POLITICAL JOURNALISM AND NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN MALABAR

Thesis
submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN HISTORY

VASU THILLERI

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT

MAY 2008

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ABBREVIATIONS

AICC	-	All India Congress Committee
AITUC	-	All India Trade Union Congress
AP	-	Associated Press
AKSF	-	All Kerala Students Federation
CDM	-	Civil Disobedience Movement
CID	-	Criminal Investigation Department
CMS	-	Church Mission Society
CPI	-	Communist Party of India
Cr. P.C.	-	Criminal Procedure Code
C.S. Files	-	Confidential Section Files
CSP	-	Congress Socialist Party
CURJ	-	Calicut University Research Journal
CWC	-	Congress Working Committee
FNR	-	Fortnightly Reports
IB	-	Intelligence Bureau
ICS	-	Indian Civil Service
INC	-	Indian National Congress
JKS	-	Journal of Kerala Studies
JSIH	-	Journal of South Indian History
KCSP	-	Kerala Congress Socialist Party
KPCC	-	Kerala Provincial Congress Committee
KSA	-	Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum
KSC	-	Kerala Students Congress
LMS	-	London Mission Society

MDCC	-	Malabar District Congress Committee
NAI	-	National Archives of India, New Delhi
NCM	-	Non-Cooperation Movement
NMML	-	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi
NSS	-	Nair Service Society
PCC	-	Provincial Congress Committee
RAE	-	Regional Archives, Ernakulam
RAK	-	Regional Archives, Kozhikode
SIHC	-	South India History Congress
SNDP Yogam	-	Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam
TNA	-	Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai
TUC	-	Trade Union Congress

INTRODUCTORY

Press has played a prominent part in the rise and growth of Indian national movement. In fact, nationalism and growth of the press were two mutually supporting processes - one supporting the other in its path of progress. In other words, it may be said that the growth of press was directly proportional to the consolidation of the forces of nationalism.[1] Started by the Western missionaries in India for evangelical purposes, it did not take long for the national leaders to understand the great potentialities of the press as a disseminator of ideas.

After the emergence of the nationalist press, it became the carrier of the seeds of nationalism and in this process it enriched itself. To understand how prominent a part press had played even at the early stage of the Indian national movement, we need only look at the composition of the delegates of the first session of the Indian National Congress, which met in Bombay in December 1885; nearly one-third of the founding fathers of the Congress were journalists.

During the early phase of the national movement, when mass mobilisation of people was not yet possible with the poor organisational set up of the Congress, the main political task was that of educating the people on public issues and propagating nationalist ideas. The main instrument for undertaking this task was provided by the press. Infact, political education on a mass scale would have been impossible without the press. All the major political controversies of the time were carried on through the press. Playing the role of the opposition, it severely criticised the policies and actions of the

[1] Vinod Bhatnagar, "Role of Press in National Resurgence", Jaipur, 1996, p. 20.

government Lord Dufferin lamented: "… In this way there can be no doubt that there is in the minds of those who read these papers …a conviction that we are all of us the enemies of mankind in general and India in particular."[2]

The press was such an important force in the Indian struggle for freedom that few of the national or regional leaders failed to make use of it. From Dadabhai Naoroji's 'Rast Goftar', through Bal Gangadhar Tilak's 'Kesari' and 'Maratha' to Mahatma Gandhi's 'Young India' and 'Harijan', almost all eminent leaders of the national movement had their own press organs to propagate their ideas. These leaders were intelligent enough to see how important it was to disseminate ideas of nationalism and freedom among the teeming millions of Indians across this vast and diverse country.

The press "imbued the people with patriotic fervour, indomitable courage and heroic self-sacrifice to an extra-ordinary degree."[3] Great national struggles like the Khilafat-Non-corporation movement and the Civil Disobedience movement were hugely popular because of the facility offered by the press to convey the message and instructions of the leadership to the volunteers and the masses in remotest villages. It could be safely said that the kind of democratic, non-violent mass movement such as India witnessed during the freedom struggle would have been impossible but for the propaganda work done by the nationalist press.

Over and above its duty of providing people with news about happenings in India and abroad, the nationalist press also shaped their thinking. It is generally said that newspapers are moulders as well as mirrors of public opinion. But in India of the nationalist era, the press functioned more as a moulder than as a mirror of public opinion.

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[2] Lord Dufferin to Secretary of State, 21 March 1886, Quoted in Bipan Chandra et al., 'India's Struggle for Independence', New Delhi, 1988, p. 104.

[3] R.C. Majumdar (ed.), "Struggle for Freedom", (Bharateeya Vidya Bhavan Series, Vol. XI), Bombay, 1969, p. 106.

The role of Kerala in India's struggle for freedom is not less significant than that of any other state of the Indian union.[4] The heat of the national movement was felt first in Malabar, being under the direct administration of the British. The Gandhian phase of the movement was especially intense in the region. As elsewhere in the country, the seeds of political journalism was sown in Malabar during the national movement. Some of the staunch nationalist newspapers in Malayalam were published from Malabar, the impact of which on the national movement was, by no means, small. The history of the freedom struggle in Malabar would be incomplete without taking into account the great contribution made by the press.

The views and messages of the newspapers in Malabar reached a large number of people than the circulation figures would indicate. Though only a small proportion of people, belonging to the educated, subscribed to newspapers during those times, the contents of these papers were read out to many others. If a paper had one subscriber in a village, it reached almost all the educated and a significant proportion of the uneducated too in that village. The Simon Commission had observed: "Vernacular paper can be and are read to illiterate villagers by their literate fellows in towns, villages, railway carriages, public meetings and so on …".[5] The commission's observation was especially true of Malabar. This was because of the high rate of literacy in the region which in 1931 was the second highest in the whole Madras Presidency.

The part played by organisations like the Congress or the Communist Party and great mass movements like the Civil Disobedience movement or the tenant movement as well as the role of eminent leaders of Malabar in the national movement have been the subject of study before. It is equally important to undertake a detailed study of the press of the nationalist era in

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4 A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala and Freedom Struggle*, Kottayam, 1997, p. 13.

5 Indian Statutory Commission - 1928 (Vol. I), p. 261.

Malabar, an era which witnessed unprecedented mass movement that not only contributed immensely to the freedom struggle but also redrew the political map of the region. The present study is a modest endeavour to examine the salient features of the political journalism of the colonial period in Malabar and to understand how influential it had been in determining the contours of the national movement and the political progress of Malabar. The main focus of the study being the political journalism of the period, a detailed narration of the political developments in connection with the national movement has been avoided. Constraints of space has also been a factor in deciding to avoid such a narration.

Survey of the Related Literature

Though studies on the impact of press on the national movement in Malabar are few in number, works on the rise and growth of press in Malayalam are available, some of which also contains sections dealing with the national movement.

Chummar Chundel examines the role of Christian missionaries in the development of Malayalam journalism in his "The Missionaries and Malayalam Journalism" (1975). One of the early works published on journalism in Kerala, it throws light on the formative period of Malayalam press.

'Malayala Pathra Charithram' (1977) edited by Chummar Chundel and Sukumaran Pottekkat presents the history of Malayalam journalism from its beginning to the modern period in brief. Chapters dealing with the early phase of Malayalam press by Chummar Chundel, middle phase of Malayalam press by T.M. Chummar, press and national movement by Perunna K.N. Nair and press and social change by V. Karunakaran Nambiar are particularly relevant for the present study. Of these, 'Press and National Movement' by

Perunna K.N. Nair is of special significance as it tries to show in brief how the freedom movement and the Malayalam press influenced and strengthened each other.

G. Priyadarshan's 'Malayala Pathrapravarthanam Prarambha Swarupam' (1982) is a brief history of the early phase of Malayalam press. Starting from 'Rajyasamacharam', the first periodical in Malayalam, the book provides the details of the early publications in the language. 'Kerala Pathrapravarthanam Suvarnaddhyayangal (1999) by the same author is a tribute to the contribution made by the great editors of Malayalam journalism of yesteryears. The chapters pertaining to Chengalath Kunhirama Menon, V.C., Balakrishna Panicker, Murkoth Kumaran, Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar, C. Krishnan and Muhammed Abdurahiman are especially useful for the present study. The author's great admiration for the titants of Malayalam journalism seems to have affected a critical evaluation of their contribution.

In 'Malayala Pathrathinte Kadha' (1976), Perunna K.N. Nair mainly focuses his attention on the interests and motives behind the major newspapers of Kerala. 'Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram' (1985) by Puduppally Raghavan provides useful information about newspapers of erstwhile Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. The author also makes an assessment of the contributions of these papers in various fields including development of national consciousness. K.M. Govi's "Adimudranam Bharathathilum Malayalathilum' (1998), as the name suggests, deals with the beginning and growth of printing in India with special emphasis on printing in Malayalam.

'Mathrubhumiyude Charithram' Vol. I (1973) by V.R. Menon and Vol. II and III (1998) by C. Uthamakurup, P.C. Sukumaran Nair and P.M. Sudharakan, while providing a detailed history of the premier newspaper of Malabar, also touches upon almost all the major and minor developments

connected with the national movement in Malabar. Started by the top leaders of the Indian National Congress of Malabar in 1923, 'Mathrubhumi' was considered the official mouthpiece of the congress until the communist group captured the Kerala Pradesh Congress committee in the late 1930's. The main drawback of these volumes is a lack of critical evaluation. The authors very often tend to exaggerate the role of 'Mathrubhumi' and the right wing leaders of the Congress with which the paper was identified, in the epic struggle against foreign imperialism. Although the three volumes are of immense help to students of history as it provides a lot of information on the most stormy period of the national movement in Malabar, they have to be vigilant because of this propensity to exaggerate on the part of the authors.

"Malayala Pathrapravarthanam Pathonpatham Noottantil" (2003) by Dr. N. Sam analyse the history of the first 54 years of journalism in Malayalam. The authors has tried to study the history of Malayalam journalism in the background of evolution of journalism in other parts of the world. Shibu Muhammed's "Charithrathinte Mudranangal Malayalapathrapravarthanathinte Vikasavum and Parinamavum" (2007) is an attempt to look at the history of Malayala journalism from a Marxian perspective. His focus on the internal contradictions in the nationalist press as well as the vested interests at work is of special relevance to the present study.

There are also works dealing with certain specific aspects of Malayalam journalism that also provide some useful information for the present study. In "Keralathile Samuhika Navothanavum Sahityavum", Dr. N. Sam analyses the impact of press on the social renaissance of Kerala. K.P. Vijayan's "Pathrangal Vichithrangal" also contains interesting information on newspapers of Kerala. "Nationalism and Social Change - the Role of Malayalam Literature" (1998) by K.K.N. Kurup is an attempt to trace the trends of Malayalam literature in promoting the sentiments of nationalism.

The book also attempts a very brief survey of the major newspapers of Kerala during the nationalist era and their contribution to the growth of nationalist spirit. M. Achuthan's "Swatantrya Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum" (1994) has a chapter on journalism and freedom struggle which provides a brief analysis of the contribution of press towards the freedom struggle.

Another important category of literature which are of immense help for an enquiry into the relation between press and national movement in Malabar is biographies. Biographies and autobiographies of eminent persons who played leading roles in the national movement or in the field of journalism or both, are available. The auto-biography of Moyarath Sankaran, "Ente Jeevitha Kadha " (1965) is full of references to Malayalam newspapers especially pertaining to 'Kerala Kesari', which was edited by Moyarath himself, and 'Mathrubhumi', for which he had worked as a correspondent.

A work of critical importance in this category is "Muhammed Abdurahiman - A Political Biography" (1978) by S.K. Pottekkat, P.P. Ummerkoya, N.P. Mohamed and K.A. Kodungallore. A towering personality of the national movement in Malabar, Abdurahiman was also a journalist of consummate ability. This work is an important source for a study of 'Al-Ameen', the newspaper started by Muhammed Abdurahiman. 'Al-Amneen' was second only to 'Mathrubhumi' in its influence on the nationalists of Malabar. E. Moidu Moulavi's autobiography, "Moulaviyude Atmakadha" (1973) is also a useful work, throwing light on Congress politics and 'Mathrubhumi'-'Al-Ameen' relationship, which had a major role in aggravating the Congress factionalism.

The biography of K. Madhavan Nair (1987) by C.K. Moosath is also relevant in so far as it throws light on the Congress leader's association with 'Mathrubhumi', which was long as well as close. "Ara Noottantilude" (1973), the autobiography of P. Narayanan Nair, one of the early editors of

'Mathrubhumi' who later turned a leftist, contains information about 'Mathrubhumi' and other newspapers of Malabar. K. Kelappan's biography by M.P. Manmadhan, while sketching the career of 'Kerala Gandhi', invariably refers to 'Mathrubhumi', Kelappan being its editor on more than one occasion. His status as a dominating personality in the political and social arena of Kerala, and in particular Malabar, and his long association with 'Mathrubhumi' makes his biography especially relevant to the study. Being a blind admirer of Kelappan, the author however lacks a critical approach while evaluating a historical personality.

K.P. Kesava Menon's autobiography, "Kazhinja Kalam" (1957)is another significant work in this category. Being a leading figure of the Indian National Congress in Malabar and the founder editor of the 'Mathrubhumi', his experiences were intimately connected with the national movement and press. "Thirinju Nokkmbol" (1981), the autobiography of K.A. Damodara Menon, editor of 'Mathrubhumi' for a considerable period of time and a prominent Congress leader, is also useful in making an assessment of 'Mathrubhumi's role in the freedom movement. The autobiography of E.M.S. Nambudiripad (1985), eminent Communist leader, who had been editor of 'Prabhatham' and 'Deshabhimani', not only provides lot of information on these left organs but also makes an attempt to uncover the vested interests of the 'right wing' newspapers of Kerala.

There are also a few specialised studies of the national movement in Malabar or Kerala, which also refer to the role of press. The "History of Freedom Movement in Kerala" by P.K.K. Menon comes under this category. A brief account of the contribution of prominent nationalist newspapers to the course of the freedom movement is provided by the author. Perunna K.N. Nair's "Keralathile Congress Prasthanam" (1967) is another work on the national movement in Kerala under the leadership of the Congress, in which

the author also examines the services rendered by the newspapers to the movement. Another work in this category is "Kerala and Freedom Struggle" by A. Sreedhara Menon. Observing that the birth of political journalism in Malayalam is a precious legacy of the freedom struggle in Kerala, Sreedhara Menon makes a very brief summary of the rise and growth of the nationalist press in Malayalam and its contribution to the freedom struggle.

There are also certain papers/articles, unpublished theses and dissertations which are of relevance to the present study. In the "Reflections on Malabar" edited by C. Balan, a paper by K. Gopalankutty, "Political Journalism - The case of Malabar 1923-47", briefly deals with some political issues taken up by 'Mathrubhumi' during the eventful years of the national movement. Being a small paper and a selective study, only broad indications of Mathrubhumi's policy with respect to certain issues are given. In a paper titled "The Press as a Site of Colonial Discourse - A Case Study on the Experience of Keralam" published in the Journal of South Indian History (Vol I., Issue I, September 2003) edited by V. Kunhali, C.I. Issac makes the point that the printing and reading culture developed amongst the Malayalees as a site of colonial discourse. The unpublished thesis of K. Gopalankutty titled, "National Movement in Malabar: 1930-47", a comprehensive analysis of the national movement in Malabar stressing the role of peasants and workers, is replete with references to press in Malabar. Another dissertation, "Native Press and the National Movement of Malabar with special reference to Mathrubhumi", by A. Parameswaran is an attempt to examine the role of the 'Mathrubhumi' as a spokesman of the national movement with special emphasis on its class interests.

From a survey of the related literature on the topic, it is pretty clear that a comprehensive study of the impact of political journalism on the national movement in Malabar has not been undertaken as yet. Moreover, most of the

works mentioned above, being written by non-historians, did not follow historical methodology. A systematic and comprehensive study of the political journalism of the nationalism era is thus a desideratum.

Sources and Methodology

The most important source material for any study with its focus on press must invariably be the newspaper issues related to the period. In carrying out the present study, the unavailability of the newspaper issues of the colonial period has been a major problem encountered by the researcher. Of the major newspapers published from Malabar during this period, only the back issues of 'Mathrubhumi' are available in its entirety. A fairly good number of the issues of 'Prabhatham' and 'Deshabimani' are also, fortunately, available, which are sufficient enough to give us an idea about the views of these leftist newspapers on important political issues. Considering the fact that 'Mitavadi' was in publication for three decades, it is surprising that a major share of its issues are not traceable. Still, enough issues have survived, enabling us to form our own view on the newspaper's stand on issues of significance.

But the same cannot be said of 'Al-Ameen' or 'Kerala Kesari'. Only less than ten issues of 'Al-Ameen' have come to light so far; it is amazing that only so few issues of such a prominent newspaper, which was second only to 'Mathrubhumi' in terms of circulation and influence for much of the period of its publication lasting for one and a half decades, have been preserved for posterity. As for 'Kerala Kesari', which had inspired its readers with its bold nationalistic journalism with a pro-poor and pro-tenant attitude, not a single issue has survived. The same is true for all the newspapers of the pre-Gandhian era.

It looks more surprising that even 'Chandrika', which has been in publication without interruption from 1934, could not preserve any of its innumerable issues belonging to the pre independence days. Whether this has got anything to do with the fact that its blatantly communal and anti-nationalist journalism of the colonial period might look indefensible in independent India, is anybody's guess.[6]

To a certain extent, this difficulty arising from the non-availability of newspaper issues of the period, can be overcome by making use of the extracts of newspaper reports which are available in the Tamil Nadu Archives in the series 'Native Newspapers Reports' as well as in the 'Reports on Vernacular and English newspapers'. But one has to be very careful in making use of these extracts as they need not necessarily give a real picture of a particular newspaper's view on an issue, for the concerned official reporting to the government might have his own subjective criteria for selecting a particular extract. However, when collated with materials collected from other sources, these extracts could provide useful information to a researcher, based on which he could make reasonably sound inferences on a particular newspaper's perspective on important issues.

Based on these and other archival sources available in various archives and libraries, as also useful data collected through interviews with freedom fighters and persons related to journalism of the period who are still alive and, of course, whatever material available with the published and unpublished works related to the topic, especially auto-biographies and biographies of important editors and political leaders of the nationalist era, it has been possible to make some conclusions which, it is hoped, can pass the test of historical objectivity.

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[6] It is high time that the Govt. took measures to set up a 'Press Archives', wherein every issue of all the newspapers published in India should be kept. Such an institution will surely be a boon for researchers.

Organisation of the Study

A thematic approach is being followed in the study. However the thematic arrangement is done without overlooking the importance of chronology. The study has six parts. In the introductory, a review of related literature and the justification of the study has been given, along with a brief note on the source materials used for the study. The first chapter deals with evolution of press in Kerala. Starting with the introduction of modern printing press in Kerala by the Christian missionaries, the chapter traces the trajectory of its growth - as a powerful weapon in the hands of social and religious reformers, as a medium for the renaissance in Malayalam literature and the rise and growth of political journalism culminating in the nationalist press of the Gandhian era.

In the second chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse how the prominent newspapers of Malabar responded to different political ideologies, having a direct bearing on the national movement. The main focus of the chapter is the response of the press to the ideology of Liberal Nationalism and the Gandhian ideology. The third chapter evaluates the impact of the ideology of socialism/communism on the press scenario of Malabar. The role of the press in the class struggle, especially that of the industrial workers and tenant farmers, which often took militant form in the late 1930's and 40's, has been highlighted.

The response of the press in Malabar to the challenge posed by the growth of communalism during the nationalist era has been dealt with in the fourth chapter. How the nationalist press sometimes succumbed to the virus of communalism even as it campaigned against the communalist ideology has been particularly highlighted in this section. In the concluding part, a brief summary of the main observations and inferences has been given. The fact

that the press in Malabar was a powerful force in shaping the nature and intensity of the national movement has been made out.

The study is narrative, analytical and interpretative in nature.

CHAPTER I

THE EVOLUTION OF PRESS IN KERALA

The printing press in India was a western import which has turned out to be the most beneficial legacies of Western colonial rule. As elsewhere in South India, the pioneers of press in Kerala were the Western missionaries. The main driving force behind their journalistic zeal was, ofcourse, the propagation of Christianity. But that does not take away from the revolutionary significance of the introduction of modern printing press in this part of the world.

Before the evolution of the printing technology, journalism had no existence in Kerala. The evolution of printing, rapid increase in the number of educational institutions and above all the mass interest in current affairs led to the inception of vernacular journalism.[1]

The first printing press was established by Rev. Benjamin Bailey in the C.M.S. Press Kottayam in 1811, with the help of the British Resident Colonel Monroe. Rev. Bailey may rightly be considered as the father of modern Malayalam printing technology. A carpenter and two blacksmiths were made to live in the press for the sake of moulding modern alphabets in Malayalam. However, Kerala could not claim the credit of commencing printing in Malayalam; Malayalam printing first commenced at the Curier Press in Bombay in 1811. The first book to be printed in Malayalam was the Holy Bible.[2]

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1 Puduppally Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram* (Mal.), Trissur, 1985, p. 13.

2 P.J. Thomas, *Keralathile Kristeey a Sahityam* (Mal.), 1935, pp. 84-85.

According to the Press Commission Report, released in 1954, the 'Vijnana Nikshepam', published from Kottayam in 1840, was the first newspaper in Kerala. Two inadvertent errors occurred in this report; it misquoted 'Jnana Nikshepam', the name of the journal, as 'Vijnana Nikshepam' and its year of publication as 1840 instead of 1848. Many committed the same mistake later.

Now it has been generally acknowledged that *'Rajya Samacharam'* was the first journal published in Kerala. It came out from Illikkunnu, a remote village near Thalassery, in June 1847. The size of the journal was Royal with eight pages and was printed in a hand-made cyclostyled press. The journal was published by the German Basel Evangelical Mission from Nettur, Thalassery. Neither the name of the editor nor the price of the journal was given in the journal. Perhaps it was a publication intended for free circulation. While K.P Vareed argued that Fr. Muller might have been the editor of the publication,[3] Murkoth Kunhappa felt that it might have been edited by no less a person than Dr. Hermann Gudert,[4] the coordinator of the Basel Mission.[5] Anyway, what can be said with a measure of certainty is that Gundert was the moving spirit behind 'Rajya Samacharam'.[6]

The contents of 'Rajya Samacharam' were mostly evangelical and were often critical of other religions, especially Hinduism and Islam. From June

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3 K.P. Vareed, *Dr. Herman Gundert*, Kottayam, 1973, pp. 94-95.

4 Born in 1814 at Stuttgart in Germany, Hermann Gundert arrived in India in 1836 as a missionary. He reached Kerala in 1838 and made Thalassery his centre of activity. He lived at Illikkunnu in Nettur near Thalassery from April 1839 till he returned to Germany in 1859. He was known to have a special aptitude to study languages and knew no less than 18 languages. Gundert had made immense contribution to the development of Malayalam language, the Malayalam-English dictionary being his most lasting legacy.

5 Murkoth Kunhappa, *Malayala Manorama Samskarika Tharangini* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1973, p. 95.

6 K.K.N. Kurup and K.J. John (ed.), *Legacy of Basel Mission and Hermann Gundert*, Calicut, 1993.

1847 to December 1850, forty-two issues of the journal had seen the light of the day. The paper used was of such durability that even the lapse of more than one and a half century could not damage it. It was one Kannankatu, a native, who composed the type.

'Paschimodayam' was another journal published by the Basel Mission, Nettur, from Illikkunnu. The first issue came out in October 1847. It too was a cyclostyled issue like the 'Rajyasamacharam', with an annual subscription of only half a rupee. This was the second journal launched by Hermann Gundert and was also the second in Malayalam. At the end of every issue the name of Fr. Muller was printed as the editor. However, it was widely believed that the hands that were set behind 'Paschimodayam', as was the case with 'Rajyasamacharam', were that of Gundert himself.[7]

The proclaimed aim of the publication was to appraise the people in these parts of the world about the modern trends in the then existing western science and other scientific exploration. Gundert was an expert news editor who could coin most suitable headings and captions. He never failed in the matter of providing illustrations. 'Paschimodayam' mostly dealt with astronomy, geography and Kerala history. Astronomy, in particular, was dealt with in detail giving the solar system, movement of stars, distance in between them etc. According to Murkoth Kunhappa, write-ups in the 'Paschimodayam' contained modern knowledge from the west.[8] With 'Paschimodayam' began the dissemination of modern knowledge in Kerala. No wonder, the journal circulated not only among the Christians but also among the Hindus. It will be no exaggeration to state that modern journalism in Kerala commenced with 'Paschimodayam'.

