* and many other poems by modern poets in the *Padyapathavali* series. It may be mentioned here that Kerala Varma appreciated the works of literary men like Chandu Menon and Kandathil Varghese Mappillai with respect.

Kerala Varma's deep sense of humility stood reflected in his conduct as well as public utterances. Once he said at the meeting of the Bhashaposhini Sabha (1894) as follows:

I admit that there are many bad usages in my *Sakuntala*. The reason for this is that when I wrote it my grasp over the idiom of Malayalam was much less than what it is now. For my present knowledge in this regard, I am particularly indebted to the journal *Vidyavinodini*.

The spirit of equality with which he treated literary men was really praiseworthy. As an instance it may be pointed out that shedding away all sense of false prestige he travelled all the way from Trivandrum to Trichur to meet Kaikulangara Rama Warriar, a great scholar. Mahakavi Ullloor has recorded that Kerala Varma once took him in his royal boat and treated him as his equal in the course of the journey.

Among the services rendered by Kerala Varma to Malayalam literature the intellectual shaping of A.R. Rajaraja Varma was of great significance. He taught him for 20 years, and inducted him into the field of Malayalam literature. Further, he extended his patronage to him in official life also. Rajaraja Varma distinguished himself as an eminent Professor of Oriental Languages in the

Maharaja's College, Trivandrum and later he got elevated to the position of its Principal. Following his teacher who was his uncle also, Rajaraja Varma imbibed the spirit of renaissance in Malayalam literature and added to its momentum by his invaluable contributions both literary and linguistic.

Kerala Varma was a great poet in Sanskrit as well as in Malayalam, though he was not the greatest poet of his time. Certainly there was no greater scholar than he in the whole of Kerala at that time. Further, there was none to match him in his dedicated as well as selfless work for the development of Malayalam language and literature. In fact, Kerala Varma was the first to champion the common cause of the people of Kerala. And it was he that came first for recognition as a leader of Keralites as a whole, irrespective of region, caste, creed or religion. The recognition found expression in the title, *Sahityachakravarti* (emperor in the literary domain) conferred on him by the people.

An Extinct Volcano

An extinct volcano—that was how Kerala Varma used to describe himself in his old age. The celebrations regarding his sixtieth birthday marked the zenith of his literary glory. As he grew older his influence began to wane a little and his supreme authority in literary matters faced challenge. The controversy over *dvitiyaksharaprasa* and the criticism against the preponderance of Sanskrit element in his translation of *Sakuntala* provided scope for others to belittle his literary eminence. The opposition on both of these issues centred on A.R. Rajaraja Varma who had by that time become prominent in the literary field wielding much influence.

Kerala Varma's literary reputation, however, did not suffer to any tangible extent as a result of the controversies but the fact remains that they caused him considerable mental anguish. Even in his early sixties, Kerala Varma found that his poetic enthusiasm had begun to dwindle. About this he wrote to Seshayya Sastri in June 1896 as follows:

There was a time when Goddess of Speech used to appear before me the moment I wished. At that time when the Goddess was at my beck and call, I could compose poetry instantly with the least effort But now the wind has begun to blow in a different direction. Due to want of practice the intuition to compose Sanskrit poetry has become dull.

At last in 1909, through the columns of the *Malayala Manorama*, he appealed to editors and authors not to approach him with further requests for contributions or opinions or introductions. This may practically be taken as Kerala Varma's farewell to the

literary world. Yet, he made a public appearance on a literary platform. in 1912 to preside over the centenary celebrations of a poet. But on that occasion he was so physically weak that his presidential address had to be read out by another person. In the year 1913 Kerala Varma's elder brother Vidvan Koyil Tampuran, died and he came to occupy the exalted position of the "Valiya Raja" of Parappanad. But due to disinterestedness in worldly matters and increasing physical fatigue, Kerala Varma entrusted the responsibilities of that position to his younger brother and led a completely retired life.

Spirituality was an integral part of Kerala Varma's personality and he fostered it throughout his life in spite of the multifarious activities he got involved in. He was religious from the very beginning of his life. That he got a spiritual preceptor—Brahmavidyaguru—in a great scholar and elevated soul like Ilattoor Ramaswami Sastri stood him in good stead in deepening his philosophical insight. He even wrote an authoritative work on Tantric cult entitled *Trisatyantaram*, in addition to a number of fine devotional lyrics. As he grew older he got satiated with life and began to look with aversion on his past glories and achievements, and yearned for ultimate spiritual emancipation. The inspired lyric *Sri Padmanabhapadapadma-satakam* that affords a mirror to Kerala Varma's mental state in his old age reflects clearly this natural, but tremendous change that took place in him.