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7 K.P. Vareed, Op.cit., pp. 94-100.

8 Murkoth Kunhappa, op.cit., pp. 104-06.

The first printed magazine in Malayalam language was the 'Jnana Nikshepam' published at the CMS Press, Kottayam in November 1848. The credit for starting this journal goes to Rev. Benjamin Bailey of the Church Mission Society. Arch Deacon Koshy and Rev. George Mathen were also actively involved in the conduct of this paper.[9] It was an eight-page monthly with price one chakra. The contents of the journal have done justice to the title which means 'Treasury of Knowledge'. As has been mentioned earlier, the general impression that it was the first journal in Kerala was corrected later. 'Njana Nikshepam' can be considered as the first magazine in Kerala which imbibed all the features of a modern journal. Just below the title, a list of contents was given on either side of the journal under the banner 'Sangathi Vivarangal' (subject matter), one after another.

Rev. George Mathen published 'Vidya Samgraham' in 1864 with Richard Collins, the principal of CMS College, as the patron. This publication, which was also known as the 'Kottayam College Quarterly Magazine', did not last long. Between 1864 and 1867 only three volumes had come out.

The first newspaper published from Kerala was in English, the 'Western Star' from Cochin in 1860. It was also the first publication started by non-clergies in Kerala. The first editor of this paper was said to be Sir Charles Lawson who later became the editor of the 'Madras Mail'. In August 1864, a Malayalam edition of the 'Western Star' was published which was named 'Paschimataraka'. Ittoop writer and T.J. Pailey were the early editors of this first newspaper in Malayalam. Later Philippose Asan became the editor.[10]

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[9] Department of Public Relations, *The Press in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1977, p. 2.

[10] C.L. Antony, *Bhashagadya Sahitya Charithram - Prasthanangalilude* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1958.

In 1870 another newspaper started publication from Kochi which was titled *'Kerala Pataka'*. It had as its editors Mangalath Kunjunni Asan and T.J. Pailey who was earlier connected with 'Paschimataraka'. The appearance of 'Kerala Pataka' seems to have had an adverse impact on the circulation of 'Paschimataraka', the publication of which was stopped for a brief period. In course of time the two papers merged to form the *'Paschimataraka-Keralapataka'*, but this arrangement did not last long and 'Paschimataraka' reappeared in its original name. There is however no evidence of the continued existence of 'Kerala Pataka'. Under Philippose Asan, the 'Paschimataraka' made frequent attacks on the Catholics and the Pope.[11] The paper also gave enough space for news of public interest and was not afraid of attacking bureaucracy.

W.H. Moore started the 'Travancore Herald', an English paper from the CMS Press, Kottayam in 1867. As a supplement to this, he also published a Malayalam paper from the same press, the 'Santishtavadi'. Because of its out spoken criticism of Divan Madhavarayar's administration, the Travancore Government banned its publication. 'Santhishtavadi', thus, became the first martyr to the cause of freedom of the press in Malayalam journalism.[12]

All these early publications were run by Protestant Christians and the one thing common to all these journals was their criticism of the Pope and Catholic principles. This naturally injured the pride of the catholics and they felt the need of having their own publication. Their first venture was 'Kerala', started in 1866 by Anthony Annavi, a Catholic from Kochi.[13]

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11 K.M. Cheriyan Kozhuvalloor, *Kalloor Oommen Philippose*, Kottayam, 1973, pp. 47-48.

12 Chummar Chundel and Sukumaran Pottekkat (ed.), *Malayala Pathra Charithram* (Mal.), 1977, p. 95.

13 G. Priyadarshan, *Malayala Pathrapravarthanam-Prarambha Swaroopam* (Mal.), Trissur, 1982, p. 36.

But the major catholic mouthpiece was the 'Satyanadakahalam' which started publication from Kunanmavu on 12 October 1876 under the auspices of the Italian Carmelite Mission. There is difference of opinion as regards the first editor of 'Satyananda Kahalam'. Though the name of Fr. Candidus, an Italian missionary, is printed below the first editorial, several scholars have accepted the name of Fr. Louis Vaippisseri as the first editor on the basis of some Carmelite documents and tradition. The first editorial promised that the paper would give preference to general knowledge and news. Its publishing centre was shifted to Varapuzha in 1879 and later to Ernakulam. Started as a fortnightly, it was issued thrice a month from 1900 and then converted into a weekly. After an uninterrupted independent existence of nearly a century, it merged with the 'Kerala Times' in 1970. After the merger, the Sunday edition of the 'Kerala Times' was styled as 'Satyanandam'. Though 'Satyananda Kahalam' was started with the objective of working for the material and spiritual well being of the Catholics, it also contributed to the general progress and welfare of the people of Kerala.[14]

The next paper to come out from Kochi was the 'Kerala Deepakam' in 1878. It was started by Kathru Sahaji Bappu, a Muslim from Kochi. As such, it was the first paper on behalf of the Muslim community in Kerala. But it appears that the paper did not have a long existence.

From the embers of 'Paschimodayam', which died out in 1851, yet another light in Malayalam journalism was kindled in 1874. The new journal was named *'Keralopakari'*. The journal was printed at the Basel Mission Press, Mangalore and published from Nettur, Thalassery by the Basel Evangelical Mission. Lawrence Porathur, an evangelist, was the most famous among the Indians who edited this journal. He was a scholar and thinker, and his articles enriched Christian literature. The magazine had a lifespan of 42

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14 Puduppally Raghavan, op.cit., p. 63.

years. It had 16 pages and its annual subscription was 12 annas. 'Keralopakari' contained social, religious and literary matters.

In 1878 *'Malayalamitram'* was published from Kottayam. Its lifespan must have been very short and nothing was heard about it later. *'Kerala Chandrika'* was started in 1879 from Trivandrum. Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar[15] wrote political articles in it which were highly critical of the administration. Because of official opposition 'Kerala Chandrika' did not have a smooth run and had to stop publication before long. The *West Coast Spectator*, an English weekly printed by Vakil Poovadan Raman from the Spectator Press, Calicut started publication in 1879 with Dr. Keys, an Englishman, as its editor. Later, its name was changed as the 'Malabar Spectator'.

Devji Bhimji, a Gujarati merchant of Kochi, had made significant contribution to the growth of Malayalam journalism in its early phase. Coming to Mattancherry from Gujarat at the age of ten in 1840, he became, through sheer hardwork, a successful merchant and industrialist. Having been attracted to printing and publishing, he founded the Keralamitram Press in 1867 and published a number of books. In January 1881, he started publishing a weekly, 'Kerala Mitram', from the same press under the editorship of Kandathil Varghese Mappila, who was later to found the 'Malayala Manorama'. The weekly's approach towards social issues of the time did not betray any religious or caste bias and it became acceptable to people belonging to all castes and communities. Good literary articles including book reviews adorned the pages of 'Kerala Mitram' during this period.[16] Perunna K.N. Nair had characterized 'Keralamitram' as the first real

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[15] Popularly known by his pseudonym 'Kesari', Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar was a celebrated journalist known for his wit and sharp humour.

[16] Chummar Chundel and Sukumaran Pottekkat (ed.), Op. cit., p.100.

newspaper in Malayalam.[17] Varghese Mappila left 'Kerala Mitram' after two years and for the remaining twelve years of its existence it was edited by Mangalath Kunjunni Asan. Unfortunately, it could not survive long after the death of its founder, Devji Bhimji in 1894. For a few years Devji Bhimji had also published a Marathi journal, 'Kerala Kokil'.

The first Malayalam newspaper published from Malabar was 'Keralapatrika', started by Chengulath Kunhirama Menon in 1884 from Kozhikode. This was printed from the Vidyavilasini Press, founded by Kalahastiyappa Muthaliyar, former Munsif of Calicut. A graduate teacher in Kozhikode, Chengulath was a prolific writer. When he visited Calcutta in 1884 to attend the conference of the Indian National Association, he conceived the idea of starting a weekly on the model of the 'Amrita Bazaar Patrika'. With the foundation of the Indian National Congress, 'Kerala Patrika' became, for all practical purposes, the mouthpiece of the Congress. It translated the name of the Congress as Bharatha Mahajana Sabha.[18] The resolutions and the addresses of its leaders received wide coverage in the 'Patrika'. It also featured news on international affairs.

As the editor of 'Kerala Patrika', Chengulath could wield a free pen that struck out against official corruption and injustice. He was fined Rs. 51 for publishing an article criticizing the Government It must have been the first instance in Malabar when an editor had to face punishment for freedom of the press.[19] Impressed by the crusading spirit of 'Kerala patrika', it is said that the Travancore Raja subscribed for 200 copies for distribution among his officials. Kunhirama Menon also waged a crusade against the caste system.

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17 Perunna K.N. Nair, *Malayala Pathrathinte Kadha* (Mal.), Ernakulam, 1976, p.15.

18 Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer, *Kerala Sahitya Charithram* (Mal.), Vol. VI, Trivandrum, 1957, p. 442.

19 K.P. Kesava Menon, *Samakaleena Keralaeeyar* (Mal.), (Vol. I), Kottayam, 1974, p. 22.

Sanjayan rightly observed that Kunhirama Menon was to Malayalam journalism what Kumaran Asan was to modern Malayalam poetry.[20] Chengulath is rightly considered the father of political journalism in Kerala. He retired from the conduct of the paper in 1910, leaving it in the hands of his nephew Cheriya Kunhirama Menon (popularly known as M.R.K.C.), who was already a famous literary figure. Because of his other pre-occupations, MRKC could not manage the paper properly. Sanjayan and Koyipalli Parameswara Kurup were some of the other editors of 'Kerala Patrika'. Among the prominent persons who wrote articles for it, the names of Appu Nedungadi (the author of 'Kunthalatha'), O. Chandu Menon (the author of 'Indulekha') and Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar ('Kesari') deserve special mention.

'Kerala Patrika' which was the main spokesman of the Congress in Malabar during its moderate phase, turned a critic of the national organization once it embarked on an extra-constitutional and law-breaking agitation under Gandhi.

The 'Malayali' was a monthly started in 1886 in Trivandrum as an official organ of the Malayali Social Reform League which later became the Malayali Sabha. Pattayil Raman Pillai Asan was its first editor. Later under C.V. Raman Pillai, a literary giant and a Government employee, it became a crusader for social and political reform. 'Malayali' is remembered most for being the moving spirit behind the Malayali Memorial agitation. It raised the slogan of 'Travancore for Tavancoreans' and vehemently criticized the policy of appointing Tamil Brahmins in the higher posts of the state service. Later C.V. Raman Pillai had to resign, when the Travancore Government prohibited its employees from running a press. The paper itself shifted the publishing centre to Thangasseri in Kollam, which was a British enclave, fearing official

[20] M.R. Nair, *Sanjayan* (Mal.), Vol. II, Kozhikode, 1970, p. 25.

retaliation.[21] Swadeshabhimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai served as its editor for a brief period around this time. He was followed by K. Velu Pillai as the editor. It was during this period that Sahitya Panchananan P.K. Narayana Pillai wrote a series of satirical articles titled 'Kalikala Vaibhavam', under the pseudonym, 'Damanan'. It became an instant hit and the paper's circulation increased significantly.

Later 'Malayali' was shifted back to Trivandrum and came out as a daily under the editorship of M.R. Madhava Warrier. Under him it supported the struggle for responsible Government in Travancore, and its name and circulation reached new heights during this period. But the Government retaliated by prohibiting the publication of the paper and it had to stop publication till 1946. In that year it restarted publication as a daily from Kesavavilasam Press, Trivandrum. In 1960 the proprietorship of the paper passed on to the Nair Service Society and it began to be published from Changanachery. A decade later, 'Malayali' went out of publication.

'Nasrani Deepika' started publication on 15 April 1887 from the Mannaman St. Joseph Press on the initiative of Nasrani Jatyaikya Sangham. As its name suggests, it was a 'Christian paper'. The first Managing Editor of the paper was Nidhiyirikkal Manikkathanar. From 1895 onwards it was published thrice a month; in 1899 it became a weekly; from 1912 onwards it was published twice a week and in 1927 it became a daily. It was the imaginative leadership of Fr. Evujin that gave the newspaper a new direction. He shifted the publishing centre from the remote Mannanam to the Kottayam city and deleted the word 'Nasrani' from its name so as to make it acceptable to all communities and castes.

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[21] Kerala History Association, *Kerala Charithram* (Mal.) (Vol. II), Kochi, 1974, p. 783.

Upliftment of the community had always been the main aim of 'Deepika' and in pursuit of that end no sacrifice was deemed big enough. Though Christians did not get my significant benefit out of the Malayali Memorial agitation, 'Deepika' still supported it. It also supported all agitations waged by Christians and other minorities and backward classes for equal rights and status vis-à-vis the forward classes. 'Deepika' was also in the vanguard of the 'Nivarthana' or Abstention movement. The struggle for responsible Government in Travancore got general support from the part of 'Deepika'. There were, however, occasions when the paper was found wanting in taking a bold stand; for eg: it supported the Travancore Government's deportation of Swadeshabhimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai. 'Deepika' also played a significant role in the agitation against nationalisation of education in Travancore in 1995. The contribution of 'Deepika' in the field of culture and literature was no insignificant.

Reference has already been made about the English paper 'West Coast Spectator' from Calicut launched by Poovadan Raman. As a supplement to it, a Malayalam weekly was started on 3 October 1888. This was 'Kerala Sanchari' and its first editor was Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar ('Kesari'). Under C.P. Govindan Nair, a teacher of Guruvayurappan College, 'Kerala Sanchari' made considerable progress.[22] Its critical approach towards the social, political and cultural issues of the time was commendable. In 1921, C. Krishnan, the prominent Ezhava leader and editor of *Mitavadi* bought the rights of *Kerala Sanchari* and the latter was merged into the former.

The tradition of the missionary pioneers was kept up by some journals started by certain priests, for the propagation of Christian philosophy and teachings like 'Karmala Kusumam', 'Sathyadootham', 'Cherupushpam', 'Osana' and 'Penthikoshth'. Hindu scholars, on their part, felt the need of replying to

[22] Chummar Chundel and Sukumaran Pottekkat (ed), op.cit., p. 108.

the criticism of the Christian journals and clarify the doubts of the people and started journals like 'Arya Siddhanta Chandrika' from Kozhikode, 'Kerala Dharshanam' from Kottarakkara, 'Sivagogivilasam' and 'Abhinava Keralam', edited by Vaghbadananda Guru and others from Malabar.

The establishment of 'Malayala Manorama' marks a turning point in Kerala journalism.[23] Eversince he left the 'Keralamitram', Kandathil Varghese Mappila had been thinking of starting a newspaper on his own. For this purpose, a joint stock company was formed, the second of its kind in Kerala and the first by the Keralites, viz., the Malayala Manorama Company in 1889 at Kottayam. It started its publication as a weekly on 22 March 1890 under the editorship of Varghese Mappila. Under him, *Malayala Manorama* gave a prominent place to linguistic and literary matters; of the four pages of the paper, one full page was allotted for these. On the initiative of Varghese Mappila, a forum of Malayalam poets was formed which was called the Bhashaposhini Sabha. The Sabha had played its own role in unifying the three different administrative units of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar into a single cultural unit. The *Bhashaposhini* monthly was launched as part of this great endeavour.

After the death of Varghese Mappila in 1904, his brother's son K.C. Mammen Mappila took his position and guided the paper for the next half a century. His long stewardship was responsible for making the *Malayala Manorama* what it is today. Even as he renovated the paper and published news of social, political and national importance he also took care of its financial side, making *Malayala Manorama* one of the greatest success stories of Indian press industry. Started as a weekly in 1890, it was converted into a bi-weekly in 1901 and from 1918 it was issued thrice a week; finally it was

[23] P.K.K. Menon, *History of Freedom Movement in Kerala* (Vol. II), Trivandrum, 1966, p.499.

made a daily on 16 January 1928. In 1937, the *Malayala Manorama Weekly* was launched with E.V. Krishna Pillai as its first editor.

The contribution of *Malayala Manorama* in the social, cultural and political fields has been immense. Its first editorial was about the education of the untouchables, *Pulayarude Vidyabhyasam*, which strongly argued for extending education to the untouchables of Kerala. The paper extended support to the social and political movements like Malayali Memorial, Ezhava Memorial, Temple Entry Agitation, Abstention Movement and the movement for responsible government in Travancore. Its strong espousal of the cause of responsible government in Travancore inevitably led to a clash with Diwan C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer's Government. The Government confiscated the paper on 9th September 1938 for publishing, the news about the police firing at Neyyattinkara. The office of the *Malayala Manorama* was sealed on 10 September and its editor K.C. Mammen Mappila along with his brother K.C. Eappen and his son K.M. Eappen were arrested and sent to jail. The paper could resume its publication only after independence.

A year after the birth of *Malayala Manorama* from Kottayam, another 'Manorama' began publication from Kozhikode as a fortnightly. This was started by the Kerala Mahajana Sabha which was a forum of some prominent personalities of Kozhikode for discussing social and political issues of the day, and had the patronage of the royal family of the Zamorins.[24] To distinguish it from *Malayala Manorama*, it was popularly called the *Kozhikodan Manorama*. When K.P. Kesava Menon was studying law in England, he used to write articles for the *Manorama*, under the title *Bilathi Visheshangal*. The paper was forced to stop publication in 1940 owing to newsprint scarcity caused by the World War II.

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[24] Perunna K.N. Nair, op. cit., p.43.

The first newspaper to be published in the name of the Ezhava community was the *Sujananandini*, started by Paravoor Kesavan Asan from Kollam in 1892. The *Ganaranjini*, a literary magazine launched by Udaya Varma from Nadapuram and the *Saraswathy*, published from Thalassery by Murkoth Kumaran were some of the other papers that came out during this period. On the initiative of Appan Tampuran and Kodungallur Kunjukuttan Thampuran, *Mangalodayam*, a bilingual monthly was launched by the Yogakshema Sabha. A major portion of it was printed in Sanskrit and only a small portion in Malayalam. The *Nair*, started as a monthly in 1902 by Kainikkara Kumara Pillai, projected mainly the customs and manners and the history of Nairs.

The *Paropakari* was one of the earliest Muslim journals to be published from Malabar. Starting from 1902 *Paropakari* continued to be published for about three years from Kozhikode under the editorship of prominent Muslim reformer Sayyid Makti Tangal.

Vivekodayam, the official organ of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, was launched in 1904 from Trivandrum with Kumaran Asan, the great poet and General Secretary of the Yogam, as the editor. The upliftment of the backward communities, especially the Ezhavas and Thiyyas, was the aim of this publication. K. Damodaran and R. Sankar, among others, also served as its editors. Later C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar purchased it and published it from Irinjalakuda. No other newspaper did make as much contribution as did *Vivekodayam* towards upliftment of the avarnas in Travancore.[25]

In 1905 Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi started the Swadeshabhimani Press in Chirayinkil taluk and published a newspaper from it in the same name, *Swadeshabhimani*. In 1906 he entrusted the editorship of the

[25] Puduppally Raghavan, op. cit., p.146.

publication to K. Ramakrishna Pillai (later he become famous as Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai) who was already experienced in journalism. As the editor of *Malayali* in 1903, his articles in it were sensational and very popular. Soon Ramakrishna Pillai became a co-partner of the Swadeshabhimani Press and paper, and it was shifted to Trivandrum in 1907.

He was a patriot with uncommon courage and a strong critic of the corrupted bureaucracy. *Swadeshabhimani*, under him, fought for the dignity and liberty of the individual and freedom of the press. The paper became a nightmare to royal officials, especially the Diwan of Travancore, P. Rajagopalachari. His editorial on 24 August 1910 which concluded with the wish that 'if Vishakam Thirunal were the Maharaja, Diwan P. Rajagopalachari would have been punished by flogging him with the cudgels of the Maharaja's horsemen', invited the royal proclamation deporting him from Travancore and confiscating his press and paper.[26] The deportation made him the greatest martyr for freedom of the press in Kerala. After deportation he edited the *Atmaposhini* from Kunnamkulam from 1913 to 1915. He had also authored a number of pioneering works including the biographies of Karl Marx and M.K. Gandhi and a series of articles on socialism. Afflicted by tuberculosis, his last years were miserable. He died in 1928 at Kannur.

'Kavana Kaumudi' which started publication from Pandalam in November 1904, was unique in that it was a fortnightly in the poetic medium. Started under the patronage of Pandalath Kerala Varma Thampuran, it was dedicated to the development of Malayalam poetry. After two years its publication was shifted to Trissur; in 1909 it returned to Pandalam for a brief period. After P.V. Krishna Warrier assumed its publication, 'Kavana Kaumudi' was published from Kottakkal. It had made incomparable

[26] *Swadeshabhimani*, 24 August 1910, Quoted in Puduppally Raghavan, Ibid., p.189-90.

contribution Malayalam poetry. Krishna Warrier also published 'Dhanwanthari' a medical magazine, in 1904 and 'Lakshmi Vilasam', an economic magazine in 1906.

Pallath Krishan started the 'Kerala Chintamani' in 1905 from Trissur with Kunnath Janardhana Menon as its first editor. Later V.C. Balakrishna Panicker, the famous poet became its editor. Like *Swadeshabhimani*, 'Kerala Chintamani' also took keen interest in political developments of the time. But unlike Ramakrishna Pillai, Balakrishna Panicker did not make any personal criticism. Murkoth Kumaran also served as its editor for some time.

Though there is no unanimity of opinion over the year of commencement of *Mitavadi*, 1907 appears to have more acceptability among scholars.[27] The address of G.K. Gokhale at the Benares session of the Indian National Congress in 1905 was believed to have inspired Murkoth Kumaran to launch a newspaper in the name of *Mitavadi* (meaning 'moderate'). When Sivasankaran, a wealthy businessman from Thalassery consented to be the proprietor, *Mitavadi* became a reality with Murkoth as the editor. No issue of *Mitavadi* in its first phase, when it was published from Thalassery, has come to light; but there are enough evidence to prove that it gave a prominent place to news.[28] Kumaran Asan's epoch-making *Veenapoovu* was first published in *Mitavadi* in parts, despite the fact that Travancore, the home and centre of activity of Asan, at that time could boast of a number of celebrated literary journals. The reading habit of the educated youth of Malabar grew considerably because of *Mitavadi*. The pages of *Mitavadi* were also open to a

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[27] While Murkoth Kunhappa considered 1908 to be the year in which *Mitavadi* started publication, P.V.K. Nedungadi thought it was 1904. However, many others like Perunna K.N.Nair, K.P. Kesava Menon, T.M. Chummar and G. Priyadarshan argued that the year was 1907.

[28] G. Priyadarshan, op. cit., p.119.

number of debates and controversies in which such literary giants as Muloor and M.K. Gurukkal participated.[29]

The quitting of Murkoth Kumaran as editor because of some strain in his relations with proprietor Sivasankaran was a great blow to *Mitavadi*. Before long *Mitavadi* was bought by C. Krishnan from Sivasankaran. C. Krishnan was one of the prominent Thiyya leaders who took keen interest in the upliftment of his community. He started publishing *Mitavadi* as a magazine from Kozhikode from August 1913 onwards. Under C. Krishnan, *Mitavadi* was a 'Thiyya Publication'; critics even called it the "Bible of the Thiyyas".

Later, Krishnan acquired the rights of 'Kerala Sanchari' and merged it into 'Mitavadi'. With a crusading spirit 'Mitavadi' fought against the tyranny of the caste system. It generally supported the British Government and opposed the national movement under the leadership of the Congress, as being dominated by the Brahmins. After sustained efforts at the upliftment of backward castes for more than a quarter of a century, 'Mitavadi' went out of publication in 1938.

Malabari, which started publication as a weekly from Tirur in 1909 under the ownership of Kizhedath Madhava Menon had a short life span of two years, but it was a fruitful one, under the editorship of V.C. Balakrishna Panicker, renowned poet. He showed boldness in criticising the government in important matters of state. His sharp criticism of the action of the Travancore Government in deporting Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai is especially worth mentioning.

Kerala Kaumudi started publication as a weekly from Mayyanad in 1911. There is a view that Mulur S. Padmanabha Panicker was its first

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[29] Ibid., p. 120

editor.[30] Anyway, the heart and soul of 'Kerala Kaumudi' during its early years was C.V. Kunjiraman, a multi-faceted personality - a poet, historian, journalist, all combined. 'Kerala Kaumudi' was shifted to Kollam and then to Trivandrum. It became a full-fledged daily in 1940. It has made immense contribution to the social and cultural progress of Kerala. Its support to the social reform movement was total. The Abstention movement and the movement for responsible Government in Travancore got great encouragement and support from it. It was considered as a mouthpiece of the Travancore State Congress. 'Kerala Kaumudi' continue to be a prominent newspaper in Kerala.

T.K. Madhavan, a prominent Congress leader, launched the Deshabhimani in 1914. It rendered valuable service in the struggle for responsible Government in Travancore. It fought against caste inequality and stood for social reform. 'Deshabhimani' advocated the need for temple entry for Harijans and Ezhavas.[31] T.K. Madhavan was one of the leading lights of the Vaikom Satyagraha and 'Deshabhimani' was in the vanguard as one of the torch bearers of the Satyagraha.

When the Nair Service Society (NSS) was founded in 1914 as the premier organisation of the Nair community, it felt the need of having its own mouthpiece. Thus the 'Service' was started in 1919 from Karukachal. Expectedly it highlighted the activities of the NSS and stood for reform in the Nair community.[32]

'Yogakshemam' and 'Unninambudiri' spearheaded the campaign for the reform-minded and progressive among the Nambudiris of Kerala and their organisation Yogakshema Sabha. Both the papers were printed at the

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30 *Mulur Janma Satabdi Smarakapatram* (Mal.), p. 146-47.

31 A.K. Pillai, *Congressum Keralavum* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1935, p. 356.

32 Puduppally Raghavan, op.cit., pp. 162-64.

Mangalodayam Press, Trissur. V.T. Bhattathiripad was the moving spirit behind the publications. EMS Nambudiripad was closely associated with 'Unni Nambudiri'. The role played by both these publications in reforming the Nambudiri community during the first half of the 20th century cannot be over emphasized.

'Samadarshi', which commenced publication from Trivandrum in 1918, became immensely popular under the editorship of A. Balakrishna Pillai, alias Kesari A. Balakrishna Pillai in 1923. The paper, under him, supported the political and social movements of the time including the Vaikom Satyagraha. He ruthlessly attacked the corrupt and high-handed aristocracy of Travancore. When the Government introduced the Travancore Newspaper Regulations in 1926, to bring the newspapers under stricter control, the management of 'Samadarshi' prevailed upon Balakrishna Pillai to resign. But he did not sit idle for long and started a new periodical, 'Probhodakan' in 1930. Only 14 copies were published and it was banned by the Travancore Government He next launched 'Kesari' on 17 September 1930 and continued his crusade against the autocratic policies of Diwan C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. 'Kesari' was also short-lived and was banned in 1935.

K. Ayyappan, who was to become famous as 'Sahodaran Ayyapan', launched 'Sahodaran', a monthly, in 1920 from Cherayi. It was the embodiment of the principles and ideas of Ayyappan, which was identified with the upliftment of the untouchables and the downtrodden of Kerala. 'Sahodaran' encouraged rationalism and Socialist doctrine[33] and fought for social, political and legal equality.[34] It mobilised the people for responsible Government inter-caste and dowry-free community marriage and temple entry agitation.

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33 K.A. Subramanian, *Sahodaran Ayyappan - A Biography*, Kochi, 1973, p. 87.

34 M. Sahadevan, *Towards Social Justice and Nation Making - A Study of Sahodaran Ayyapan*, Palakkad, 1993, p. 57.

The Rise of Nationalist Press

The beginning of Gandhian era in Indian politics also marked an important stage in the evolution of press in Kerala. Though political journalism had already started and newspapers supporting the 'moderate' Congress had appeared on the scene, the major thrust of the journalism of the pre-Gandhian era was social reform. It was the rise of M.K. Gandhi at the helm of the freedom movement that inaugurated a new era for the press as for politics. The new found confidence of the Indian people that marked Indian politics after the advent of Gandhi was reflected in the rise of an intensely nationalist press.

The first full-fledged nationalist newspaper published in Kerala was 'Swarat', a fortnightly launched by A.K. Pillai from Kollam in 1921. It enthusiastically supported the Gandhian movement and exhorted the readers to boycott foreign goods. In 1926 'Swarat' was converted into a daily and shifted to Trivandrum. The paper was in the forefront in spearheading the campaign in favour of the Vaikom Satyagraha.

G. Raman Menon launched the 'Pauran', a monthly from Kayamkulam in 1921. After three years, it was converted into a weekly. The 'Pauran' was a strong advocate of the 'Swadeshi' and published Gandhiji's articles on the subject.[35]

'Bhaje Bharatam' was a paper published from Chengannur under the editorship of M. Mathunni and Shankarathil Sankara Pillai, to propagate Congress views. The editors were punished for treason in 1923, just before the beginning of Vaikom Satyagraha and put in jail. They were the first

[35] Native Newspapers Reports (hereafter NNPR), 36/1928, Tamil Nadu Archives (hereafter TNA), Chennai.

Congress political prisoners from Travancore.[36] Their imprisonment put an end to the publication of 'Bhaje Bharatam'.

The 'Bhaje Keralam' started publication from Ernakulam in 1921 with Paliyath Cheriya Kunjunni Achan as editor. It took up Congress propaganda in a major way and was also highly critical of the policies of the Government of Kochi. Ultimately its press was sealed by the Government for publishing an editorial severely criticising the Diwan, Sir Vijayaraghavachariyar.[37]

V.K. Chinnammalu Amma, the sister of V.K. Krishna Menon, published the 'Navayugam' from Calicut in 1921. Vallathol Narayana Menon's nationalist poems which were published in it, attracted the readers at that time. It may be noted that another paper in the same name, 'Navayugam' was launched later from Trivandrum by the Communist leaders of Travancore.

The most important nationalist newspaper to emerge at this time was the *Mathrubhumi* from Kozhikode. The prominent Congress leaders of Malabar came forward to launch it to fill a political vacuum created by that political volcano, the Malabar Rebellion. After the suppression of the Malabar Rebellion and the withdrawal of the Non-cooperation Movement and until almost the end of the twenties, the political struggle for freedom was on a low key.[38] Not only the Congress programmes but the entire public activity of Malabar virtually came to a halt. 'For a long time after the Rebellion, no public activity was possible in Malabar. Enmity towards the Congress was evident everywhere.... Some Hindu leaders accused the Congressmen of treason for joining the Khilafatists.... The Muslims complained that those who had induced them to join the Congress, abandoned them when police

[36] Puthupally Raghavan, op.cit., p.218.

[37] *Ibid*, p. 218.

[38] A. Sreedhara Menon: *A Concise Political History of Modern Kerala*, Madras, 1987, p. 53.

oppression and firing by the troops started".[39] The Congress leaders failed to link with the people directly and they had no other media of communication of their own. Because of the psychosis of fear, editors in Malabar were not prepared to publish news of the national movement. It was in these circumstances that the Congress leaders, after due deliberations, resolved to found a publishing company, the *Mathrubhumi* Printing and Publishing Company'. K.P. Kesava Menon, K. Madhavan Nair, Kurur Neelakantan Namboodiripad, Ambalat Karunakara Menon, T.V. Sundara Iyer, Dr. A.R. Menon and P. Achuthan were the directors of the company when it was registered. The company had an authorised capital of Rs. one lakh, comprising 20,000 shares of Rs. 5 each.[40] Though the company was registered in 1922, the *Mathrubhumi* newspaper was published only after one year. In the beginning it was published as a tri-weekly. Its directors had decided to publish the first issue of the paper on the first anniversary of Gandhiji's arrest on 18th March, 1922. However, the first issue came out on 17th March 1923, as 18th March happened to be a Sunday.[41]

The editorial board of the *Mathrubhumi* consisted of K.P. Kesava Menon as the editor, K. Madhavan Nair as the Manager, P. Ramunni Menon as Assistant Editor and K.V. Kunjunni Menon, Kozhippurath Madhava Menon and T.P. Chandukutty Kidavu as members. The team was workaholic with a restless mind. *Mathrubhumi*'s origin was the symbolic expression of the national awakening of the country.[42] In the first leader of the *Mathrubhumi*, it set forth the objective thus: "Human life is a noble obligation. Everyone must have the absolute freedom for the realisation of that obligation. All must be enabled to enjoy spontaneously the fruits of their

[39] K.P. Kesava Menon: *Kazhinja Kalam* (Mal.), Kozhikode, 1957, p. 1128.

[40] V.R. Menon, *Mathrubhumiyude Charithram* (Mal.) Vol. I, Kozhikode, 1973, p.49.

[41] *Ibid*.

[42] K.P. Vijayan, *Pathrangal Vichitrangal* (Mal.), p.17.

wisdom, labour and ability. The customs, rules and regulations that reduce it and weaken and destroy human self-respect must be kept apart as they are not conducive to the progress of humanity. It is the only way to attain progress, freedom and peace completely in the world. We will be examining all the other subjects on this premise".[43]

The *Mathrubhumi* was the voice of the Indian National Congress. The paper published Congress programmes promptly and tried to educate the people on the virtue of patriotism. It always gave maximum coverage to Gandhi. K.P. Kesava Menon, P. Ramunni Menon, K. Kelappan, P. Narayanan Nair and K.A. Damodara Menon were some of prominent editors who contributed to the growth of *Mathrubhumi* as the pre-eminent nationalist paper of Kerala. Started as a tri-weekly, it was converted into a daily in 1930, to bring home to the people of Malabar, the hot news about the momentous developments in connection with the Salt Satyagraha. The '*Mathrubhumi* Illustrated Weekly' started publication in 1932, with Gandhi's photo adorning the cover. A detailed discussion on *Mathrubhumi*s role in the freedom movement will be undertaken in the next chapter.

Prominent Congress leader Muhammed Abdurahiman Sahib started publishing the 'Al-Ameen' from Kozhikode on 12 October 1924, the birthday of Prophet Mohammed. Besides Abdul Rahman, who was also the editor, the director board of 'Al-Ameen' included A.K. Kunhi Mayan Haji, C.P. Alippikkeyi, K.M. Seethi Muhammed Haji, Kunji Pokker Kutty, Manapattu Kochu Moideen Haji and others.[44] Started as a tri-weekly, it began to be issued as a daily in 1930. The objective of Abdul Rahman in publishing the 'Al-Ameen' was to rouse nationalist spirit among the Muslims of Malabar. It was a time when the Hindu-Muslim brotherhood fostered by the Khilafat-

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43 *Mathrubuhumi*, 17th March, 1923.

44 S.K. Pottekkat *et al*., *Muhammed Abdurahiman* (Mal.), Kozhikode, 1978, p. 139.

Non-cooperation Movement had crumbled, and the Malabar Muslims, after the harrowing incidents of the Malabar Rebellion, had turned anti-Congress. To bring them back in to the nationalist cause was a Herculean task, which was exactly what Muhammed Abdul Rahman sought to achieve through the 'Al-Ameen'. Nationalist Muslims of the day like E. Moidu Moulavi, P.P. Ummer Koya and P.A. Muhammed Koya were closely associated with the paper. In 1930, when the Salt Satyagraha was in full swing and the Government turned against the pro-Congress press, the publication of 'Al-Ameen' had to be stopped for a short period. It re-started publication and continued its outspoken criticism of the government. In September, 1939, when the World War II broke out, an editorial of the 'Al-Ameen', under the caption 'Congress and the War', advocated and exhorted the readers not to co-operate with the war efforts of the British. An infuriated Government promptly banned the paper on 29 September 1939.[45]

The 'Lokamanyan' was launched from Trissur in 1920, with Kurur Neelakantan Namboodiripad as the founder-editor and Poovathingal Sebastian as the publisher. It highlighted the ideology of the Indian National Congress. It passionately advocated that the women of Kerala must adopt Khaddar and work at the 'charka' and be willing to sweat a little when others shed their tears.[46] In 1923, the Government of Kochi charged the editor and publisher with treason for publishing certain editorial, critical of the Government[47]. With the imprisonment of the editor and publisher, the brief but fruitful life of 'Lokamanyan' came to an end.

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45 There will be occasion to discuss in detail the stand taken by Abdul Rahman and the 'Al-Ameen' on some controversial issues, in the next chapter.

46 *Lokamanyan,* Trissur, Oct-Nov, 1922, (NNPR 1/1923, pp. 50-51, TNA, Chennai)

47 Pudhuppally Raghavan, *op.cit*, p.209.

The 'Kerala Kesari' was launched by Moyarath Sankaran, a prominent Congress leader from Vatakara in January 1924. Moyarath also served as its editor upto 1930. 'Kerala Kesari' did not have an uninterrupted life because of financial problems. Moyarath had suffered a lot, both financially and otherwise, to run the paper. 'Kerala Kesari' was second to none in whole heartedly supporting the Vaikom Satyagraha and the Salt Satyagraha.[48]

Amsi Narayana Pillai edited the 'Mahatma' from Trissur in 1930, which propagated the ideology of the Indian National Congress. P. Kesava Dev, the famous novelist and writer with an acerbic pen, was also associated with the 'Mahatma'. The 'Kerala Dasan' started publication from Trivandrum on 22 March 1924. Joseph Chazhikkadan and M.M. Varkey were its editors. Its provocative editorial annoyed the authorities which led to the arrest of M.M. Varkey and the closure of the paper. Later, on 20 January 1926, Varkey released the 'Dasan', a weekly from Trivandrum. 'Dasan' stood for the rights of the Catholics and supported the Abstention Movement. When the weekly turned against the Diwan, C.P. Rama Swamy Iyer, through its editorials, the Government banned its licence. A man with a crusading spirit, Varkey was not to be silenced by such government measures. He started publishing the 'Yuva Bharathi' on 2 November 1934. The C.P's Government, on its part, was also determined not to allow Varkey to continue his attack on the Government policies. 'Yuva Bharathi' was promptly banned by invoking the clauses of the Press Regulations Act of 1926. Varkey, now, shifted his publishing activities to Kochi and edited the 'Malabar Mail', through which he continued his crusade against the despotic reign of Sir C.P. C.P retaliated by banning the paper in Travancore, by an order.

The 'Malayala Rajyam', a nationalist weekly, was published in 1929 by K.G. Sankar, a Congress youth leader, who gave up his studies to join the

[48] Moyarath Sankaran: *Ente Jeevitha Kadha* (Mal.), Kozhikode, 1965, pp, 207-215.

Non-cooperation movement. Earlier he had served the 'Malayali' and was forced to resign form it over a controversial editorial, which criticised the Travancore Government.[49] The paper was printed at Sree Ramavilasm Press, Kollam. After two years it was made a daily. The 'Malayala Rajyam' also started the first illustrated weekly in Malayalam, the 'Malayala Rajyam Illustrated Weekly'. The 'Malayalam Rajyam' welcomed the formation of the Socialist party in the Congress. Referring to the Meerut Conspiracy case and other hostile measures of the Government against the Communists, the 'Malayala Rajyam' observed that by carrying out a Communist hunt, communism could not be suppressed. Even in England, the Communist party had not been declared an unlawful organisation and therefore the Government could not think of suppressing the spread of Communist ideas in India alone.[50] When K.G. Sankar relinquished the control of the paper owing to ill-health, his brother, K.G. Parameswaran Pillai became the owner of the 'Malayala Rajyam' publication. He reversed the nationalist posture of the paper and it became supportive of the policies of Sir C.P. It was rumoured that K.G. Parameswaran Pillai was nominated to the Sree Mulam Praja Sabha in 1944, as a reward for the support rendered to Sir. C.P.[51]

The 'Gomathi', started in 1930, was printed from the Vidyavilasini Press, Trissur. Kunnath Janardhana Menon was the founder-editor. The paper strongly argued for the unity of the Malayalam speaking areas. The name 'Gomathi' was given to this journal by combining the first two letters of Gosree (Cochin), Malabar and Thiruvithamkur. The 'Gomathi' was the first ¼

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49 Department of Public Relations, op.cit., p.19.

50 NNPR 1933, p.68, TNA, Chennai.

51 A. Sreedhara Menon: *Sir C.P. Thiruvitamkur Charithrathil* (Mal.), Kottayam, 2008, p. 387.

anna ('Kalana') paper published in Kerala.[52] It did not have any objective other than bringing to readers the news of the day.[53]

The 'Deepam', an illustrated monthly, was published by Thomas Paul from Ernakulam, with Murkoth Kumaran as the editor. The first issue came out on 17 August 1929. The 'Deepam' gave prominence to literature and knowledge. However, it also supported the agitation for a responsible government in Travancore.

'Yuvabharatham' was a profoundly nationalistic weekly edited by T.R. Krishnaswamy Iyer from Palakkad. Modelled on Gandhi's 'Young India', it enthusiastically supported the Gandhian programme. Its printing press was sealed by the Government in 1831 for publishing a poem written by T. Subramanian Tirumumbu, extolling the Civil Disobedience Movement and challenging the British paramountcy.[54]

The 'Prabhatam', the first 'Socialist paper', to be published from Malabar,[55] was originally owned by K.S. Nair and published from Palakkad. Later, E.M.S. Namboodiripad and Ramachandran Nedungadi purchased it and released it as a weekly from Shornur in 1934. E.M.S. was the editor and Ramachandran Nedungadi the manager. 'Prabhatham' was the official organ of the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala. E.M.S. wrote a questionnaire in it under the pen name, 'Surendran'. The paper supported the progressive movements in Kerala and also helped a lot to spread Socialist and Communist ideas.[56] It encouraged labour movements and popular uprisings in Kerala. The 'Prabhatham' translated articles from the 'Congress Socialist', the official

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52 Pudhuppally Raghavan, *Op.cit*., p.249.

53 Ibid, p. 219.

54 'History of the Freedom Movement in Malabar' (Part V), TNA, Chennai.

55 Puduppally Raghavan, op.cit., p. 220.

56 Berlin Kunhanandan Nair: *Enpathuthikanja EMS* (Mal.), 1990, p. 54.

organ of the All-India Congress Socialist Party.[57] The 'Prabhatham' published a poem, 'Atmasandesham', written by Chowara Parameswaran on Bhagat Singh's martyrdom. It was an appeal for a revolution to end the imperialist domination of the present social order and to achieve independence.[58] The Government ordered the management to deposit Rs. 2000/- as security. Since the management had no money to deposit, the 'Prabhatham' had to stop publication. After three years, the licence was restored and publication shifted to Kozhikode in 1938. The paper was now the organ of the Communist movement, reflecting the political evolution taking place in Kerala. However this time the 'Prabhatham' was not destined to last long.

'Deshabandhu', launched by Subrahmanian Tirumumbu from Nileswaram in 1929 and 'Swabhimani', edited by A.K. Kunhikrishnan Nambiar, propagated the nationalist ideology in North Malabar during a very active phase of the national movement - in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

A.C. Kannan Nair released a hand written magazine, the 'Sakthi', from Kanhangad in 1930. He received the whole hearted support and assistance from another freedom- loving man K.T. Kumaran Nambiar. Later it was printed at A.V. Press, Kannur and circulated mainly in North Malabar. An article written by Dr. Sutherland, an American free-thinker, in the 'Modern Review', edited by Ramanand Chatterjee, was translated and published in the 'Sakthi' under the caption, "Who must rule India?" This was enough to provoke the authorities and their wrath fell on the 'Sakthi', leading to its disappearance.[59] Poets like P. Kunhiraman Nair, Kuttamath, Kadathanad

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57 E.M. Sankaran Namboodiripad: *How I Became a Communist*, Trivandrum, 1976, p.125.

58 Fortnightly Report (hereafter FNR) 1936-1940, p. 18, TNA, Channai

59 K.K.N. Kurup, *A.C. Kannan Nair-Oru Padanam* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1985, pp. 29-30.

Madhavi Amma, Vidwan P. Kelu Nair and literary critic, Kuttikrishna Marar were associated with the journal.[60]

The 'Chandrika', official organ of the Muslim League in Kerala, started publication as a weekly from Tellicherry in 1934, with T. Muhammed as the first editor. It was converted in to a daily in 1939 under the editorship of K.K. Muhammed Shafi. During the World War II, owing to the scarcity of newsprint, 'Chandrika' was published as a tri-weekly. After the war, it was again converted into a daily and was shifted to Kozhikode.

'Pauraprabha' was a daily published from Kottayam in 1938 by Z.M. Parettu. Later C.M. Stephen, a Congress leader, purchased the paper and published it first from Mavelikkara and then from Trivandrum. It extended support to the struggle for responsible Government in Travancore. 'Pauradhwani', another daily from Kottayam, was started, in 1939 by K.M. Chacko. Later he also released 'Paurakahalam' from Trivandrum Both 'Pauradwani' and 'Paura Kahalam', supported the State Congress agitation for responsible Government in Travancore.[61]

The 'Kaumudi' started publication under the ownership and editorship of C. Kesavan in 1937. In 1940 it published a message of George Thomas that the supreme duty of the people of Travancore was to work for responsible government. This provoked the Diwan, Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, who promptly banned the paper and revoked its licence. K.T. Thomas, the Congress leader, and C. Kesavan launched the 'Prabodhini', a weekly which was also promptly banned by the Travancore Government which, under Sir C.P., was notoriously intolerant of the press. The 'Nava Sakthi', which started

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60 Manuscript Library, Section - Individual B-N, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML), Teen Moorthy, New Delhi.

61 Pudhuppally Raghavan, *Op.cit*, pp. 220-221

publication under the editorship of T.M. Varghese and V.K. Velayudhan, did not last more than two issues either.

The 'Harbinger' was an English weekly published by the Arya Samajists from Calicut. Launched

The 'Swatantra Bharatham' was a clandestine four-page weekly that released 17 issues during the Quit India days. Unnerved by the outspoken nature of its articles, the authorities searched for the printing press, which was sealed at Kutaku, in South Canara. But it re-appeared soon, being secretly printed at such places in Malabar as Chemancherry near Koyilandy, Tellicherry and Kozhikode. However, the police had the last laugh, who raided the press at Chamancherry and arrested Madhavan Kidavu, Unni Nair, Krishnan Nair, T.P. Kunhirama Kidavu, K. Gopalan and C. Damodaran. Mention must also be made of N.V. Krishna Warrier, Kinath Narayanan, S.K. Pottekkat, V.A. Kesavan Nair and R.M. Manakkalath, who were the brain behind the editing of this clandestine publication which was a bold attempt at challenging the Government curbs on nationalist journalism.[62]

The 'Deenabandhu' started publication on 26 January 1941, as a weekly from Trissur with V.R. Krishnan Ezhuthachan as the editor. It was the official organ of the Cochin Prajamandalam and mainly featured news about the political movements in the state of Kochi. It was to commemorate the name of Deenabandhu C.F. Andrews that they named the weekly as 'Deenabandhu'.[63] Krishnan Ezhuthacan and his staff were imprisoned in connection with the Quit India movement. The Government of Kochi stopped the newsprint and banned the publication of 'Deenabandhu' for reproducing an editorial from the 'Snehitan', published from Trissur, under the caption

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62 M.G. Indiradevi, 'The Blooming of Swatantra Bharatham' in the Journal of Kerala Studies, Vol. III, March-December 1981, p. 41.

63 V.R. Krishnan Ezhuthachan: *Atmakadha* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1997, p. 185.

'Naranayattu' (Man-hunt), which deplored the lathi charge by the police in Trissur on 5 August 1942. In 1944 it restarted publication. In January 1946 it was shifted to Ernakulam and released as a daily. 'Deenabandhu' gave full support to the struggle for responsible government in Travancore which resulted in its ban in Travancore.[64]

After the demise of the 'Prabhatham' in the late thirties, the Communists in Malabar were without a paper of their own until the 'Deshabhimani' started publication as a weekly from Kozhikode in 1942. M.S. Devadas was its first editor. Deshabhimani's main focus was on the grievances of the workers and peasants. It also highlighted the corruption among government officials.[65] In 1946 'Deshabhimani' became a daily. The paper was critical of many of the policies of the Congress ministry led by T. Prakasam in Madras, especially the Government's hostile attitude towards the Communist party. The publication of 'Deshabhimani' was suspended in 1946 for publishing an article on the 25th anniversary of the Malabar Rebellion, by E.M. Sankaran Namboodiripad, with the caption, 'Preaching and Warning of Malabar Rebellion'. In Travancore the official organ of the Communist party was the 'Janayugam', started as a weekly in 1947 from Kollam, with N. Gopinathan Nair as the editor.