In the middle of September 1914, Kerala Varma accompanied by his nephew A.R. Rajaraja Varma, went to Vaikom by car for the annual worship at the famous Siva temple there. After the usual prayers and ceremonies in the temple he met his admirers and friends who assembled there. Taking leave of them in all grace, he started his journey back and reached his palace at Harippad on 18th September. He stayed there for two days meeting his own kith and kin and performing worship at the local Subrahmanya temple. On 20th September he took food with the members of his family and started for Trivandrum with his nephew, but on his way to Kayamkulam he unfortunately met with an accident. The nephew stood in attendance on Kerala Varma and his condition continued to be hopeful for a day more. But it took a critical turn abruptly and the doctors could not save the precious life of that great man. He passed away in peace on 22nd September lying supported by the hands of his beloved nephew and foremost disciple. The dead body

was cremated at Mavelikkara with due honour.

The news of Kerala Varma's death spread like wild fire and people as a whole mourned the loss of the great scholar and poet who illuminated their literary horizon for a period of about five decades. Newspapers published leading articles paying tributes to the deceased; admirers organised condolence meetings to pay homage to him; many obituary notes appeared in journals and poets including Vallathol and Ulloor wrote elegies. In an obituary note in his journal *Vivekodaya*, Mahakavi Kumaran Asan assessed Kerala Varma's greatness in the following words:

We do not think that in Kerala there is any great man other than Kerala Varma whom all Malayalees, irrespective of caste, or creed, love and respect with so much sincerity, and remember with so much of gratitude. When will it be possible for us to see again a combination like this of qualities such as scholarship, poetic talents, goodness, generosity, family prestige and character of the highest standard. O! Land of Kerala, thy light has gone! Thou art engulfed in darkness!

Important Events

1845 February 19th	Birth.
1855	Leaves for Trivandrum with his uncle Rajaraja Varma.
1859 April 24th	Weds Rani Lakshmibai and becomes Valiyakoyil Tampuran.
1861	Composes <i>Tirunal Prabandham</i> .
1865	Composes <i>Thulabharasatakam</i> .
-do-	Visits the Duke of Edinburgh.
1866	Composes <i>Guruvayupuresastava</i> .
1867	Becomes member of Text Book Committee.
1868	Assumes Chairmanship of Text Book Committee.
1872	Tour to Baroda and other places.
1877 August 4th	Arrest and imprisonment.
1880	Submission of <i>Kshamapanasahasra</i> .
-do-	Composes <i>Yamapranamasataka</i> .
-do-	Death of Ayilyam Tirunal.
-do-	The crowning of Visakham Tirunal.
-do-	Release from Jail.
1881	Lakshmibai receives the title of C.I.
1882	Meets Grant Duff, Governor of Madras.
-do-	Tour to Madras.
-do-	Publishes the first edition of <i>Sakuntala</i> and <i>Nakshatramala</i> .
1883	Fellow of the Madras University and Member of the University Senate.
1885	Visakham Tirunal passes away.
1888	Composes <i>Vyaghrakuyesasataka</i> .
1889	Publishes <i>Visakhavijaya</i> .

1890	Receives the title M.R.A.S.
1891	Elected as life-president of Bhashaposhini Sabha.
1893	Composes <i>Amarukasataka</i> (Manipravala).
1894	Publishes <i>Akbar</i> .
1895	Gets the titles F.R. H.S. and C.S.I.
-do-	Publishes <i>Mayurasandesha</i> and <i>Mahaccaritasamgraham</i> .
1898	Adviser to Government regarding vernacular language.
1900	Publishes the complete edition of <i>Visakhavijaya</i> .
1901	Maharani's death.
1902	Publishes <i>Anyapadesasataka</i> .
1905	Celebration of the sixtieth birthday.
1909	Bids farewell to the literary world.
1912	Last appearance on a literary platform.
1913	Becomes "Valiya Raja of Parappanad".
1914 September 22nd	Death.

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