The National War Front published the 'Paurasakthi' from Kozhikode in 1944, with B.G. Varghese as its editor. The paper was started with the object of supporting the war propaganda machinery of the government.[66] Once the War was over, the objective of the paper also underwent a change. Popular leaders like K.A. Damodara Menon and Varghese Kalathil also served as its

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64 Prajamandala Charithra Rachana Samiti: *Kochi Rajya Prajamandalam* (Mal.), Kochi, 1985, p. 391.

65 Dr. K.K.N. Kurup *Nationalism and Social Change - The Role of Malayalam Literature*, Trissur, 1998, p.127.

66 Pudhuppally Raghavan, *Op.cit*., p.224.

editors during the post-War period, by which time it became a daily. For some time, 'Paurasakthi' was the official organ of the Praja Socialist Party in Kerala.

The 'Kerala Bhushanam' was launched from Kottayam as a daily in 1944. K.K. Kuruvila was the founder-editor of the same. Later A.V. George purchased and published it for same time. Thangal Kunju Musaliyar started the 'Prabhatham' weekly (not to be confused with the 'Prabhatham' published from Malabar by the Communists) from Kollam in 1944. Later it was converted into a daily. A Krishnan published the 'Express' from Trissur in 1944. A profound nationalist and Socialist, his ideas invariably found expression in the columns of the paper. Kunnath Janardhana Menon was the editor.

This brief survey of the evolution of press in Kerala from 1847 to 1947 brings out the inspiring spectacle of its transformation from being an ideological apparatus of the missionaries and colonialism to being the flag bearer of Indian nationalism. The potentialities of the press as a disseminator of ideas was first made use of by social and religious reformers. But it did not take long for political journalism to take deep root in Kerala. By the 1920's, nationalist press came off age and by the 1930's a strong leftist press came on the scene, reflecting the political transformation taking place in Malabar.

CHAPTER II

NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY AND THE PRESS IN MALABAR

Propaganda of ideology through the mass media of journalism was introduced in India by the same people who brought the printing press to India, viz., the Western missionaries. As is well known, they were motivated by the potentialities press provided for the dissemination of Christian ideals among the Indians. The educated among the Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, quick to take the cue from the missionaries, started their own journals to combat the propaganda onslaught from the latter. But press as a real battleground of ideologies emerged with the birth of political journalism and the rise of Indian national movement.

"The Indian National Movement is perhaps one of the best examples of the creation of an extremely wide movement with a common aim in which diverse political and ideological currents could co-exist and work - and simultaneously continue to contend for overall ideological and political hegemony over it."[1] Of these diverse political and ideological currents, the major ones to have exerted a lasting influence on the national movement were the Gandhian, the Liberal Nationalist, the Socialist/Communist and the Communalist.

Gandhian ideology had been the predominant influence on nationalist politics through the most eventful years of the struggle for freedom. The blueprint for the Gandhian method of struggle, rooted in non-violent satyagraha, was evolved in South Africa. Satyagraha was instrumental in making the national movement from essentially an upper middle class

[1] Bipan Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1998, p.14.

movement into a mass movement in which workers, peasants and other groups including women took part in large numbers. If the Indian national movement is considered to be the largest democratic struggle world has ever seen, the credit must go to the uniqueness of satyagraha with its emphasis on non-violence.

However, Satyagraha as a form of struggle against foreign imperialism, did not go unchallenged. The major criticism levelled against satyagraha was with the respect to the extreme interpretation being given to "ahimsa" or non-violence by Gandhi; non-violence, to him, was not a mere tactic in the struggle for freedom, as it was to a large section of Congressmen. It was on the other hand, a "deeply-felt and worked out philosophy",[2] an inviolable principle. Non-violence was not the only issue on which there were sharp divisions among the nationalists; there were other items in the Gandhian programme that the non-Gandhians in the Congress were uncomfortable with. All these had greatly impacted on nationalist politics during the critical years of freedom movement. A study of nationalist press, that does not focus on how the press responded to Gandhian ideology, is meaningless.

The Liberal Nationalists or the Moderates, who held sway in the Congress upto the Gandhian era, were by no means, less patriotic than the Gandhian. But they sincerely believed that Indians needed practical lessons in the art of democratic governance under the guidance of the British for a lot more years. They did not approve of extra-constitutional agitation; they believed in constitutional agitation, having deep faith in the British sense of justice. They hoped to get at the ultimate goal of independence step by step, through constituional reforms. The Liberal Nationalists were the forefathers of Indian nationalism and laid firm foundations of a secular democracy. They

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2 Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, Madras, 1983, p.179.

were also the pioneers of nationalist press; most of the prominent leaders among the Moderates had their own newspapers. Though Malabar did not produce many prominent Liberal Nationalist leaders, there were a number of newspapers here which followed a political line which could best be termed as 'Liberal Nationalist'. In fact, majority of the newspapers of pre-Gandhian era belonged to this category.

How the press in Malabar reacted to the ideologies of Socialism/ Communism and communalism, both of which had a profound influence on the national movement, will be dealtwith in separate chapters.

LIBERAL NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY

Right from its inception in 1885, the Indian National Congress had been a favourite subject of newspapers of different ideological hues. Newspapers of the 19th century had only a limited readership, the level of literacy and education being very low. However, these educated readers had a natural interest in the fortunes of the Congress, the first all India political organisation initiated by the educated elite of India.

The *Kerala Patrika*, the first political journal of Malabar, was also the first to take a keen interest in the affairs of the Congress. In an article published in March 1886, the *Patrika* thought it desirable that "when there is any public grievance, people should hold meetings, consider the grievances and then lay it before the central committee of the Bharatha Mahajana Sabha (Indian National Congress)[3] existing in the Presidency towns, for its consideration and for taking measures for their redress".[4] The Patrika's enthusiasm in making the Congress a real representative body by bringing it closer to the people, is quite evident in this article, which was published

[3] It was the *Kerala Patrika* which translated the name, 'Indian National Congress' as 'Bharatha Mahajana Sabha' in Malayalam.

[4] NNPR - 1886, TNA, Chennai.

within a couple of months of the foundation of the Congress. It is very well to remember here that the editor of 'Kerala Patrika', Chengulath Kunhirama Menon, was a Congress enthusiast and the first Secretary of the local Congress Committee, in which position he continued for eight years.

That the *Kerala Patrika* was considered a 'Congress paper' during the pre-Gandhian era is not a matter of surprise, considering the elaborate coverage it provided to Congress news as well as the support it gave to Congress resolutions, apart form its editor's involvement in Congress affairs. The *Patrika* is seen to have worked hard to make the annual sessions of the Congress a great success. Weeks before the session, the paper used to report elaborately the preparations for the session as well as the details regarding the meetings of the local Congressmen to nominate delegates to the annual conference, and even suggesting topics for discussion in the meetings.

Referring to the preparations going on in Allahabad for the approaching annual session of the Congress in Dec. 1888, the *Kerala Patrika* expressed a hope that 'this institution will become stronger yet because the people have began to appreciate its work'.[5] An article in the same paper, in supporting the resolution of the Congress session of 1889 in favour of the abolition of the Arm Act, said that the Act in its operation, made the people of Malabar in particular, quite defenceless against robbers and wild beasts.[6]

An article in the *Kerala Patrika*, of the 2 March 1889, was indicative of the deep interest the paper evinced in Congress affairs. It invited the attention of the public to the necessity for holding meetings in Kozhikode and other places to nominate delegates to represent Malabar at the approaching Mahajana Sabha meeting in Malabar. It was even suggested that the delegates should lay before the Mahajana Sabha the grievances of the people

5 *Kerala Patrika*, 22 Dec. 1888 (NNPR-1889).

6 *Kerala Patrika*, 2 February 1889 (NNPR-1889).

consequent upon the disarmament of the inhabitants of certain taluks in Malabar and that a memorial in this regard should be adopted to be forwarded to the Government, together with the resolutions passed there.[7] When a newspaper takes it upon itself to inspire the local Congressmen to meet and nominate delegates and even to suggest the topics for discussion, it shows how closely it identifies itself with the organisation.

Noticing the resolutions passed at the Bombay Congress, the *Kerala Patrika* of the 11 January 1890, said: "The attendance of 2000 delegates, representing almost every section of population, is itself a clear proof that the Congress has taken a firm hold of the hearts of the people, and that the opponents who had ridiculed and despised the movement have began to admit its importance". The paper also declared that most of the European missionaries and non-officials have joined and sympathised fully with the Congress's aims, and that the opposition of the Anglo-Indian officials was due to an apprehension that if the concession asked for be conceded, it might be injurious to their interests.[8] Going by the article and editorials published by the 'Patrika', its nationalist credentials during the pre-Gandhian era appears to be impeccable.

During the early years of the Congress, the *Kerala Sanchari* was also favourably disposed towards it. In an editorial on 31 October 1888, entitled *The Indian National Congress*, the paper advised the people to work for strengthening the Congress.[9] When Lord Dufferin made some derogatory remarks about the Congress, the *Sanchari* strongly criticised the Viceroy.[10] It surely takes some courage to use strong words against the all-powerful Viceroy at a time when Indian nationalism was in its nascent stage. The

7 NNPR-1889, TNA, Chennai.

8 NNPR-1890, TNA, Chennai.

9 NNPR-1888, TNA, Chennai.

10 Ibid.

paper doubted the use of a legislative assembly such as the one existing in India, which was a legislature only in name, though the *Sanchari* did not say that there should be in India a parliament like the one in England.[11]

An editorial comment made by the *Kerala Sanchari* in February 1889 was at once supportive of the Congress and praised the British rule, reflecting the Liberal Nationalist politics of the period. The paper considered that the Congress was the outcome of the education which the people had received and of the freedom which they enjoyed under the British rule and exhorted the people to devote their time, money and energy, as far as practicable, to the success of the Congress.[12] The comment was a reflection not only of a friendly press the Congress got at the time but also of its modest beginning which ensured that the Government was not hostile to it. Infact, there was nothing contradictory in being a Congress supporter as well as an admirer of the British Government at the same time in those times.

The newspapers of Malabar had understood the importance of political propaganda in England to further the cause of Indian nationalism and appreciated the work of Indian Political Agency in London. In a leader, the *Kerala Sanchari* advised the people of Malabar to subscribe to keep up the Indian Political Agency and to render the district Congress committee all possible assistance.[13] The *Kerala Patrika* called upon the people of Malabar to subscribe at the rate of three or six paise each to make the sum of Rs.500 being their annual share of the contribution towards the funds for keeping up the London Indian Political Agency, which was of absolute necessity for furthering the work of the Congress in England.[14]

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11 Ibid.

12 NNPR-1889, TNA, Chennai.

13 *Kerala Sanchari*, Kozhikode, 9 April 1890 (NNPR-1890).

14 *Kerala Patrika*, 7 June 1890 (NNPR-1890).

The *West Coast Spectator*, the English newspaper published from Kozhikode, also followed a liberal policy in political matters. The paper had immense faith in the British sense of justice and the greatness of English democracy. Commenting on the presidential address in the Congress session of 1910, which stressed the importance of carrying on an educative campaign in England, the *Spectator* said: "The importance of this campaign is very great and it has repeatedly been urged by our friends in England. The salvation of India is in the hands of the great English Democracy, which is at present totally ignorant of the conditions that prevail in India. India's appeals to English Democracy in the past have been fruitful of political concessions. It is our honest belief that were the English electors placed in full possession of the facts relating to India, our work to bring about our political salvation would be materially lightened, and the day would not be far distant when we would realise self Government within the Empire which is the goal of our aspiration".[15]

The Spectator's identification with the Moderates in the Congress is so total here that the above-quoted editorial comment could well be mistaken for the statement of a Moderate leader. Like the Moderates, the newspaper was in awe of the English Democracy and believed that the British leaders need only be appraised of the facts relating to India, for her to realise the goal of self Government within the Empire. No wonder, the *Spectator* could not visualise a political future for India outside the Empire.

Of all the newspapers published from Malabar, the *Mitavadi* was, perhaps, the most anti-Congress in its attitude. It considered the Congress as an upper caste organisation dominated by the Brahmins, who were condemned for enslaving the vast majority of the country, constituting the

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15 *The West Coast Spectator*, Kozhikode, 28 Dec. 1910 (from Report on English and vernacular Newspapers, TNA, Chennai).

backward classes. The *Mitavadi* pictured the pretence of the Congress that it represented the 35 crores Indians as a 'Himalayan hoax'.[16]

Refusal to meet the political and economic demands by the Government and its repressive measures against the growing national movement shook the faith of an increasing number of Indians in the ideology and technique of liberal nationalism.[17] The growing disillusionment with the moderate leadership resulted in the emergence of a new group of militant nationalists, having a different political ideology and conception of struggle, within the Congress. This new group, known as the Extremists, began to grow rapidly at the end of the 19th century. The rivalry between the Moderates and the Extremists, which ultimately led to a split in the Congress in 1907, was also reflected in the nationalist press.

Most of the newspapers in Malabar of the pre-Gandhian era supported the Moderate policy of constitutional agitation for achieving Congress goals. Referring to the Calcutta Congress of 1906, the 'Kerala Sanchari' remarked, "constitutional agitation is the only means of realising our aspirations".[18]

The *West Coast Reformer*, another English paper published from Kozhikode, was talking of constitutional agitation even in 1929 when the country was on the brink of the Salt Satyagraha. Referring to the talk of another mass movement being launched, the *Reformer* observed: "It would only be proper and constitutional if accredited Indian leaders take themselves upto fight out the country's cause within the councils. Even in the midst of civil strifes or foreign aggressions all nations have discussed their political problems either within their legislatures or assemblies or parliaments. To argue, therefore, that council work is futile and that it should be substituted by

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16 *Mitavadi*, Kozhikode, 5 April 1931.

17 A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, 1948, p.328.

18 *Kerala Sanchari*, Kozhikode, 2 January 1907 (NNPR-1907).

mass propaganda is not only foolish but also dangerous to the nation's cause ....".[19]

Home Rule Movement

The split in the Congress in 1907, resulting in the Moderate's controlling the organisation and the deportation of Bala Gangadhara Tilak ensured that political waters of India would be placid for some years. The return of Tilak and the launching of Home Rule Movement by himself and Annie Besant again recharged the political atmosphere in India. The Liberals as well as the newspapers that followed a Liberal Nationalist line viewed the militant rhetoric of the Home Rule leaders with alarm.

The *West Coast Spectator* did not consider Home Rule as a realistic aim. In an editorial the paper observed: "We confess we are not charmed with the new today dangled before our vision, for the very simple reason that Home Rule will not come within our life-time nor in that of the next generation. Practical politicians have to admit that India, as she is today, with her sects and creeds, with divergent interests, the ideal of nationality still in its nebulous state, with intercine quarrels and jealousies, cannot realise complete autonomy for many years to come ...."[20] When the *Spectator* failed to visualise complete autonomy for generations, it was also reflective of the very modest nationalist aspirations of the Liberals in the Congress. But five years hence, Gandhi was to effect such a radical change in Indian politics that most nationalists began to dream not merely of complete autonomy but even of complete independence, if not within one year, as promised by Gandhi on the eve of the Non-Co-operation Movement, at least within their life time. All the same, one has to admit that the *Spectator* was realistic in pointing out how

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19 *West Coast Reformer*, Kozhikode, 11 August 1929 (NNPR-July to August 1929).

20 *The West Coast Spectator*, 19 Sept. 1915 (Reports on English and Vernacular Newspapers-1915, TNA, Chennai).

weak Indian nationalism was at that time, with "intercine quarrels and jealousies".

The tone of the *Manorama* does not appear to be as hostile as that of the *Spectator*. Referring to the formation of the Home Rule League, the paper cautioned the promoters: "The League will meet with success, if its work be carried on loyally and without much voice. Owing to the existence of War, its promoters should now take particular care to consult the Government and act with them and never to give room for agitation".[21] Though the *Manorama* did not see anything wrong in the formation of the League, it did not want the latter to provoke the Government in the midst of a war by indulging in any kind of agitation, revealing the loyalist nature of the paper.

The *Kerala Sanchari* appeared to be very optimistic about the Home Rule League, though it too did not see any agitational role for it. Referring to the establishment of the League, the *Sanchari* pointed out: "There can be no doubt that India will derive many advantages as a result of the War, and that in case the Englishmen, who love justice and liberty, be disposed to grant self-government to India, the immediate establishment of a League like this will make her fit to receive it at the end of the War".[22] The *Sanchari* did not see any role for the League other than preparing the country to receive self-government, if the British were pleased to grant it at the successful conclusion of the war. The paper also did not forget to express its high regard for the British "love of justice and liberty".

The complete identification of the *Kerala Patrika* with the Congress, which earned it the epithet of a "Congress paper" lasted only till the Liberals controlled the premier political organisation of India. The *Patrika* was wary

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[21] *Manorama*, 8 October 1915 (Reports on English and Vernacular Newspapers-1915, TNA, Chennai).

[22] *Kerala Sanchari*, 26 October 1915 (Reports on English and Vernacular Newspapers-1915, TNA, Chennai).

of extremist politics, even of the Home Rule variety, when the Government was involved in a war. Referring to a speech made by Tilak in Madras in April 1918, the paper observed: "We are not prepared to consider those people real well-wishers of India, who agree with these extremists that now is the time to use their obstinacy and strength in a strife with the Government . . . . Although it is agreed on all hands that Home Rule should be granted to India, we are not of opinion that it will immediately be gained either by intimidating the Government or by assuming a militant attitude towards it. Even if Home Rule were gained at once we do not think that the people of India are now able to use such freedom."[23] That the *Kerala Patrika* failed to catch up with the march of Indian nationalism is abundantly clear from its view that India would not be able to use the freedom, if at all the British were to grant her Home Rule.

World War I

During the World War I most of the newspapers in Malabar stood for cooperation with the Government in its war efforts. Most of these papers were loyalist in character, in the sense that they believed that the British should stay in India for quite some time to come and consequently their nationalist demands were limited to constitutional progress under the British. They prayed for a British victory in the Great War against Germany and her allies. If we are to consider the fact that even Gandhi was a cooperator in 1915, there is nothing surprising about the stand taken by the newspapers in Malabar.

On 8 April 1914, the *Kerala Patrika*, in a leader wrote: "As India is under British rule, she must rise or fall with England. It is therefore incumbent on us to pray for the success of the British arms and to render every possible help to her. England, of course, can fight Germany single-

[23] *Kerala Patrika*, 27 April 1918 (NNPR-1918).

handed, but if the colonies and India throw their weight on her side, it is sure to add to her strength".[24]

The *Manorama* concluded its leader entitled "The War and Our Duty" with an appeal to the people to sink all differences of opinion, to unite against the danger of a German invasion, and to provide the necessary men and money and to cooperate whole-heartedly with the Government. "It is only if we are able to defend the 'motherland' that we shall be fit for Home Rule".[25] Evidently the War, to the *Manorama*, was India's war.

Two decades later when the World War II broke out, the Government had to face a generally non-cooperative press; it was also a measure of the political progress India made under Gandhi's leadership. Incidentally, most of the newspapers of the pre-Gandhian era in Malabar became extinct by this time, victims of political conservatism, not in tune with the time.

Loyalty to the Throne

Most of the newspapers of Malabar, even the nationalist ones, of the pre-Gandhian era were loyal to the British throne. In fact, there is nothing surprising about it, considering the fact that even the most forward looking Congress leaders of the period talked of only self-government within the Empire. Jubilee celebrations of the King or Queen were usually occasions for professing loyalty to the throne.

An article in the *Kerala Patrika* (February 1887) invited the people of Malabar 'to contribute what they can towards a fund which is being raised for commemorating the Queen's Jubilee.[26] In the next issue, the *Patrika*, after referring to the high devotion displayed towards their sovereign by the

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24 NNPR-1914, TNA, Chennai.

25 *Manorama*, 3 May 1918 (NNPR-1918).

26 NNPR-1887, TNA, Chennai.

inhabitants in commemorating the Queen's Jubilee, remarked: "It behoves the Queen, in the interests of Her Majesty's Indian subjects and in sufficient recognition of their devotion, to confer upon them certain privileges in connection with the administration of the country . . . ."[27] The Moderate politics of reposing complete faith in the British and praying for certain reforms is exactly what is reflected in this editorial. Coming as it is from the most progressive and nationalistic of political journals in Malabar at the time, it does point to the fact that national consciousness was at its infancy in Malabar during this period.

Referring to reports of jubilation in Kottayam over British victories in war in South Africa early in 1900, the *West Coast Spectator* cited the incident as illustrative of "how loyal the native of India is to Britain, even in Native states where the blessings we enjoy under Her Majesty's rule are felt somewhat indirectly. The South African war is a great misfortune for humanity, but it has served to show the genuineness and depth of Indian loyalty".[28] An enslaved people celebrating the victories of its master in a war abroad and a newspaper rejoicing at it - what more is needed to show the near-total loyalty commanded by the British even after one and a half decades of Moderate Congress work! It is only when this fact is understood that one is able to see the kind of success Gandhi had effected in destroying this loyalty within a few years.

It has been mentioned earlier that *Mitavadi* was the most loyal of the papers from Malabar. It has its own reasons, very valid ones at that, for taking such a position. In a review of K.P. Kesava Menon's book, "Self-rule: Its Meaning and Necessity", published in May 1918, the *Mitavadi* explained why it preferred British administration to self-rule. Admitting that the author

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27 Ibid.

28 *West Coast Spectator*, 11 March 1900 (NNPR-1900).

had succeeded in pointing out the consequences of foreign rule, the paper, however, doubted whether any good would come, if the Europeans were to hand over power into the hands of Indians. *Mitavadi* rejected Kesava Menon's claim that administration by native rajas in states like Travancore was by no means worse than that of British India. On the other hand, the paper claimed: "if we are to make a list of irregularities in the administration of Kochi and Thiruvitamkur, that would be much longer than the one prepared by Mr. Menon, of the wrongs of the British administration".[29]

The *Mitavadi* contended, "if one is to think of the harms being done to the lower caste people by their own countrymen, the harms from the foreigners is not at all serious".[30] The paper also advised the backward classes against joining those who were abusing the British, that would make them a people lacking not only in gratitude but also in intelligence. The *Mitavadi*, thus, certainly considered the British as its friend and exhorted the backward classes not to join the Congress, being the foe of their friend, the British.

The *Mitavadi* also pointed to the significant progress made by the lower caste people in Malabar by acquiring modern education, making use of the employment opportunities in Government service and involving in industrial enterprises. The 'Thiyya paper' also pointed out that similar freedom and opportunities were not open to the lower castes in Kochi and Thiruvitamkur, both ruled by native kings. When there was not even a single Ezhava officer in Thiruvitamkur with a salary of Rs.5/- or more per month, Malabar could boast of dozens of Thiyyas in higher posts, *Mitavadi* claimed. Based on this experience, the paper argued that the exit of Britain from India would mean a return back for the lower castes to the age of naked exploitation by the upper castes.[31]

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29 *Mitavadi*, May 1918.

30 Ibid.

31 *Mitavadi*, June 1919.

The near-total loyalty that had been the feature of newspapers of the Liberal era was conspicuous by its absence in the case of newspapers inspired by the Gandhian ideology. When the Silver Jubilee of the British King's accession to the thorne was proposed to be celebrated on a large scale in 1935, it had a mixed reaction among the newspapers of Malabar. The *Mathrubhumi* did not find any reason for the Indian people to be proud of being a part of the British Empire. In a leader, the paper expressed its opinion thus: "No one would be reluctant to congratulate the British King in his capacity as an individual. But a Jubilee celebration will be looked upon by Britain as an expression of the Empire's unity and glory. Has India an equal status with the other members of the Empire? Is not her position one of mere slavery within the mighty Empire today? The question of India's participation in the celebration needs careful consideration. There are many princes and title-holders in India who are proud of the British Empire and who glory in their dependency. Let them be the principal persons to celebrate this great Empire Festival".[32]

Such defiance as expressed by the *Mathrubhumi*, which came into existence during the Gandhian era and was inspired by Gandhian ideology, could not be expected from the papers of the pre-Gandhian era. For instance, the *Manorama* thought it was India's duty to celebrate the auspicious event. The paper said: "Whatever may be the difference of opinion between England and India in political matters, we think that Indians too should celebrate this auspicious event in a manner worthy of their generous instinct. As the British Emperor's powers are limited, a political fighting mentality is not necessary in this matter. If India participates in the celebrations it might serve to bring about a change in the attitude of the British conservatives towards India. Though as a political party the Congress has decided to abstain from the celebrations, we consider that this decision will not affect India's sense of

[32] NNPR - July to December, 1935, TNA, Chennai.

duty. We hope that the Jubilee celebrations will come to a successful end."[33] Here again, the Liberal politics of pleasing the political master and obtaining some concessions is on display.

After the Jubilee celebrations were over, the *Prabhatham*, noting that the celebrations were on a grand scale and well attended, advised the Congress to learn lessons from it. "Whether it be due to the inherent loyalty of the people or to inducement or compulsion from the authorities, almost everywhere, vast crowds of people have participated in the Jubilee celebrations. To follow the abstention policy of the Congress, there were none but the Congressmen themselves. Does it not show that the Congress has not yet gained sufficient influence in the country? The inference is that if the anti-war resolution of the Congress should find strong support in the country, there must be incessant and powerful propaganda in that behalf and that it would be foolish to postpone thinking of it until war actually break out".[34] That a large number of people had participated in the Jubilee celebrations was taken by the *Prabhatham* as proof of the insufficiency of propaganda on the part of the Congress. If, even after five decades of nationalist work by the Congress, the people continued to be loyal to the British crown, it does reflect on the inadequacy of educative campaign on the ill-effects of British imperialism.

Racial Discrimination

Right from the early days of political journalism, press in Malabar frequently and boldly attacked the British Government for its policy of racial discrimination. Discrimination between the Indians and the Europeans existed in a glaring manner in different fields during British rule in India as

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33 *Manorama*, 2 Feb. 1935 (NNPR - January to June 1935).

34 *Prabhatham*, May 13, 1935.

well as in British colonies with expatriate Indians.[35] That discrimination, wherever it existed, was opposed and condemned in strong language by newspapers of different political perspectives in Malabar.

Instances of racial discrimination - at the administrative, judicial and social level - were many and frequent. Referring to the conduct of a European military officer at Poona towards a Parsi barrister and in Malabar of certain high officials towards a maistry and certain Adhikaris, a correspondent of the *Kerala Patrika* wrote that in Malabar "the devil prompting Europeans to beat natives first used his influence upon military officers, and gradually upon high civil functionaries". The writer also warned that "the only means for warding off the influence of the devil is to repay ten-fold each stroke received".[36] These are brave words coming as it was at a time when Indian nationalism was as yet in its infancy and the Indian National Congress not even one year old.

Racial discrimination in the courts was frequently publicised and resented by the nationalist press in Malabar. Award of light punishments to European offenders and the assault of Indians by Europeans were always highlighted by them. An article in the *Kerala Sanchari*, in referring to the partiality shown to Europeans over the natives in the administration of justice, alluded to the fact that a soldier who had intentionally shot an agriculturalist in Ahmedabad was acquitted on the ground that the shot was accidental, and that Mr. Crawford, who received immense bribe from various persons, was ultimately found guilty of only having received loans, while the natives concerned in the same affairs were very seriously dealt with. The article then concluded with a remark that 'the observance of such distinction is

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35 N. Subramanyam, *The Press and the National Movement in South India - Andhra, 1905-1932*, Madras, 1984, p.60.

36 *Kerala Patrika*, Sept. 1886 (NNPR-1886).

inconsistent with the terms of the Queens' proclamation issued 30 years ago".[37]

Infact, no instance of racial discrimination, wherever it occurred, escaped the roving eyes of a vigilant press. An article in the *Kerala Patrika*, of the 26 April 1890, said that 'the services of two or three companies of native sepoys engaged in the Burma field service have been dispensed with, without even giving them a gratuity. European soldiers would never submit to such a treatment but would mutiny against it. But these are natives and have no one to whom they can represent their grievances'.[38]

In its mission of bringing to light every act of omission and commission committed by the Government, the *Mathrubhumi* lost no opportunity to highlight instances of racial discrimination. The paper published a series of articles in July 1931 under the title, "Do the English men have special rights?", exposing the bias shown by the British Government in favour of Englishmen as against Indians, in its industrial policy.[39] The *Mathrubhumi* was able to establish its arguments with relevant statistics and other documentary evidence.

Commenting on the London Hotel incident in which five Indian competitors for the World Tennis Championship were not allowed to stay in the same hotel as the other competitors and the subsequent developments, the *Mathrubhumi* wrote: "Even in India, Indians feel that they are, in their relations with the white officials, an inferior race, but most of them rest content with the thought that it is just what they deserve . . . . Whether in Government office or in railway compartments, our practice has been to submit ourselves to a subordinate position. This is not to be attributed to the

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37 *Kerala Sanchari*, April 17, 1889 (NNPR-1889).

38 NNPR - 1890, TNA, Chennai.

39 *Mathrubhumi*, 17, 18 and 19 July 1931.

colour of our skin or to any inborn cowardice, but to long standing foreign domination. The moment we began to enjoy freedom, all our weaknesses which now seem inherent in us will be found to disappear. Freedom alone will beget friendly relations."[40] This is an instance of how nationalist newspapers connected every problem to the political slavery that India was subjected to. They knew that the first battle had to be fought in the minds of the people; that the condition of mental slavery had to be overcome before foreign domination could be successfully challenged.

The extreme discriminatory attitude being shown to expatriate Indians in Kenya, South Africa, Sri Lanka etc. by the Governments of the respective countries was the subject of frequent criticism of the press in Malabar.

Malabar Rebellion

The Malabar Rebellion, which caused gruesome violence in parts of South Malabar, is a watershed in the history of national movement in Kerala, the consequences of which lasted for many years in the political field. Taken aback by the burst of violence, the press, generally, was hostile to the rebels. Even as columns of newspapers were replete with the gory tales of violence committed by the "fanatic rebels", the cruelties committed by the Government forces like the police and the army did not get as much exposure. Later, however, newspapers like the *Al-Ameen* tried to compensate for this lapse on the part of contemporary press.

The *Kerala Patrika*, which had already turned anti-Congress by this time, was apprehensive of the Non-Co-operation-Khilafat Movement. When the Malabar Rebellion broke out, the paper commented: "Nobody having a real knowledge of the state of affairs will deny that the efforts of the Non-Co-operation and the Khilafat workers are productive of evil. All men with

[40] *Mathrubhumi*, 12 Feb. 1935.

common sense will realise what the consequences will be if the uneducated Mappila, for instance, are made to believe that the Government are doing harm to their religion. There is no doubt that the Government have done well in trying to impede the work of these people. All the people who are not Non-cooperators should be ready to help the Government . . . . .[41] It is pretty clear from this comment that the *Patrika* found the Congress and the Khilafat workers responsible for the violence of 1921.

Though the *Kerala Patrika* was critical of the violent nature of rebels, its reporting of the Rebellion does not appear to be biased. Its reports on the administration of Variamkunnath Kunhammad Haji, the rebel leader, for instance, threw much light on his sense of justice. Instances of punishment being meted out to rebels for molesting Hindus in general and women in particular, as well as instances of jewels and other valuables being returned to their rightful owners were many in these reports.[42]

The *Yogakshemam*, though published from the state of Kochi, was widely read by the reformist Nambudiris of Malabar. The paper highlighted the news of sabotage activities of the Mappilas like removing railway lines, cutting of telegraph wires, breaking bridges, looting of treasuries, destruction of records in the registry offices, forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam etc. The paper also justified the suppression of the revolt by the Government.[43] As the mouthpiece of the Nambudiris, who were the major victims of violence committed by the rebels, it was quite natural for the *Yogakshemam* to highlight the atrocities of the rebels and to support Government measures in suppressing the rebellion.

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41 *Kerala Patrika*, 16 April 1921 (NNPR-1921).

42 K. Madhavan Nair, *Malabar Kalapam* (Mal.), Kozhikode, pp.259-261.

43 *Yogakshemam*, 9 September 1921.

True to its loyalist character, the *Mitavadi* took a pre-Government stand with respect to the Malabar Rebellion and accused the 'fanatical Muslims' of molesting the Hindus.[44] The most vocal of the supporters of the Government measures was the *Madras Mail*, which was popular among Government loyalists in Malabar. Justifying the measures taken by the authorities to quell the rebellion, the paper wrote: "The action of Mr. Thomas, the District Magistrate of Malabar, in stopping the Khilafat agitation in that district, has . . . . exposed him to much vituperation from the Extremist press and from some of the protagonists of the NCO movement . . . . They have no idea, as few outside Malabar have, to what violent excesses the fanatical and turbulent spirit prevalent among the Moplahs of Malabar have driven them in the past, and how the danger of some sudden outburst of fanaticism, especially among the ignorant and backward Moplah inhabitants of Ernad and Walluvanad taluks, is an everpresent cause of anxiety of the officers charged with the duty of preserving peace and tranquility in the district. . . ."[45]

The *Manorama* charged the Non-Cooperation Khilafat Movement with the responsibility for instigating the Rebellion. But the *Hindu*, popular among the English-educated class, did not buy this argument. In an editorial, the leading South Indian newspaper, observed: "The suggestion that it is the Khilafat organisations that are responsible for the Moplah trouble has little foundation infact. It is significant that in the localities in which the trouble was most intense, Ernad and Walluvanad, there were the least members of Congress Khilafat organisations . . . . On the other hand, where there were effective Khilafat and Congress organisations, as there were at Ponnani, they stood for law and order . . . . ."[46]

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44 Moyarath Sankaran, *Op.cit.*, p.161.

45 NNPR-1921, TNA, Chennai.

46 *The Hindu*, Madras, 7 September 1921.

The Hindu too highlighted the alleged atrocities committed by the rebels on the Hindus including forcible conversion. It so unnerved the rebel leadership that Variam Kunnath Kunhamed Haji shot off a letter to the editor of the *Hindu*, protesting against the damaging reports about the rebels, appearing in the newspaper.[47]

GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY AND PRESS IN MALABAR

Let us now turn to the crucial question of how the newspapers in Malabar responded to Gandhian ideology and to the national movement under his leadership. Gandhi never claimed he was the founder of a political doctrine. He was the enemy of all 'isms' and more generally of all systems.[48] However, the idea has gained acceptance among scholars that his thought formed something of a system, which has often been called 'Gandhism'. Gandhi's interests were encyclopaedic and extended to all aspects of human life. A detailed discussion of Gandhism is not attempted here, the focus being on the response of press (in Malabar) to the political programme of Gandhi and to his leadership of the national movement.

The Gandhian programme had two parts to it - the agitational and the constructive. The agitational part of the programme consisted of 'Satyagraha', a method of passive resistance which included civil disobedience (both individual and mass civil disobedience), non-co-operation, non-payment of taxes, mass demonstration and marches, mass courting of arrests and hunger strikes. What made Satyagraha unique was its adherence to 'ahimsa' or non-violence, which was also productive of much controversy.

Constructive work played a very important role in the Gandhian strategy; in fact Gandhi used to say that constructive work was more important than the agitational part of his programme. It was organised around

47 K.N. Panikkar (ed.): *Peasant Protests and Revolts in Malabar*, p. 128.

48 Claude Markovits, *The Un-Gandhian Gandhi*, Delhi, 2003, p.62.

the promotion of khadi, spinning and village industries, national education, Hindu-Muslim unity, the struggle against untouchability and the social upliftment of the Harijans and the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. Constructive work provided Congress workers continuous and effective work in the passive phases of the national movement, helped build their bonds with those sections of the masses who were hitherto untouched by politics and developed their organising capacity and self-reliance.[49] Inspite of the great importance that Gandhi attached to constructive work, not all sections of Congressmen were equally interested in it.

Gandhi and Satyagraha began to be debated in the press even before he became active in Indian politics. *Mitavadi* was perhaps the first of the Malayalam newspapers to make some prophetic comments about Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi and his struggle in South Africa.[50] In December 1913 the paper published two editorials on him, when he was not yet the Mahatma but barrister Gandhi, leading the struggle of expatriate Indians against racial discrimination of the South African Government. Expressing moral indignation at the punishment meted out to Gandhi by the British rulers of South Africa, the first editorial opined that it would always be a blackmark on the British.[51] The second editorial spoke highly of the personal sacrifice made by Gandhi in taking up the leadership of the struggle in South Africa and lamented the absence of such a leader in India to address the issue of caste inequality.[52]

Paying glowing tribute to Gandhi for undertaking a fast to make the Ahamedabad Mill Workers' strike a success the *Mitavadi'* in a lengthy leader

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49 Bipan Chandra et al., op.cit., pp.245-246.

50 G. Priyadarshan, *Malayala Pathrapravarthanam - Prarambha Swarupam* (Mal.), Thrissur, 1982, p.133.

51 *Mitavadi*, December, 1913.

52 Ibid.

in April 1918, remarked. "Though we may not have the inner strength to work like him, still we should try to become his disciples and imitate him."[53]

Non-Cooperation Movement

The advent of Gandhi on the political scene and the resultant wave of nationalist mass movement led to an enormous growth of nationalist press. The Simon Commission noted that the Indian press played "a considerable part" in the "development of Indian politics and public opinion" after 1920.[54] The annual reports for the year 1921 stated that the newspapers "had done not a little to engender among the people a sense of hatred against the administration and a spirit of love for the cause of Gandhi".[55] Because of the traumatic experience of 1921, it took few more years for Malabar to feel the impact of Gandhian politics, especially as regards the emergence of nationalist press. For the same reason, the non-cooperation movement, the first of the great mass movements led by Gandhi, did not get much support from the press in Malabar.

The *Mitavadi*, whose enthusiasm for Gandhi's work in South Africa and his effective intervention in favour of Ahmedabad mill workers has been noted earlier, turned a severe critic of him, once he assumed the leadership of the Indian National Congress. The paper had so much identified the Congress with the caste Hundus that even Gandhi could not have redeemed it.

The *Mitavadi* opposed tooth and nail the Non-cooperation-Khilaft Movement. The paper declared, 'The more one is a non-cooperator, the more caste-minded he is'. During the course of the movement, the *Mitavadi*, allotted a lot of a space to article and poems ridiculing it. A puzzle it

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53 *Mitavadi*, April 1918.

54 Indian Statutory Commission Report, vol. I, p. 286.

55 Govt. of Madras, Public (confidential) department, G.O. No. 803-4, dated 7.10.1922.

published for the readers to fill up, is illustrative of how the paper ridiculed the movement. The riddle, "Two horns will sprout in the horse's head", was completed by the loyalist readers of *Mitavadi* variously like,, "When India attains independence", when Non-cooperation succeeds", "when Congress rules the country" and "when caste Hindus of the Congress discards untouchability",[56] indicating that none of this would ever come true. The *Mitavadi* was also against the concept of 'Khilafat', which was zealously taken over by Gandhi. The paper demanded that the Government should not allow the Khilafat Committee to work for the cause.

The *Hindu* was not very enthusiastic about the Non-cooperation Movement in the beginning and was especially opposed to its boycott programme. In an editorial the paper wrote: ". . . But we put the question plainly, is it not too much to ask of human nature to say that all lawyers should be turned out into the streets or that all school children should stop going to schools at a time when education facilities were hopelessely deficient."[57]

The editor of the 'Hindu', Rangaswamy Iyengar, who was president of the Madras Congress Committee, even submitted his resignation for that post as he was completely opposed to the boycott programme.[58] However, after the Nagpur session of the Congress, he became a convert to the Gandhian programme, and naturally the tone of the paper also changed. After the conversion of its editor to the ideology of non-cooperation, the 'Hindu' gave wide publicity to it. The paper described the movement as "essentially a movement of the masses" and asked the youth "to show their fidelity to their

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56 Moyarath Sankaran, op.cit., pp. 129-130.

57 *The Hindu*, 15 Septemebr, 1920.

58 S. Subramnayam, op.cit., p. 74.

Motherland, to shed off their cowardice and slave mentality under the inspiration of patriotism".[59]

K.P. Kesava Menon, in his autobiography, wrote that Chengulath Kunhikrishna Menon, editor of the *Kerala Patrika*, did not like to hear even the names of Gandhiji and the Non-cooperation Movement. He alleged that Chengulath used the columns of his paper mainly to abuse that movement and those who took part in it. [60] In an editorial entitled "Gandhi Mahatma", published in September 1921, the *Kerala Patrika* not only criticised but even ridiculed the Gandhian programme like boycott of foreign cloth and educational institutions, non-co-operation with the work of legislature and the boycott of courts by lawyers.[61] Being a newspaper that followed the liberal line in politics, Kerala Patrika's opposition to the Non-cooperation Movement was on expected lines; but what is significant is that there were also occasions when it criticised the authorities, especially the police. For instance, the 'Patrika' criticised the police for openly siding with the opponents of NCM in the clashes with Congress workers. In certain areas of South Malabar, the resistance against the movement was on communal lines. There were separate Christian, Thiyya and Panchama processions, which started as counter movement against the NCM. This was resisted by a handful of Mohammedan and Congress workers in certain places. The 'Kerala Patrika' blamed the Superintendent of police for openly siding with the Christians.[62]

The 'Kerala Sanchari' and the *Manorama* too opposed the NCM. K.P. Kesava Menon remarked that C.P. Govindan Nair, editor of the 'Sanchari', did not like to publish anything against the Government. He however, conceded

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59 *The Hindu*, 26 April, 1927.

60 K.P, Kesava Menon, *Kazhinja Kalam* (Mal.), Kozhikode, 2005, (1957), p. 126

61 G. Priyardarshan, op.cit., pp. 8-9.

62 Report from St. Goerge, Madras, No. 1428/1 dated, 17/3/21, TNA.

that Govindan Nair had sympathised with the national movement, but was afraid of expressing it openly.[63]

The *Gajakesari* of Murkoth Kumaran, stronly opposed the NCM on the ground that a solution to the problems arising from caste inequality should be found first before any movement of the political freedom of the country was launched.[64] Like the *Mitavadi* the 'Gajakesari' representing the interests of the Thiyya and other backward classes preferred British rule to a Brahmin-dominated Congress rule.

The *Madras Mail'* as usual, vehemently attacked Congress movement. In an editorial the 'Mail' wondered: "Who rules India: the Imperial Government or Mr. Gandhi, the tyrant, who under the cloak of socalled non-violent political movement, endeavours to impose his will on the people of India."[65]

The traumatic events of 1921 proved to be a severe blow to the forward movement of nationalist politics in Malabar. The work of the Congress was almost paralysed. It was not until the anti-Simon Agitation that Malabar witnessed any significant political movement. But it will not be correct to say that the post-Rebellion period was completely bereft of nationalist activities.[66] The absence interms of organisational activities and mass movements was, to a large extent, compensated by the work of the nationalist press, which was able to keep up the nationalist spirit of the people by propagating the nationalist ideology. It is significant that the period witnessed the birth and growth of the leading nationalist papers of Malabar, viz., *Mathrubhumi*, *Al-Ameen* and *Kerala Kesari*.

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63 K.P. Kesavan Menon, op.cit., p. 126.

64 G. Priyadarshan, op.cit., pp. 8-9.

65 *Madras Mail*, 8 July, 1921.

66 K. Gopalankutty, *Malabar Padanangal* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 2007, p. 36.

Civil Disobedience Movement

By the time Gandhi launched the second of his great mass movements, the Salt Satyagraha, the press scenario in Malabar had witnessed vast changes. The centre stage was now occupied by new entrants which were the products of the Gandhian era like the *Mathrubhumi*, the *Al-Ameen* and the *Kerala Kesari*; the major players of the pre-Gandhian era like the 'Kerala Patrika' the 'Kerala Sanchari' and the *Manorama* were relegated to the background. In influence and circulation, the newcomers surged ahead.

Of these, the *Mathrubhumi* was in the forefront in espousing Gandhian ideology. Considering how consistently in propagated the Gandhian programme and how resolutely it fought the onslaught on Gandhian ideas by forces within and outside the Congress, it can even be called a 'Gandhian paper'. Close identification of *Mathrubhumi* with Gandhian ideology was evident from the first issue onwards. A special item in the first issue was "Ente Gurunathan", the celebrated poem on Gandhi by Vallathol Narayana Menon. An advertisement featured in the first issue touched upon almost all aspects of the Gandhian programme. Reminding the readers that the 'Mahatmaji' had been languishing in the jail for the last one year for the cause of 'Swarajya', the *Mathrubhumi* asked:

> "What did you do for Swarajya?
> Did you take membership in the Congress?
> Did you donate to the Congress fund?
> Are you wearing Khadder?
> Are you trying to raise the lower castes?
> Are you trying to forge unity in the country?
> If you have not done all these, take an oath that you will do all these from today onwards . . . "[67]

[67] *Mathrubhumi*" 17 March, 1923.

When the no-changers and pro-changers fought on the issue of council entry in the 1920's. *Mathrubhumi* stood firmly on the side of Gandhians.

Like the *Mathrubhumi*, the *Al-Ameen* was also launched with the avowed objective of strengthening the nationalist forces, but it viewed things from a nationalist-Muslim perspective.

The *Mathrubhumi* functioned as the mouthpiece of the Congress during the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). To facilitate prompt dissemination of information during the epic struggle, the paper was converted into a daily on the day on which Gandhi broke the salt law at Dandhi, 6th April 1930. It succeeded in giving eye witness accounts of the various incidents of the epic struggle, which stormed the country. *Mathrubhumi's* propaganda had a great role in making the Salt Satyagraha procession under K. Kelappan a huge success. Congress workers and sympathisers eagerly waited every morning for the paper.

Moyarath Sankaran, the main ograniser of the Satyagraha procession, in his autobiography attested to the fact that detailed reports in *Mathrubhumi* of the progress of the procession under the leadership of K. Kelappan, through the interior parts of North Malabar and the enthusiastic reception it got at various places, awakended the patriotic feelings of the Thiyya youth in the Vatakara, Mahe, Thalassery and Kannur areas. As a result, more and more people came forward to support the Satyagraha and the Congress. The circulation of *Mathrubhumi* grew enormously during the Satyagraha days. 'Thus" Moyarath says, "it is difficult to tell whether *Mathrubhumi* was more helpful to the Kerala Satyagraha or the Kerala Satyagraha to the *Mathrubhumi*".[68]

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[68] Moyarath, op.cit., pp. 240-242.

The *Kerala Kesari* of Moyarath Sankaran played a leading role in energising the people during the CDM. Moyarath claimed that the *Kerala Kesari* was the largest circulating paper of Malabar at that time.[69] The Kerarla Kesari press at Vatakara rendered another important service to the nationalist cause - the printing of notices and leaflets, especially the clandestine ones during the CDM, when there were severe restrictions on freedom of the press. Moyarath reminisced, in his autobiography, an instance in which the *Kerala Kesari* Press printed one lakh notices within ten days. Very often *Kerala Kesari* had to suffer huge losses, for, often it did not get the printing charge, or got only part of it.[70]

In line with its opposition to Gandhian programme, the *Kerala Patrika* did not support the CDM; its opposition to the movement was with respect to its extra-constitutional and law-breaking nature, which might, in its opinion, spawn violence. Referring to the Malegoan riots, the *Patrika* apprehended non-co-operate disturbances in Malabar also and advocated strong propaganda in the interior parts of the district to educate the people about the dangers of the movement.[71]

That the *Kerala Patrika* opposed the CDM does not mean that it was against nationalist demands. In an editorial, the paper said that "the Government's complaint is that Indians do not cooperate with them, but they do not think of or mention the reasons for such non-cooperation. Indians are suffering from want of freedom not seen anywhere in civilized countries".[72] Certainly, even the moderate papers that were opposed to civil disobedience as a form of struggle, sympathised with the nationalist cause.

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69 Ibid., p. 234.

70 Moyarath, pp.292-293.

71 *Kerala Patrika*, 7 May 1933, NNPR-1933, TNA, Chennai.

72 *Kerala Patrika*, 18 October 1930, NNPR-1930, TNA, Chennai.

Initially, the *Al-Ameen* was against the movement and tried to find fault with Gandhi for launching civil disobedience without consulting the Muslims.[73] The initial hesitation, however, was well compensated by the energy and enthusiasm the paper exhibited once it decided to support the movement. The leader entitled *Jihad-Ul-Akbar*, exhorting Muslims to take part in the CDM, is a classic example of evocative appeal in the name of religion and patriotism. The leader begins thus: "If patriotism is a part of one's religious faith, if Islam is a religion that extols the message of freedom, it is the duty of real Muslims to sacrifice their lives in the path of God for the freedom and welfare of the motherland . . . ." And it concludes thus: "It is a matter of pride for this tolerant struggle that the number of Muslim fighters, who are capable of sacrificing their life for India and Islam, are on the rise".[74]

After the initial opposition turned into support, *Al-Ameen*'s dedication to the nationalist cause during the CDM was total. At a time when even *Mathrubhumi* suspended its leader column for fear of inviting the wrath of authorities, the *Al-Ameen* was willing to sacrifice its own life for the cause.

Critics often charged *Mathrubhumi* of not opposing the Government as vehemently as was expected of a nationalist newspaper during the CDM and that it was compromising its nationalist principles just to avoid Government repression. But this does not appear to be wholly true, considering how Government authorities viewed the paper at that time. The following observation made by an official, testifies to this fact: "The *Mathrubhumi* of Calicut is a political journal supporting the Congress creed. It has considerable influence in Malabar. Its tone is vehement and at times undesirable. Severable objectionable articles appearing in this paper have

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73 *Al-Ameen*, 29 April 1930.

74 *Al-Ameen*, 6 July 1930.

come to the notice of Government."[75] Again, the District Magistrate, in a confidential letter dated 17 Oct. 1932 to the Chief Secretary, expressed the opinion that the *Mathrubhumi* is a paper of extremist tendencies and has published a good deal of matter making allegations of unnecessary and illegal violence by the police in dealing with the CDM".[76]

Thus the allegation often made against the *Mathrubhumi* that it disregarded Gandhi's advice to nationalist papers to stop publication in view of severe press restrictions, purely on business grounds, stands on feeble ground. It must also be remembered that only nine newspapers stopped publishing in India during 1930-33.[77] An objective analysis of the reports, articles and editorials of *Mathrubhumi* during the CDM days would also vouch for the effective campaign the paper carried on to make the movement a great success.

The fact is that, in spite of all the anti-press laws existing at the time, newspapers enjoyed reasonable freedom, if only they were prudent enough to avoid highly provocative language. This is where *Mathrubhumi* differed from the *Al-Ameen*. In hindsight, it seems that *Mathrubhumi*'s prudence more than *Al-Ameen*'s martyrdom proved to be more helpful to the nationalist cause. In fact, *Mathrubhumi*, during the CDM, was the best example of how a nationalist newspaper could effectively discharge its duties, despite all the prevalent repressive laws. It does also reflect on the semi-hegemonic nature of the British administration.

Police excesses during the course of the CDM became the subject of severe criticism from the part of the nationalist press. The *Yuvabharatham*, in

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75 Official note dated 7 July 1935 of the Public Department, Government of Madras (Public Department G.O.No. 1434 dated 08.11.1932).

76 Public Department G.O.No.544 dated 3 April 1935, Regional Archives, Kozhikode.

77 J. Natarajan, *History of Journalism*, New Delhi, 1955, p.166.

an editorial, declared that 'the day of self-government is not very far' and warned the police who 'brace themselves to untold highhandedness in harassing their countrymen today to please some wicked superiors of theirs that their fate would then be in the hands of Indians'.[78] When the Government arrested Gandhi, Sardar Patel and Madan Mohan Malavya and others during the course of the CDM, the nationalist papers in Malabar condemned the arrest and characterised it as a Himalayan blunder. The *Mathrubhumi* blamed the authorities for the arrest of P. Krishna Pillai, who was convicted at Kozhikode, put in chains and had his rations reduced.[79]

The *Swabhimani*, an intensely nationalist weekly from Kannur, supported the movement with strongly-worded articles and editorials. It became a victim of the press ordinance and was closed down in June 1930, refusing to pay the security deposit of Rs.1500, demanded by the Government.

Mitavadi's opposition to Gandhian movement was consistent and it continued during the CDM. Its editorials justifying police excesses provoked severe criticism from the nationalist papers. Not only did the *Mitavadi* support the police measures, but it even wanted the police to be more proactive in dealing with the Satyagraha volunteers. In an editorial it wrote that the CDM was dying out in North Malabar, and why the movement was still very strong in South Malabar was because of the "wait and watch" policy of the police.[80] This editorial, critics charged, tentamounted to prompting violence.

The high-handed action of the authorities against women satyagrahis particularly provoked nationalist workers and newspapers. The forcible

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78 *Yuvabharatham*, 26 July 1931.

79 *Mathrubhumi*, 12 June 1930.

80 *Mitavadi*, 28 November 1930.

removal of the *thali* or *mangalyasutra*[81] of Mrs. Kamalabhai Prabhu, wife of prominent Congress leader L.S. Prabhu, by the police in the court on the order of Sub-divisional Magistrate, Dodewell, in order to realise the money towards fine imposed by him, produced a commotion throughout India. Nationalist newspapers carried on a powerful campaign against this atrocious act, in utter violation of the religious customs of the people. The protest was so strong that the Government was forced to order the immediate return of Mrs. Prabhu's *thali* and to institute an official enquiry.

Annie Besant was among the prominent national leaders opposing the CDM. In an article in her *New India* she made a scathing attack on the very idea of civil disobedience. Besant feared that Gandhi's movement "will erode people's respect for law in general with the result that they will not obey even the law of an independent India". *Mathrubhumi*, the great supporter of the Gandhian movement that it was, joined issue with Besant and came to the defence of the movement. The paper pointed out that from the very beginning of history it was by disobeying the anti-people laws that people tried to destroy such laws.

In August 1931, the *Yuvabharatham* published a poem on the CDM by T. Subramanian Tirumumbu entitled "Review of the Last War of Dharma". The poem made a severe attack on the "hard-hearted demon of the present rule who has devoured gold and money in large quantities, is now inebriately sucking up with his black tongue the life blood of the people". After giving an account of the 'policy of deception' by which the British established their rule in India, the poet lamented at the deplorable condition of the land of Bharatha. The poem, then, eloquently proclaimed the power of the soul force with which Mahatma Gandhi opposed the enemy. "But soul force will,

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[81] *Thali* or *Mangalyasutra* is the most sacred thread tied round the neck of the bride by the bridegroom on the occasion of wedding. According to Hindu custom, a women should not part with her *thali* so long as her husband is alive.

without the least exertion, shatter the granite walls of the jail, and will show the best way of overcoming the enemy". The poem ended with the adoration of Mahatma Gandhi who taught the people that "their life is but straw in the fight to redeem the motherland, that the jail is a palace and a rain of shots but a shower of flowers".[82]

The poem was so annoying to the authorities that it was held to be seditious and the poet, editor and printer were awarded imprisonment by the District Magistrate.[83]

Gandhi-Bose Rift

The Gandhi-Bose rift in the Congress which developed into a major crisis in nationalist politics was hotly debated in the press. The nationalist press expressed its profound resentment at the crisis in the Congress leadership, blaming one section or the other or both. The leftists in the congress being on the side of Bose, the *Prabhatham* supported the latter. In a leader, on January 1939, on the coming election to the president ship of the Congress, the Congress Socialist organ made a strong plea favouring Bose against Pattabhi Sitaramayya: " Dr. Pattabhi is the reply to the question whether compromising mentality has crept into the Congress under the cover of Gandhian ideology."[84]

The *Al-Ameen* expectedly, supported the Bose faction; the founder and editor of the paper, Muhammed Abdurhiman, being the leader of Forward Bloc in Kerala, it was only natural for the *Al-Ameen* to support Bose. The *Mathrubhumi*, on the other hand was out and out pro-Gandhi in this trial of

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82 Public Department, G.O. No.1043 dated 8 October 1931 (Regional Archives, Kozhikode).

83 T.R. Krishna Swamy Iyer, the editor, Kunnath Narayanan Nair, the proprietor of the Kamalalayam Press where *Yuva Bharatham* was printed and T. Subramanian Tirumumbu were sentenced to 9 months rigorous imprisonment.

84 *Prabhatham*, 30 January 1939.

strength between Gandhians and non-Gandhians. When Bose was elected president defeating Gandhi's nominee, Pattabhi, '*Mathrubhumi* congratulated him on his victory; but, at the same time, it hastened to add that supreme authority in Congress still rested with Gandhi. "The undeniable leadership to start a struggle in India rests with Mahatmaji alone....."[85] This is proof of the fact that the 'Muthrubhumi' was not ready to acknowledge the legitimate authority of Subhash Bose as Congress President, instead it was eager to give Gandhi extra-constitutional authority to control the Congress, over the shoulders of its democratically elected President.

Consequent on the defeat of his candidate to Bose, Gandhi advised his supporters to keep away from the Working Committee, ostensibly to let Bose and his supporters to run the organisation in accordance with their own ideals and programme. The decision stemmed from the realisation that in electing Bose over his nominee, the majority of Congress representatives had expressed no-confidence in the Gandhian programme. *Mathrubhumi* disagreed on this interpretation of the victory of Bose. It pointed out that when they voted for Bose, Congress representatives would not have thought that their vote would be interpreted as an expression of no confidence in ahimsa. The vote against Pattabhi could be an expression of the misunderstanding among Congressmen that had been growing ever since the formation of ministries by Congress in the provinces, that the organisation was returning to the path of constitutionalism. As far as ahimsa was concerned, *Mathrubhumi* appeared to be more royal than the king.

The passing of the controversial Pant resolution at the Tripuri Congress, which the Bose camp took to be insulting to the President, provoked strong protest from a section of the press. The resolution expressed full faith in the basic policies of Gandhi, required the President to form the

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85 *Mathrubhumi*, 31 January 1935.

new Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhi, and expressed regrets at the efforts to malign the names of the members of the old Working Committee (The reference, here is to the allegation made by Bose that members of old working committee had been carrying on consultations with Government authorities on the Federation issue[86(a)] and thus trying to compromise with the British). Thus the democratically elected President was saddled with a working committee dominated by his rivals in the Congress. The *Mathrubhumi* had no qualms in supporting the Resolution, saying that the 'Pant Resolution will be able to save the Congress from the wrong path it had taken under Bose and to put an end to the troubles in the organisation that has been brewing ever since the election of Bose as President'.[87] The paper conveniently forgot that most of these troubles stemmed from the reluctance of the Gandhians to cooperate with the President.

Bose characterised the demands made in the Pant Resolution as inconsistent with the Congress constitution. To this, *Mathrubhumi* commented "There will be circumstances when every institution will have to violate the letter of certain laws to maintain its soul spirit". The argument just shows the extent to which *Mathrubhumi* would go to defend the actions of the Gandhians. When it came to Gandhi and his disciples, even the Congress constitution could be overlooked.

The persistence with which the rightist Congress leaders refused to cooperate with Bose in making his term as Congress President a success, and culminating in the resignation of a duly elected President, led to an unprecedented uproar both in the press and platform.[88] The '*Indian Express*'

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86 (a) The Federation issue refers to the proposal contained in the Government of India Act of 1935 for a Federal Government at the Centre. Certain Congress leaders were in favour of accepting the proposal.

87 *Mathrubhumi*, 11 March 1939.

88 Aurobindo Mazumdar, *op.cit*., p.133.

of Madras, which had a reasonable readership among the English-knowing public of Malabar, in its leader column in May 1939, came down heavily on the AICC and its leaders: "The conception of an annual leader is one that does poor justice to the continuity of efforts needed for the attainment of the Congress objective, and we feel that the time has come for ridding Congress elections of all farcical make believe, by providing that Mahatma Gandhi shall, in conformity with his position of unshakable national leadership, be the President of the institution for his life time. The fate that has overtaken Mr. Bose has shown that none that has not Gandhi's support can survive as Congress President for long, and the real choice is between Gandhiji, and a lieutenant of his choice by rotation. Whey be content with a sub leader for a role identified with supreme leadership. Our suggestion is only for giving dejure recognition for defacto state of affairs already obtaining in the Congress".[89] After his decision to abruptly end the NCM in 1922 following the Chauri Chaura incident, Gandhi did not attract so much criticism in his political career as during the Tripuri Congress and immediately after.

G.B. Pant's controversial resolution was passed at the Tripuri Congress, thanks to the abstention of the Congress Socialists. Critics found the Congress Socialist party guilty of selling Socialism to Gandhism. *Prabhatham* replied to this criticism through an article by Jayaprakash Narayan. He justified the stand taken by the Congress Socialists with respect to the resolution by observing that Gandhi and his supporters would have quit the Congress, if the resolution had failed. Congress Socialists wanted to avoid such a situation. They also believed that it would be most beneficial to the national movement if the Working Committee had the participation of Gandhi, by constituting it as per his desire. On the other hand, Congress Socialists were not able to support the resolution as certain principles involved in it were not acceptable to them; for eg: they did not accept the

89 *The Indian Express*, 3 May 1939.

position that only Gandhi could lead the country in a struggle against the British.[90]

The passing of the Pant resolution emboldened certain leaders of the rightist faction like Satyamurthy to demand the expulsion of Communists, Socialists and other revolutionaries from the Congress. The, *Prabhatham* reminded these leaders that the resolution, inspite of its using the name of Gandhi and declaring faith in him, was opposed by 20 percent of delegates in the AICC. Neither did the *Prabhatham* support the contention of Bose's supporters that as per the constitution of the Congress, it was the prerogative of the President to constitute the Working Committee, and, as such, he was not bound by the Pant resolution. Whatever might be the arguments of legal pandits, a resolution passed by the AICC should be respected. Further, the paper also expressed its view that only a Working Committee constituted by both Gandhi and Bose could unitedly lead India in a struggle for freedom.[91]

World War II and Quit India Movement

In the years preceding and during World War II, newspapers of Malabar gave expression to the varying attitudes of political groups ranging from the Liberals, the Gandhians and the Left groups. However, Gandhi's out-and-out pacifism did not find many takers among them.

As has been noted earlier, most of the prominent newspapers of the liberal era had disappeared from the scene by the end of the 1930s. Compared to the World War I period, press restrictions were also more severe, especially after the Quit India exhortation. Still, nationalist papers, wholly ranged against foreign rule, indulged in constant criticism of the Government of the day, and inspite of legislations like the Press Emergency Powers Act and the Defence of India Rules, took risks knowingly in the movement of non-

90 *Prabhatham*, 27 March 1939.

91 *Prabhatham*, 3 April 1939.

cooperation with the war efforts. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that it was a wholly repressive regime; most newspapers which were keen on saving their skins were given all possible chances.[92] There was a dual outlook among Indian newspapers in those dangerous days. They followed the policy of non-cooperation with the war efforts, but they also opposed the Fascist and Nazi regimes. If they took risk on the one side, they were on safe ground on the other, while the British regime had enough support from the loyalist press not only in its war efforts but in its repression of the anti-War and anti-Government movement.

Much before the outbreak of the War, the *Prabhatham*, official organ of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party, had foreseen the war coming. In a leading article in March 1935, under the heading *War! War!*, the paper, after explaining how the world was fast moving towards yet another World War, exhorted the people to make use of the golden opportunity to push on effectively India's fight for independence. Stressing the importance of organsing 35 crores of India's people against the war mentality, the *Prabhatham* added: "But it should not be forgotten that it is not lifeless speeches on peace and unity, but the creation of a lively and militant organisation of the masses that would be effective. It is not the state of man's mind but the force of surrounding circumstances that causes war. Unless these circumstances are put an end to, the doctrine of non-violence cannot spread, however much one may lecture on it. It should be borne in mind that capitalism is the root cause of the World War and that as long as competition among the capitalists of different countries continues, the war-mentality cannot be got rid of. Gandhiji should, therefore, engage himself in an endeavour to destroy capitalism, if he thinks that his doctrine of non-violence is a practical thing ...."[93]

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92 M. Chalapathi Rau, *The Press in India*, Bombay, pp.131-132.

93 *Prabhatham*, 25 March 1935.

Expectedly, the mouth piece of the Congress Socialists gave a class perspective of international politics, and wanted the Congress, in the event of a war, to launch the final struggle for independence, making use of the opportunity. The paper also indirectly hinted that Gandhi's talk of peace and non-violence was useless and that what was needed was militant organisation that could wage an effective struggle.

Broadly speaking, *The Hindu* reflected the liberal view which was against precipitating a crisis during the hostilities and favoured cooperation in the anti-fascist war efforts on honourable terms.

The nationalist papers of Malabar were anti-fascist, but they were also convinced that an enslaved India could not fight for the freedom and democracy of other countries. The *Mathrubhumi*, in a leader in August 1939, on India's stand in the imminent war, reminded the Indian leaders of the bitter experience of World War I, when India got the oppressive Rowlatt Act for the co-operation it offered.[94] Criticising the attack on Poland by Fascist Germany and the Communist Soviet Union on either side in September 1939, *Mathrubhumi* characterised Communism as imperialism,[95] which was significant in the context of the stand taken by the paper in the factional politics of the Congress in Malabar, with the Gandhians on one side and the Leftists on the other.

The outbreak of the War was seen by many as a golden opportunity to be made use of by India to win her freedom. They thought that if Gandhi was to lead a great mass civil disobedience movement, England, itself involved in a life-and-death struggle, would be compelled to accede to nationalist India's demand. When Gandhi decided to launch individual satyagraha, instead of its mass variety, it did not satisfy many, especially the leftists, in the Congress.

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94 *Mathrubhumi*, 30 August 1939.

95 *Mathrubhumi*, 24 September 1939.

The *Mathrubhumi*, true to its pro-Gandhian stance in the Congress politics, found nothing wrong in Gandhi's reluctance to start a mass movement. The paper reminded the readers of Gandhi's view that it was not the objective of a Satyagrahi to upset his opponent. "A mass civil disobedience movement at this stage will put the British in panic, which is not a satyagrahi's objective; his objective is a change of the opponent's mind".[96]

Referring to a suggestion made by the Liberal Federation that India could consider cooperating with the war efforts, if all the positions in the Viceroy's Executive Council were given to Indians, *Mathrubhumi* opined, "It is not by a looking at whether all the members of the Executive Council are Indians that the national character of the Central Government is determined but by looking at whether the members of the council are responsible to the people of India".[97] Thus it can be seen that the *Mathrubhumi* followed a policy in tune with the official policy of the Congress, which, though sympathising with the Allied cause, took the position that an unfree India could not fight a war, said to be waging to save freedom and democracy.

The *Al-Ameen* was also against Indian participation in the World War. In a leader, the paper exhorted the people not to cooperate with the British war efforts and urged the Congress to begin a civil disobedience movement to wrest freedom from foreign imperialists. The leader was provocative enough for the Government to order the closure of *Al-Ameen* on 29 September 1939.[98] As during the CDM, *Al-Ameen* again became a martyr to the nationalist cause.

More than the realisation of the national objective of freedom from Britain, the *Deshabhimani*, official organ of the Communists, was guided by its eagerness to ensure the victory of the Soviet Union by defeating the

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96 *Mathrubhumi*, 2 November 1941.

97 *Mathrubhumi*, 30 December 1941.

98 S.K. Pottekkat *et al*., *Op.cit.*, p.162.

Fascists. Consequently it stood for full cooperation with the Government in the execution of war. The paper even exhorted workers not to indulge in strikes but to work for more hours to increase production and thus help the Government in the war efforts. No wonder, the *Deshabhimani* was against any kind of agitation against the Government, which could adversely affect the execution of the "People's War". The paper wanted the Congress to adopt a policy of determined opposition to fascism.

Reflecting the Soviet complaint that the Allies were concentrating on the western front and neglecting the eastern front in its war strategy, the *Deshabhimani* wrote: "The war policy of imperialism is merely defending the Jap aggression . . . . our policy is to attack Japan and make Burma and Malaya free and end the war as quickly as possible . . . ."[99]

In March 1943, Prime Minister Winston Churchill made a speech in which he envisaged an entirely different plan for the war against Japan, to be put into effect after the lapse of one or two years. The *Deshabhimani* saw through the game of Churchill and uncovered the imperialist plan. The paper said that "the meaning of Churchill's statement is that after the war in Europe is over, troops can be brought over from there and success can be achieved; that without allowing the people to participate in the country's defence as a free people, India, Burma and colonies can be retaken by military strength on behalf of the Empire". *Deshabhimani* also expressed its view that the only national policy that could be adopted against Churchill's tactics was the establishment of a National Government in India for attacking Japan in its own territory without delay and for that purpose, what was needed was Congress-League unity.[100]

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99 *Deshabhimani*, 23 March 1943.

100 *Deshabhimani*, 28 March 1943.

The *Deshabhimani* severely attacked Subhash Bose, earlier ally of the Communists in their opposition to the Gandhians in the Congress, for allying with the Axis Powers. Two lines from a poem entitled "No Japan" by poet, Cherukad and published in the "*Deshabhimani*" will suffice to show how much the Communists hated Bose.

> ". . . That scoundrel (Bose) is not our leader,
> He is the boot-licker of the Japanese . . . ."[101]

The *Swatantra Bharatham*, the clandestine newssheet started by the Socialist activists of the Quit India Movement, severely criticised the Communists for supporting the Government in their war efforts. It may be mentioned here that the Communists, who had been hitherto propagating the view that the World War was being fought between imperialist powers for world domination and that the opportunity offered by the War should be made use of by the suppressed peoples of the world to liberate themselves, changed their view all of a sudden when the Soviets joined the War on the side of the Allies and termed it, the "People's War", and fully cooperated with Government in the war efforts.[102] The *Swatantra Bharatham* observed that inorder to ensure the freedoms, promised by President Roosevelt, the freedom of India was essential, and pointed out that the Communists had betrayed the nationalist cause by unconditionally cooperating with the Government.[103]

While the *Deshabhimani* had been carrying on a propaganda blitzkrieg against Japanese collaborators and fifth-columnists (meaning the Socialists and the followers of Bose),[104] the *Swatantra Bharatham* appeared to be

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101 *Deshabhimani*, 8 August 1943.

102 EMS Namboodirippad, *A History of Indian Freedom Struggle*, Kozhikode, 1982, p. 142.

103 *Swathantra Bharatham*, 2 November 1942.

104 After the Soviet entry into the World War II and especially during the Quit India days, the Communists used to refer the Congress Socialists and the

favourably disposed towards a Japanese aggression, in the hope that this would help India to win her freedom.

Compared to the situation during the NCM and CDM, nationalist press had to work under more restrictions during the Quit India Movement, the third and last of the great mass movements led by Gandhi. As could be expected in a war situation, the Government was severe in suppressing criticism from the press. "At no time in the political history of the country was the nationalist press compelled to suspend its onward march under such severe stress and stringent orders as at the time of the Quit India Movement", says Aurobindo Mazmdar.[105]

In line with the Communist position after the Soviets joined the War on the side of the Allies, *Deshabhimani* opposed the Quit India movement. It may appear to be strange that the *Deshabhimani* had its birth in September 1942, when the whole country was being shaken by the August Revolution and nationalist press was finding it very difficult to survive under the weight of Government repression; a number of nationalist papers already being closed down. But *Deshabhimani* came on to the scene in most favourbale conditions in this respect, due to the above-mentioned change of attitude in the Community Party of India towards the War and consequently towards the Government. While nationalist papers were severely constrained due to stringent press restrictions, *Deshabhimani* had considerable freedom to air its views, which largely concurred with those of the Government.

In an article published in the *Deshabhimani* in April 1943, on the occasion of observing the 'National Week', P. Krishna Pillai said that "agitational path is not that of Indian freedom; it is the path of imperialism

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followers of Bose as fifth columnists.

105 Aurobindo Mazumdar, *Indian Press and Freedom Struggle*, Calcutta, 1993, p.184.

which wants to keep her enslaved. Those patriots, who without understanding this reality, prepare for civil disobedience and destruction during the National Week, will be helping, by such acts, the British imperialism". Krishna Pillai also pleaded for a review of the Bombay Resolution,[106] as the part dealing with agitation in it "is being misused by the fifth columnists".[107]

Deshabhimani wanted the Congress to admit that the August Resolution was a mistake. Its editor, M.S. Devadas, in an article, asked the Congress leaders to openly declare that the threat of agitation in the resolution was a mistake. It was a mistake because it was against the country's defence. "It is not enough not to oppose the country's defence; one should fearlessly cooperate with it. It is not enough to say that the Congress is against destruction; it should be declared that destruction is trreason and fifth column work."[108]

The Congress Socialists, who were the chief activists of the 1942 struggle, had planned to observe the first anniversary of the Quit India day on 9 August 1943 in a big way - by taking out processions, by means for strikes by workers and by observing hartal.[109] The *Deshabhimani* took it upon itself the task of defeating the Quit India day observation by conducting a spirited campaign against it. In a front page article, P.C. Joshi, Secretary of the Communist Party of India, wrote: ". . . . Their (Congress Socialists) chief aim is to create disunity and anarchy in the rear and thus pave the way for a fascist attack. . "[110] In an article on 15 April 1943 in the *Deshabhimani*, Communist

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106 The 'Quit India' resolution passed by the Bombay session of the AICC on 8 August 1942 had called for 'mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale'.

107 "*Deshabhimani* " Kozhikode, 11 April 1943.

108 *Deshabhimani* 9 May 1943.

109 M.G. Indiradevi, *Kerala and the Quit India Movement*, Alapuzha, 2005, p. 73.

110 *Deshabhimani* 1 August 1943.

leader. C. Unniraja, referring to the arrests of some Congress Socialists in connection with the Kizhariyur bomb case, said that "this has vindicated the *Deshabhimani*'s warning that Japanese agents are preparing to foment trouble on 9 August".[111]

C. Unniraja, in another article in the *Deshabhimani*, blamed the Congress Socialists for the violent incidents and acts of "sabotage" they allegedly indulged in during the Quit India Movement. Stressing the importance of 'ahimsa', he accused that they were committing treason in the name of Congress.[112] The Communists and the *Deshabhimani*, who had been ridiculing ahimsa as a "Gandhian fad", is seen, here, pleading for observing it meticulously. The reason is not far to seek; they did not want to trouble the Government when the latter was involved in a 'Peoples' war' against the Fascist powers. Infact, what mattered to *Deshabhimani* was to ensure the victory of the Soviet side for which it was willing to take an opportunistic stand on ahimsa.

While Deshabhmani' attitude towards Quit India activists was one of intense hostility, that of the *Mathrubhumi* was one of ambivalence. True to its firm faith in the Gandhian ideals, the leading nationalist paper in Malabar did not praise the violent activities of 1942. Nor did it condemn the activists of 1942 as traitors, as did the *Deshabhimani*; of their patriotism, *Mathrubhumi* had no doubt, though it did not approve of their methods.

What made the Quit India Movement very different from the NCM and CDM was the incidence of violence and sabotage committed by the agitators in various parts of the country. So much violence on the part of the agitators in the course of a movement led by the high priest of non-violence naturally led to a controversy with respect to the responsibility for the violence, in

111 *Deshabhimani* 15 August 1943.

112 *Deshabhimani* 22 August 1943.

which newspapers also took an active part. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

As mentioned earlier, nationalist papers like the *Mathrubhumi* that supported that Congress-led movement were severely constrained by the repressive press laws imposed by the Government during the Quit India Movement. *Mathrubhumi* even had to suspend publication for a few days from 20 August 1942 owing to some fresh restrictions which made it impossible for the paper to fulfill its objective of public service.[113] Publication was resumed on 2 September 1942 when the Government agreed to ease certain restrictions.

Mathrubhumi has sometimes been accused of according prominence to financial stability over national duty. Mention has been made earlier of its disregarding Gandhi's advice to stop publication under severe Government restrictions and *Mathrubhumi's* logic for not complying with it. It is relevant here to point out that *Mathrubhumi* published Government advertisements, requesting people to take Defence Savings Certificate, even as it vigoursly campaigned in favour of the Congress policy of non-cooperation with the war efforts. Was the Government advertisement published for monetary considerations? Or was the newspaper constrained to publish it to save its skin under pressure form the authorities? Either way, it reflects poorly on the nationalist credentials of the *Mathrubhumi*.

No study on the political journalism of Quit India period in Malabar will be complete without a reference to the 'Swatantra Bharatham', the clandestine news-sheet released by the Quit India activists of Malabar. Bringing out a news sheet of that kind in those days was not at all an easy

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[113] P.C. Sukumaran Nair *et al., Mathrubhumiyude Charithram* (Mal.) Vol. 3, Kozhikode, 1998, pp. 81-82.

task. Besides its printing, distribution and reading, the very mention of its name was considered to be an offence against the Government.

Distributing the paper to its readers was really risky job then. But the inner most urge for freedom prompted the freedom loving people to spread the news-sheet wherever they could. For this, persons were selected with much care. In North Malabar, it was distributed by one Kuttan of South Malabar and in South Malabar it was distributed by T.P. Kunhirama Kidavu, son of K. Kelappan, for some time.[114] This arrangement was made to escape from the policemen. Kunhirama Kidav used to hide the copies of 'Swatntra Bharatham' in a vegetable basket and spread vegetables over them, inorder to ensure unsuspected transportation to places of distribution.[115] 'Swantra Bharatham' had a wide circulation in Kerala inspite of all the security and intelligence system the British had enforced during those days.

The 'Swantra Bharatham' published emotional articles on police atrocities on nationalist workers and agitators. It also highlighted the revolutionary activities of the Quit India agitators like the cutting of communication lines, breaking of bridges and railway lines etc. Clandestine newsheets and leaflets were the only means of knowing such incidents at that time, as regular newspapers were prohibited from publishing such news by the authorities. In everything published by the 'Swatantra Bharatham', the British were painted in the darkest of colours.

The 'Swantra Bharatham', however, was not destined to last long. The Government framed a case against a number of persons on the charge that they between June and September 1943, at Karoli and Kizhakkayil house in Chemmancheri near Koyilandy, printed and published for distribution unauthorised leaflets (copies of Swantra Bharatham) containing prejudicial

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114 M.G. Indiradevi, o*p.cit.*, p. 40.

115 Ibid. p. 41.

reports intended to influence the conduct or attitude of the public in a manner prejudicial to the defence of British India and to the efficient prosecution of war, and to instigate directly or indirectly the use of criminal force against the public officials, to wit police officials.[116]

Gandhi and Ahimsa

After having seen how various newspapers in Malabar responded to the national movement under Gandhi, let us now examine how these papers viewed the political personality of Gandhi and his concept of 'ahimsa'. We have seen how the *Mitavadi's*, earlier admiration for Gandhi turned into aversion once he became the undisputed leader of the Indian National Congress. From 1920 onwards *Mitavadi* subjected Gandhi and his programme to severe criticism. Infact, most of the newspapers of the pre Gandhian era in Malabar, which generally followed a moderate or liberal stand in politics, praised Gandhi when he was a co-operator. It was after he turned a non-cooperator that these papers found his politics unacceptable. In the 1920s and 1930s Malabar witnessed the emergence of newspapers inspired by the Gandhian and Socialist/Communist ideologies and they were destined to dominate the field of political journalism, thereafter.

Of the newspapers owing allegiance to Gandhian ideology in Malabar, the most prominent was, undoubtedly, the *Mathrubhumi*. Giving publicity to the objective and ideology of the Indian National Congress was declared to be one of the objectives of the *Mathrubhumi* Printing and Publishing Company, when it was registered in 1922. Thus *Mathrubhumi* was born with the avowed objective of propagating the ideals up the Congress, which at that time, was none other than the Gandhian ideals.

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[116] FIR No. 82/43 dated 9 September, 1943 and charge sheet dated 22 September 1943, Koyilandy Police Station.

Mathrubhumi's admiration for Gandhi often took such proportions as to glorify him as sort of a demi-god. The paper considered him not merely as a political leader, but as the spiritual embodiment of the virtue of Indian nation and culture. It would appear that *Mathrubhumi* could not see Gandhi without this spiritual aura. In an editorial entitled "The Lucky Star of India", published on the occasion of the 62nd birthday of Gandhi, *Mathrubhumi* wrote: "Today is the day when the world had seen for the first time, the beautiful dawn of holy epoch; 2 October is the day made historical by the birth of a holy man who had won the world through love . . . "[117] This blending of the politics with spirituality made the paper incapable of a critical approach vis-a-vis Gandhi and his ideology; when analysing Gandhi and his programme, the *Mathrubhumi* tended to lose the objectivity that such an analysis demanded from a newspaper.

Mathrubhumi in a leader published on the 55th birthday of Gandhi,[118] adorned him with epithets like 'Rishi', 'Lord of piety' and 'incarnation of sacrifice'. When it came to Gandhi *Mathrubhumi* ' lost all sense of proportion. Its adoration of Gandhi often bordered on the religious.

Nevertheless, there were occasions, rare though they were, when *Mathrubhumi* did differ form Gandhi's views. In 1934, an earthquake in Bihar caused much damage to life and property. Gandhi made a comment that the earthquake was a punishment given by God to the people of Bihar for continuing to follow the evil of untouchability. Rabindranath Tagore, in a response, contradicted Gandhi's view and said that earthquake is a natural phenomenon and it had nothing to do with man's sin or virtue. *Mathrubhumi* supported the rational view of the great poet.[119] *Mathrubhumi* also opposed

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117 *Mathrubhumi* (Kozhikode", 2 October, 1931.

118 It was customary for *Mathrubhumi* to publish a leader on every birthday of Gandhi glorifying his personality.

119 *Mathrubhumi*, 15 January1934

Gandhi's proposal in 1924 to make compulsory for every Congress member to spin 2000 rounds of Khadi yarn every month.[120]

The *Prabhatham*, the official organ of the Kerala Congress Socialist party, and later the *Deshabhimani*, the Communist organ, were always at logger heads with the predominant nationalist ideology the Congress represented under Gandhi. Wherever an opportunity presented itself these leftist papers exposed the weaknesses of the Gandhian ideology. Responding to Gandhi's criticism of the Leftists' walkout from the AICC meeting in October 1938, Minoo Masani wrote in the *Prabhatham* that the major question before the nation was whether the Congress should develop into a real national movement of the mass of the people or should it transform into a narrow political party of a few, willing to accept the principles of Gandhism without any question. "There are people who want the present economic structure to continue in the name of ahimsa. It is their advices that we detest", Masani concluded.[121] Gandhi's insistence on non-violence was thus, made responsible for protecting and preserving the capitalist structure, meaning thereby, that only a violent revolution could destroy the existing social structure.

Mathrubhumi's faith in the leadership of Gandhi was so blind that it was incapable of conceiving a leadership for the Congress other than that of the Mahatma. The paper expressed this blind faith on many occasions, especially when Suhash Bose challenged Gandhian leadership in the late 1930s. "There are enough instances in history where the individual becomes bigger than the institution; when the ideas and ideals of a population centres round that individual. Today Gandhi's is bigger than the Congress" *Mathrubhumi* is seen, here, placing the leader over the organisation. In

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120 *Mathrubhumi*, 28 October 1924. (We will have occasion to discuss the controversy regarding the spinning condition, later).

121 *Prabhatham*, 31 October 1938.

December 1941, the Working Committee passed a resolution at its Bardoli meeting, relieving Gandhi of Congress leadership. The committee was constrained to take such a decision because it thought that the changed international situation due to the expansion of war, demanded a change from the .....pacifist policy of Gandhi. This 'partying of ways' between the Congress and Gandhi was 'most unfortunate and painful for the *Mathrubhumi*, which expressed great disappointment at the Congress losing the leadership of Gandhi. The pacifist position of Gandhi was found to be quite rational by the paper. Even when most of his close colleagues and disciples found Gandhi's ideals not in consonance with the times, *Mathrubhumi* stood firm behind him and his leadership. The paper wrote: "Whoever may be responsible for initiating a philosophical discussion on the dimension of the ideology of ahimsa at this juncture and thus forcing Gandhi to retreat from the leadership of the Congress, their policy is not conducive to the best interests of the country".[122]

Notwithstanding the Socialist's disagreement with Gandhi on the issue of non-violence, the '*Swatantra Bharatham*' strongly supported the Gandhian struggle; the position of Gandhi as the supreme leader of the nation was accepted by them. The 'Swatantra Bharatham', of the 21 February 1943, has a picture on its front page in which Gandhi was shown as being crucified, an Englishman was shown nailing Gandhi to the cross even as he was assisted by an Indian. In the main article of the issue, Gandhi was compared to Jesus Christ and British India to the Roman Empire of Jesus's time. Just as Jesus Christ had tried to save the Jews from the misrule of the Roman Empire, Gandhi was depicted as trying to save Indian people from the misrule and exploitation of the British Empire, with truth and ahimsa as his weapons.[123]

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[122] C. Uthama Kurup *et.al*., *Mathrubhumiyude Charithram* (Mal.) (Vol. II), Kozhikode, 1998, pp. 490-491.

[123] *Swatanthra Bharatham*, 21 February 1943.

Al-Ameen did not show much enthusiasm for Gandhian ideas or leadership. Being edited by Muhammed Abdurahiman, a great admirer of Subhash Bose and the leader of the Kerala branch of the Forward Bloc, the lukewarm attitude of *Al-Ameen* towards the Gandhian ideology should cause no surprises.

Annie Besant and her '*New India*' were bitterly opposed to Gandhi and his programme. In an article published in 'New India' after the Calcutta Congress of 1928, Besant remarked that Gandhi's influence in the political life of India had been destructive. She reminisced her talk with G.K. Gokhale just before Gandhi's return from South Africa in which the legendary Moderate leader allegedly apprehended the entry of Gandhi into Indian politics to be an impediment to the political progress of the country. Besant thought that 'his warning has now been vindicated'. She went on to argue that Gandhi's non-co-operation and civil disobedience had only managed to destroy a ripening crop, referring to her own Home Rule Movement. "Gandhi is not a political strategist; he is only a sanyasin with whimsical dreams who does not know ordinary human character", she averred.[124] Evidently Gandhi's, political programme was deemed to be too revolutionary by Besant.

Perhaps, no other single issue created as much controversy during the national movement as did 'ahimsa' or non-violence, which was central to the Gandhian ideology and programme. The efficacy of non-violence as a policy was questioned by critics, within and outside the Congress, from the days of the Non-cooperation Movement onwards. Non-violence was so dearest to Gandhi that he would not compromise on the issue. The heat and dust the issue produced in nationalist politics was definitely echoed in the nationalist press.

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[124] NNPR-1929, TNA, Chennai.

Of the nationalist papers in Malabar, the *Mathrubhumi* was in the forefront in defending non-violence as the most suited policy for the Indian national movement. In the 1920s the effectiveness of non-violent struggle was mainly challenged by militant nationalists. The throwing of bomb in the Imperial Legislative Assembly by Bhagat Singh and his companions was an act of rare courage and self-sacrifice which excited the whole country, especially the youth. But the *Mathrubhumi*, in an editorial, termed the incident as "pathetic", for, "under the prevailing political conditions, non-violent methods are the most suitable for realisation of the goal".[125] The paper exhorted all patriots to advise the people to desist from indulging in such violent activities. It was appropriate for a newspaper, which had accepted the policy of non-violence as best suited for the freedom struggle, to point out the unsuitability of violent methods for realisation of the goal. But one would also expect a nationalist paper to acknowledge the supreme sacrifice and courage exhibited by the young men who were inspired by patriotism of the highest order, which *Mathrubhumi* didn't.

Mathrubhumi's reporting of an incident during the Salt Satyagraha at the Kozhikode beach showed the significance it attached to the principle of non-violence in the struggle for freedom. On 14 May 1930, the Sub Divisional Officer, Saldana tried to remove the national flag from the site where the Satyagraha volunteers were breaking the Salt law. Hundreds of people who had gathered there became restive and tried to attack the SDO, whom the volunteers were able to rescue from the ire of the mob. In a report entitled, "The Undesirable Impatience of the Mob", the *Mathrubhumi* condemned the behaviour of the mob and emphasized the importance of never deviating from the path of ahimsa.[126] What the report shows is that the paper

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125 *Mathrubhumi*, 11 April 1929.

126 '*Mathrubhumi*, 15 May 1930.

was not ready to acquiesce a slight deviation from the path of non-violence even in the face of provocation.

The *Prabhatham*, being an organ of Congress Socialists with Communist leanings, was a votary of revolution and did not have much use for non-violence. It frequently published articles and poems extolling armed rebellion. The following lines from a poem written by K. Damodaran and published in the *Prabhatham* is representative of how these poems glorified a bloody challenge to the British.

> ".....Oh' noble lady (Mother India)! I will tear off my holy Khaddar cloth with which to wipe thy tears, I will wash off the dirt on they forehead with my blood...[127]

The '*Mathrubhumi*, published a leader on the telegram messages between Gandhi and the prisoners of Andaman Islands, who were on a fast, in its issue dated 2 September 1937. The prisoners, most of whom were punished for involving in violent, militant and revolutionary terrorism against the British Indian state, confessed in their letter to Gandhi that 'none of them now believe in terrorism and that they are now conscious of the futility of terrorism as a political weapon and faith'. Referring to this, the *Mathrubhumi* said that even though no country had yet regained its lost freedom without indulging in violence, if it was possible, then that was the best and the easiest method. The paper also claimed that under Gandhi's non-violent struggle, the country was nearing towards its goal of freedom more speedily and in a more desirable manner than what would have been possible through a violent struggle.[128]

The *Prabhatham* published a long article entitled "Ahimsa and Truth-The Communists and Violence" by Somanath Lahiri in response to an article

[127] *Prabhatham*, 11 March 1935.

[128] *Mathrubhumi*, 2 September 1937.

by Gandhi in the 'Harijan' dated 2 April 1938. Gandhi, in his article, criticised the authorities for calling the police and army for quelling a communal riot in Allahabad. "The rioters are our own countrymen and if they are to kill us, let it be so". Gandhi argued that what was needed against organised violence was not the non-violence of the weak and that non-violence was the weapon of the bold.[129]

Somanath Lahiri ridiculed Gandhi's contention that the Congress ministry should not have called the police and the army in the face of growing violence. Pointing out that Gandhi had not criticised the police firing into the striking workers at Chirala, Lahiri contended that the former's opposition to the use of violence by Government did not extend to all spheres of life, especially in the case of striking workers. He brought out the contradiction in Gandhi's stand thus:

"Mr. Gandhi advises non-violence against the murderous fanatic and the aggressor who attack from behind. Even if the workers were not peaceful, one would expect Gandhi and his followers to protest the use of violence by the Congress ministry.... But there is no such protest ..... You speak of non-violence.... Is shooting unarmed crowd not violence?[130] By advising the tenants against resisting the violence of janmies, the Gandhian's were really supporting violence. He claimed that the Communists did not advice violence; they only predicted the possibility of violence being inflicted on them. Violence was inherent in the prevailing social structure. Lahiri went on to deny the allegation that the revolutionaries were advising violence and civil war. "What they are saying is that the working class is facing capitalist violence and that has to be resisted". He also claimed that Communism fought for the destruction of all kinds of violence and torture. "In the course

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129 *Harijan*, 2 April 1938.

130 *Prabhatham*, 1 August 1938.

of this effort, there will be struggle at every stage. If the working class is to submit to violence, that will mean not only a return from that struggle but also that violence grows along with the growth of capitalism and imperialism".[131] The article conveyed the message that non-violence as a policy or tactic of struggle was not only ineffective against capitalist forces but it also weakened the working class.

E.M. Sankaran Nambudiripad, prominent leader of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party, had handled a regular column in the *Prabhatham* under the pen-name of "Surendran". This column was utilised by the paper to clarify many of the ideological questions relating to the Party. In an article in the issue dated 26 September 1938, Surendran threw light on the defects of the philosophy of non-violence as preached by the Gandhians. He complained that the Gandhians did not oppose the violence committed y Government and argued that violence, even if committed against thieves and robbers, was violence. If love could win over violence, as the Gandhians argued, why the Government was not using it against thieves and robbers. Pointing out that imperialism was the organised form of violence, the article contended that if Government could use violence against thieves and robbers, then, the use of violence against imperialism was justified. It was absurd to say that violence could be used to suppress small scale theft and robbery but not against imperialism which was the highest form of theft and robbery. The author also denied the charge that the Socialists and other extremists were encouraging the practice of violence. Their programme was to mobilise people for a struggle to obtain their just rights. Though they preferred non-violent means for this struggle, if the use of violence happened to be the easiest way to realise their objectives, they could not surrender their freedom of choice in the name of the ideology of non-violence. The article alleged that the Gandhians were clubbing together the personal opinions of Gandhi

131 *Prabhatham*, 15 August 1938.

with the official policy of the Congress. "The Gandhians accept ahimsa as a philosophy of life; the Socialists and other extremists accept it as a policy", EMS (Surendran) concluded.[132]

In November 1938, S. Ramanathan, a minister in the Rajaji Government, justified use of violence by Government on the ground that "it is impossible to run a complete 'Ahimsa Government', as India is not completely free". The *Prabhatham* joined issue with the minister saying that "if Mr. Ramanathan can justify violence on the ground that political condition is not conducive to the practice of perfect ahimsa, then how he will prevent others, who have not entered the Government from using violence as a means". The paper contended that if Mr. Ramanathan's argument was accepted, the terrorist movement in India was justified in using violence to realise their objective of winning the freedom of the country.[133]

After the exit of the *Prabhatham* in 1939, the Communists launched the *Deshabhimani* as a weekly in 1942. As the mouthpiece of a revolutionary party, *Deshabhimani* could not have much respect for the Gandhian concept of ahimsa, which was accused of restraining the revolutionary spirit of Indian people. It is relevant here to note the view prevalent among certain scholars that the rightists in the Congress saw in non-violence an ideologically useful devise to neutralise the left wing of the party.[134]

The peasant unrest and the consequent incidents of violence in North Malabar was a politically sensitive issue from the middle of the 1930s and was hotly debated in the press. While the '*Mathrubhumi* found the Communists and the *Deshabhimani* guilty of promoting violence, the latter

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132 *Prabhatham*, 26 September 1936.

133 *Prabhatham*, 14 November 1938.

134 Claude Markovits, *op.cit*., pp. 101-102.

accused that the police, in collusion with the janmies of Malabar, was responsible for the violence.

Allegation against the *Deshabhimani*, that it was promoting violence, came not only from pro-Congress papers like the *Mathrubhumi*, but also from the official circles. In a latter to the chief secretary, the District Magistrate reported: "After the conversion of the weekly into a daily (*Deshabhimani*), it is seen in experience that atmosphere in the district has considerably deteriorated due to the open declaration of faith in violence preached by the paper...."[135] Dixon, an English official who had enquired into the activities of the Communists in Malabar, reported that the "*Deshabhimani* indulges regularly in inflammatory propaganda designed to promote violence and breaches of the law.[136]

From the late 1930s, the Congress ceased to represent truly Gandhian ideals (Gandhi had already stopped his membership in 1934), though its leaders continued to profess by his name and use his charisma to establish their own political legitimacy. The deviation form Gandhian ideals was especially noticeable in respect of the policy of non-violence. The decision of the Working Committee to relieve Gandhi of Congress leadership because of his pacifist policy has already been noted earlier. This political reality was acknowledged even by his close associates and pro-Gandhian newspapers.

Mathrubhumi, in a leader published in December 1945, tried to distinguish between non-violence as conceived by Gandhi and as accepted by the Congress. "For Gandhi, ahimsa is as important a part of his life as the air he breathes. He has also given a wide meaning to it. As far as Gandhiji is concerned, all the actions of men within the narrow circle of 'me' and 'mine'

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[135] Public Dept. G.O.No. 962 dated 4-3-47, Regional Archives, Kozhikode (hereafter RAK).

[136] Public Dept. G.O.No. 2658 dated 25/8/47, RAK.

do involve violence. A capitalist exploiting the labourers or a caste Hindu beating an avarna-all these are in that sense, different forms of violence",[137] '*Mathrubhumi* pointed out.

On the other hand, non-violence, for the Congress, was not a philosophy of life or a principle of spirituality; it was only a policy to be utilised in the struggle for freedom against the British. The paper reminded the readers of the Congress declaration in the August Resolution that a free India would be ready to help Britain in the war against Japan. The Congress had also recognised the necessity of a national army in a free India to face any foreign attack. *Mathrubhumi* also pointed out the fact that among the fundamental rights of citizens, the Congress had even recognised the rights of an individual to wear arms for his self protection. All these were not in tune with Gandhi's idea of non-violence. The paper concluded the leader thus: "A philosophy of life is not one that can be changed, but a policy can be changed".[138]

The article "1921's Echo and Warning-Communist Party's Proclamation", written by EMS Nambudiripad and published by the *Deshabhimani*, in connection with the 25th anniversary of the Malabar Rebellion appealed for direct action and revolt on an all-India scale holding up the Rebellion of 1921 as an ideal. The article recalled with disgust the cowardly policy of the Congress leadership which allegedly accused the rebels of religious fanaticism in the name of violence and failed to do their duty of resisting imperialist repression. After pointing out that all the causes for the rebellion were in existence now also, the article warned: "As in 1921 today also in the name of ahimsa, national leadership is getting ready to suppress the anti-imperialist struggle".[139]

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137 *Mathrubhumi*, 14 December 1945.

138 Ibid.

139 *Deshabhimani* (Kozhikode), 20 August 1946.

It is significant that EMS saw the policy of ahimsa to be the major obstacle before a successful revolution in India.

Like the *Prabhatham*, *Deshabhimani* too published poems and articles glorifying armed revolution. An extract of Lenin'e letter published in the '*Deshabhimani* (18/1/47) proclaimed that armed revolution was indispensable for an oppressed community.

"In December 1905 when the Moscow revolts ended in failure, Plekhanov, the Menshevik leader, said: "They should not have armed". As a reply to this, Lenin wrote: 'There could not have been a more myopic opinion than that of Plekhanov .....Infact what we should have done was that we should have armed with more boldness, more determination and more firmness. We should have convinced the masses well beforehand that peaceful strikes will not be adequate and that fearless and relentless armed revolution was indispensable.....An oppressed community who do not attempt to secure arms and learn to use them deserves only to vegitate as slaves".[140]

The naval strike, which started in Bombay on 19 February 1946, was a major shock to British imperialism and is generally believed to have hastened the British decision to quit India. Though not conforming to the Gandhian way of struggle, the 'naval revolt' had boosted the spirit of patriots. However, the *Mathrubhumi*, though sympathising with the soldiers' grievances, did not approve of the violence on the part of the soldiers. The paper also denounced the hartal in Bombay and the violence that followed. "Violence in the country whether from the part of the people or from the part of the Government is on the increase. This propensity to violence is dangerous".[141]

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140 Public Dept. G.O.No.2658 dated 25/8/47, RAK.

141 *Mathrubhumi*, 9 February 1946.

The *Deshabhimani*, as has been noted above, always complained that the Congress policy of ahimsa was obstructing the progress of revolutionary forces in India. But the same paper found fault with the Socialist activists of the Quit India Movement for not strictly complying with the Congress policy of non-violence. In an editorial, the '*Deshabhimani* alleged that a clandestine paper, being released in the name of the KPCC (the reference here is to the 'Swatantra Bharatham') was inviting violence by goading people to acts of sabotage like cutting of communication links and breaking of bridges. The Communist organ was of the opinion that doing such things, which was against the declared policy of the Congress, in the name of the Congress was not only against the great legacy of the organization but would also weaken the national movement.

That the Communists and the *Deshabhimani*, by no means against the use of violent means against foreign imperialists and never sorry for the violence committed by the peasant activists of North Malabar, should condemn the stray incidents of violence committed by the Socialists against Government institutions and properties, during the course of a mass movement against foreign rulers, must be seen in the background of the Communist attitude towards the Government, consequent on the entry of the Soviet Union in the World War II on the side of the Allies.

Constructive Programme

Non-co-operation and civil disobedience were only one part of the agitational part of the Gandhian programme. Equally, if not more, important was the non-agitational part of the constructive part of the programme, atleast for the Gandhians. The constructive programme consisted mainly of the promotion of khadi, campaign against untouchability and Harijan welfare, Hindu-Muslim Unity, promotion of Hindi, anti-liquor propaganda and national education. The Gandhians contended that the constructive

programme was so comprehensive that if properly implemented, along with non-co-operation and civil disobedience, it would render the British Government irrelevant. But unfortunately the constructive part of the Gandhian programme was not as popular as the agitational part, especially with the non-Gandhians.

The programme was considered as a solution to the social and economic problems of rural India. The importance of Gandhian constructive work in building up rural support for Congress cannot be over emphasized. "National schools, Khaddar Bhandars, and social service associations (like Lajpat Rai's Lok Sevak Mandal) trained up and provided financial support to considerable numbers of full-time Congress cadres", observed Sumit Sarkar.[142] That khadi did provide relief for the rural poor is beyond doubt.

Swadeshi and Khaddar

The 'charka' or the spinning wheel and khaddar became symbols of the swadeshi spirit, after Gandhi's emergence as the leader of the national movement, and the virtues of spinning and weaving of khaddar were extolled.[143] However, 'swadeshism' was in vogue among nationalists well before Gandhi appeared on the Indian political scenario. During the anti-Partition Movement of 1905, swadeshism became a passion among nationalists. The nationalist press campaigned vigorously to make swadeshiam a success. The '*Bharata Bhandu*', after referring to the partition of Bengal, said that swadeshism and boycott were the only two weapons left with the people of India with which to fight out their cause and win their object.[144]

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142 Sumit Sarkar, *op.cit*., p.230-231.

143 N. Subramanyam, *op.cit*., p. 149.

144 *Bharata Bhandu*, 12 October 1907, NNPR 1907, TNA, Chennai.

It was not only newspapers like the 'Bharata Bandhu', belonging to the extremist genre, but even liberal ones supported the swadeshi movement. The "West Coast Spectator", for instance, advised the Congress to launch an educative campaign among the people to strengthen the swadeshi movement. The paper wrote "....The Congress desires the progress of the swadeshi movement no doubt but, we repeat, without doing propagandist work it cannot achieve anything beneficial. The various Congress committees scattered throughout the country can do much towards strengthening the swadeshi movement in their respective spheres of influence, by educating the public, preaching swadeshi affairs at festivals and other places, where people congregate and taking a practical interest in the movement. It is a pity that this aspect of the question has not suggested itself to the Congress."[145]

The Anglo Indian press, on the other hand, vehemently opposed the Khadi movement. The '*Madras Mail*' expressed its fury thus: "who rules India: the Imperial Government or Mr. Gandhi, the tyrant, who under the cloak of so-called non-violent political movement, endeavours to impose his will on the people of India..... In order that he may hasten the coming of the day when all India shall be subject to his autocratic sway he has ordained that no one in India should wear foreign cloth after August 1, save those who he is pleased to deem too ignorant to know the difference between mill-made cloth and the khadi..... In the Gandhian dictionary "foreign" cloth includes cloth made in the mills of India as well as that made abroad.....[146]

The *Mathrubhumi* was in the forefront in doing propaganda work for the success of the constructive programme. In the first issue itself, the paper prominently published an advertisement on the last page, exhorting the people to use Khadi and to discard foreign cloth.[147] Starting from the first issue,

145 *The West Coast Spectator*, 4 January 1911, NNPR 1911, TNA, Chennai.

146 *The Madras Mail*, 8 July 1921.

147 *Mathrubhumi* 17 March 1923.

Mathrubhumi consistently and vigorously campaigned to popularise constructive work among Congress workers.

The *Mitavadi*, a bitter critic of Gandhi and the Congress, on the other hand, viewed Gandhian constructive work as a political gimmick. The paper did not even hesitate to say that the 'charka' or the spinning wheel should be burned. The *Mitavadi* pooh-poohed the Congress exhortation to boycott foreign cloth and pointed to the dress modernisation programme that Kamal Pasha was undertaking in Turkey and the fact that Dr. Sun Yat Sen and Count Okuma used to wear European dress. The paper also made the sarcastic comment, "the less cloth one wears the more he becomes a Mahatma",[148] without naming Gandhi, who used to wear only a loin cloth.

Mitavadi's attack on khaddar and especially on the Mahatma personally, was too much for the '*Mathrubhumi* which replied through an article by none other than K. Kelappan, the "Kerala Gandhi". Kelappan made a scathing attack on the blind imitation of western style in dress and alleged that these people had only scorn for everything Indian.[149]

The *Al-Ameen* also supported swadeshism and the promotion of khadi. It published an article by K. Ahammed, a nationalist Muslim, exhorting Indian Muslims to boycott foreign cloth and adopt khaddar to show their self-respect and love of their mother-land.[150] The *'Sakti'*, an intensely nationalist paper, upheld swadeshi and advocated the need for the adoption of khadi by all Indians.[151]

Even as the nationalist papers wholeheartedly supported the khaddar movement, they were not in favour of making a fetish of it. In the Belgaum

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148 *Mitavadi*, December, 1925.

149 *Mathrubhumi*, 19 December 1925.

150 *Al-Ameen*, 23 April 1925.

151 Manuscript Section I, Sl.No. 5, NMML, New Delhi,

Congress of 1924, Gandhi made some proposals for changes in the Congress constitution, which would help to promote khadi. These proposals included replacement of the four-anna membership fee with 2000 rounds of khadi yarn to be delivered by each member every month, spun by himself, and the requirement of the habitual wearing of khadi as an essential qualification for membership. The proposals did not find much favour with most of the nationalist newspapers. '*The Hindu'* commented "It must be remembered that the Congress has always been regarded primarily as a political body of workers for the achievement of self Government.....But if the changes that Gandhiji proposes are adopted and the philosophy underlying them should become the mainspring of Congress activity, the Congress would cease to be a political body....."[152]

Even *Mathrubhumi*, known for its 'Gandhi-bakti', disagreed with this over-emphasis on khaddar. The paper rightly argued that the move would prompt many active members of Congress to disassociate themselves with the organisation. This was one of the few occasions where the *Mathrubhumi* chose to disagree with Gandhi on an important issue pertaining to the Congress.

The *Kerala Kesari* was another paper from Malabar which took a keen interest in the constructive programme, especially the promotion of khadi. When Gandhi toured Kerala in October 1927, in connection with the campaign for the Khaddar Fund, he was given an amount of Rs. 750 at Vatakara, which was the biggest amount he got from anywhere in North Malabar. This would not have been possible, but for the vigorous campaign the *Kerala Kesari* carried on for the Khaddar fund.[153] *Mathrubhumi* gave the widest possible publicity to Gandhi's Kerala tour. It published a poem

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152 GNS Reghavan, *The Press in India - A New History*, New Delhi, p. 94.

153 Moyarath Sankaran, *op.cit, pp. 208-209.*

praising khaddar, written by the great poet, Vallathol Narayana Menon, on the front page, welcoming him to Kerala.[154]

An eloquent example of *Mathrubhumi*'s interest in the promotion of khadi was its report and editorial on a resolution moved in the KPCC meeting held at Kozhikode on 2 August 1931. The report said that the resolution, stressing the need for the promotion of khadi, presented by Kurur Neelakantan Nambudiripad, could not be passed, as there was nobody to second the same. The paper also published an editorial note, expressing dis may at the callous attitude of the KPCC towards the issue of khaddar.[155] This created a commotion among the Congress circles, with certain leaders contesting *Mathrubhumi*'s report. The issue ultimately led to two resolutions being moved against *Mathrubhumi* at the next KPCC meeting at Guruvayur. After heated exchanges between members, one resolution was amended and the other defeated. Thus the issue ultimately ended in *Mathrubhumi*'s victory.[156]

In the khaddar resolution issue, the *Al-Ameen* took a stand opposite to that of the *Mathrubhumi*.[157] This has to be seen in the light of the internal politics of the Congress, in which the *Al-Ameen* and *Mathrubhumi* supported opposite camps.

The '*Yuvabharatham'*, in a brilliant article, underlined the role of the khaddar movement in upholding the self respect of Indians and its importance as an economic weapon against the British, thus: ".....Is it manly to spurn a chaste wife because she is not beautiful enough? Do those who, captivated by their beauty, go after harlots, deserve any respect? Though rough, Khaddar is

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154 *Mathrubhumi*, 25 October 1927.

155 *Mathrubhumi*, 3 August, 1931.

156 V.R. Menon, *op.cit*, pp. 311-334.

157 *Al-Ameen*, 4 September 1931.

ours. We shall admit that it has not the "gloss or glamour" of Lancashire mill cloth. But we should realise that it is the rough Khaddar that lightens the hard life of the poor people. This Khaddar is the "dam" that obstructs the flow of wealth from India to England. Strengthen the khaddar movement that will detain 70 crores of pounds in India itself. Foreigners will get excited when they starve. Then they will look into the surrounding circumstances. And then India will gain her object....."[158]

Mathrubhumi considered the constructive programme to be so important that it wanted not only the Congress workers but even students to indulge themselves in Swadeshi propaganda. In an editorial, the paper exhorted the students to utilise their vacation for the purpose and suggested that they could also join the Buy India League in its propagation of swadeshi. The students could also make an economic survey of their villages, which could be utilised for the latter activities of the swadeshi movement. Apart from stressing the importance of using only swadeshi goods, *Mathrubhumi* also urged the students to involve themselves in the campaign against untouchability as well as against the use of liquor.[159]

The impressive growth of Socialist and Communist ideas and a relative fading of the Gandhian ideals in Malabar visible from the mid-1930s onwards apparently had an adverse impact on the khadi movement. *Mathrubhumi*, through an editorial, tried to clear the misunderstanding that khaddar was in any way opposed to Socialism. Reminding the readers of an observation made by Jawaharlal Nehru that the greatness of khaddar was its Socialist aspect, *Mathrubhumi* added that equality was one of the important ideals that the khaddar represented.[160]

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158 *Yuvabharathanm*, 26 July 1931 (Public Dept. G.O, No. 1043 dated 8/10/96, RAK).

159 *Mathrubhumi*, 2 April 1932.

160 *Mathrubhumi*, 17 September 19347.

Though *Mathrubhumi* was opposed to making membership in the Congress conditional to spinning a specific measure of yarn, it was of the opinion that members of the Congress committees should wear khaddar. When the Ponnani Taluk committee of the Congress rejected a resolution, on 4 May, 1939, requiring members of the village and taluk committee to wear khaddar, *Mathrubhumi* denounced it. The paper wrote: "The khaddar is not mere home-made cloth, it is a symbol of the self-respect of the Indian people and sign of our self-sufficiency".[161]

The *Mathrubhumi* always tried to link the problems of the people to the consequences of the foreign rule and presented the Gandhian programme as the best solution. The leader it published on the eve of the Thiruvonam Festival in August 1939 is an instance. The paper pointed out that poverty in Kerala was so extreme under foreign rule that the people were unable to celebrate Thiruvonam. However, even under foreign domination, Gandhiji has shown us the means of alliavating starvation and poverty, the *Mathrubhumi* said, pointing to the 'charka' or the spinning wheel.[162]

Left organs like the *Prabhatham* and the '*Deshabhimani* did not show as much enthusiasm as the pro-Gandhi papers like the *Mathrubhumi* in the promotion of the khaddar.

Campaign Against Untouchability

The eradication of untouchability and the upliftment of Harijans formed a prominent part of the Gandhian constructive programme. It was also the most controversial part of the constructive programme; the controversial nature primarily stemmed from Gandhi's position on untouchability, for he defended the Varna system, of which untouchability

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161 *Mathrubhumi*, 9 march, 1939.

162 *Mathrubhumi*, 27 August 1939.

was a structural element.[163] In a speech in Madras in 1927, Gandhi upheld the fourfold classification of caste and the duties appropriate to each stage of life ('Varnashrama dharma'), though he firmly rejected the notion that caste had anything to do with high or low status.[164] Further he maintained that a ban on interdining or intermarriage was essential to the ideal system.[165]

Gandhi held the view that untouchability was a purely social fact which had nothing to do with religion and that it was basically a perversion of Hinduism. He saw the untouchables as an essential part of the Hindu community and fought to have them readmitted into mainstream Hinduism and to abolish discriminations against them- such as their being barred from entering Hindu temples. He thought that if these discriminations were abolished and the upper caste Hindus changed their attitude, the problem of untouchability could be solved.[166]

Leaders of lower castes and untouchables' movements like E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker and B.R. Ambedkar found themselves in open disagreement with Gandhi on the question of caste and untouchability. They viewed untouchability as integral to caste. Criticising Gandhi's views on the issue, E.V.R. Naicker wrote: "Though the public believes that Mahatma Gandhi wishes to abolish untouchability and reform religion and society, the Mahatma's utterances and thought reveal him to hold exactly the opposite views on this matter ..... Though he claims openly enough that untouchability should be abolished, he interprets his own words in this regard in such a manner as will enable the persistence of untouchability . . ."[167]

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163 Claude Markovits, op.cit., p.126.

164 Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind-Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Delhi, 2002, p.260.

165 M.K. Gandhi, *Collected works*, Vol. 34, Delhi, pp.510-11.

166 For an exchange of views on this between Gandhi and the caste Hindus, see T.K. Ravindran, *Vaikom Satyagraha and Gandhi*, Trissur, 1975.

Countering Gandhi's views, Dr. Ambedkar held that the annihilation of caste required an assault on Hinduism itself. He wrote: "People are not wrong in observing caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated the notion of caste. If this is correct, then obviously the enemy, you must grapple with, is not the people who observe caste, but the Shastras which teach them this religion of caste ...."[168] Rejecting the patronizing nature of Gandhi's programme for eradication of untouchability, these leaders stressed on self-respect and self-reliance of the avarnas. Naicker went on to lead a militant anti-Brahmin Self-respect Movement, with momentous consequences in Tamil Nadu politics.

The contrasting position with respect to the caste system and untouchability, visible on the national political scene, was duly reflected in the way press in Malabar approached the issue. It might look paradoxical that *Mitavadi* which was to become the severest critic of the Gandhian programme for the eradication of untouchability, had earlier praised the leadership qualities exhibited by him in South Africa and lamented the absence of such a leader in India to address the issue of caste inequality.[169] Again in February 1915, it wrote that the inequalities in Indian society would be eradicated only by the activities of men like Gandhi.[170]

But *Mitavadi's* hopes in this respect proved to be misplaced, for in the first place, it could not reconcile with Gandhi's assumption of Congress leadership, which the former viewed as essentially a Brahmin organisation, working to perpetuate Brahmin domination. Secondly, Gandhi's approach to the problem of untouchability, which primarily banked on a change of mind

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167 Quoted in V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium*, Calcutta, 1998, p.299.

168 Quoted in Nicholas B. Dirks, *op. cit.*, p.267.

169 *Mitavadi*, December 1913.

170 *Ibid.*, February 1915.

on the part of the orthodox section of the upper caste Hindus, was not in conformity with that of *Mitavadi*. While *Mitavadi* took the campaign against untouchability as its life mission, it considered the Gandhian programme as a gimmick, as a means of attracting lower caste people to the Congress fold. The paper mainly depended on the British Government for doing away with such practices in Hinduism. In September 1922, it suggested that the Government should introduce legislation prohibiting 'distance pollution' and 'touch pollution' in Malabar, just as they have prohibited human sacrifice, sati, infanticide etc.[171]

Mitavadi's opposition to Gandhi and his programme only grew with each year. In October 1931, it reminded Gandhi that the lower caste people, much the same way as the Muslims, were also against him.[172] On another occasion, the paper observed that Gandhi was audacious enough to say anything he liked about the lower caste people because the admiration of the ordinary people, who were lured by his poverty and loin cloth, had gone to his head.[173]

Right from its inception in March 1923, *Mathrubhumi* gave due attention to the problem of social evils like untouchability and pollution and whole heartedly supported the Gandhian programme, which it saw as the panacea for all the ills plaguing the caste-burdened Hindu community. *Mitavadi's* allegation that the Gandhian programme for the eradication of untouchability was a trick to seduce lower caste people to the Congress fold in the fight against the British Government was provocative enough for the *Mathrubhumi* to react sharply. *Mathrubhumi* claimed in January 1924, rather unrealistically, that there was not a single Congress leader in India who was adamant in retaining untouchability or who would not condemn the stupidity

171 *Ibid.,* 11 September 1922.

172 *Ibid.,* October 1931.

173 *Ibid.,* 17 November 1931.

of the caste Hindus, wanting to retain the practice of untouchability. "It is difficult to believe, even if predicted by a holy sage, that such leaders like the Mahatmaji, Madan Mohan Malaviya or C.R. Das, who are willing to do any sacrifice for the freedom of the country, will be interested in maintaining the evil doings that a caste do to another caste".[174]

Mathrubhumi agreed with *Mitavadi* that only a social revolution could put an end to such inequities in India. However, the nationalist paper reminded *Mitavadi*, that such a transformation could not be accomplished by the efforts of one or two persons; the power and strength needed for such a transformation should come from inside the people. The paper observed: "With the growth of the spirit of freedom among Indians, we have come to detest not only the acts of injustices being committed by the British Government but also the injustices that one community do to another community .... If one is to say that communal/community freedom is needed but political freedom is not needed or vice versa, his motives have to be suspected".[175]

The Gandhian constructive programme was greatly encouraged by the 'Atmavidyakahalam' of Guru Vagbhatananda. Referring to the allegation of anti-Congress newspapers like the *Mitavadi* and the 'Gajakesari' that Gandhi represented the interests of caste Hindus, the 'Kahalam' wondered how a person who had interdined with Christians and Muslims could be considered a caste Hindu.[176]

In the second State Political Conference held at Palakkad in May 1923, a number of untouchables like the Nayadis had taken part along with upper castemen like Nambudiris and Nairs. An elated *Mathrubhumi* pointed out

[174] *Mathrubhumi*, 29 January 1924.

[175] *Ibid.*

[176] Dr. M.S. Nair, *Vagbhatananda Guruvum Samoohika Navosthanavum* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1998, pp.105-06.

that this was unprecedented and was an indication of the fact that the Congress was determined to put an end to pollution and untouchability in Kerala.[177] However, when a controversy arose with respect to the interdining that took place at the Conference, *Mathrubhumi*, observed that though all Congressmen were liable to work for the eradication of untouchability and pollution, interdining was a different case. It was for each person to decide the position, cleanliness and condition of those with whom he wanted to dine with. Nevertheless, the paper was against assigning a caste taboo on interdining. "But it is meaningless to say that one should not dine with a particular person because the latter belongs to a lower caste".[178]

Referring to reports that a Gurukula in Madras, run by a congressman, V.V.S. Iyer, with financial assistance from the Congress, had been discriminating against non-Brahmin students, *Mathrubhumi* declared, "the arrogance of upper caste men should be opposed just like we are opposing the foreign rule. Certain people have no qualms to do anything in the name of religion. It is surprising that even prominent congressmen are reluctant to abandon caste animosity".[179]

In January 1925, some Hindu Pandits met in a conference in Bombay and passed a resolution criticising the campaign against untouchability being carried on by Gandhi and his followers. Condemning the resolution, *Mathrubhumi* remarked; "The campaign against untouchability has created as much disappointment and anger in these pandits as it did in the British. The harm these pandits do to the people is love of religion, to them. It was the same deplorable mentality that has weakened the Hindu community and has led India to slavery.... These is an internal meaning to all these external uproar. In the same way a person likes to retain his power and position, so do

177 *Mathrubhumi*, 8 May 1923.

178 *Mathrubhumi*, 15 May 1923.

179 *Mathrubhumi*, 15 May 1923.

communities. The country, position, happiness and comforts are not the monopoly of a particular community; there is no meaning to say that a particular caste is superior to another; a particular caste has no power to make slaves of another caste, just as a particular country does not have power to make slaves of another country. . .”[180]

Mitavadi, dedicated to the cause of Thiyya upliftment, did not hesitate to criticise the Thiyyas whenever instances of the latter observing pollution toward untouchables like the Parayas, Kuravas and Pulayas were noticed.[181]

Mathrubhumi was against indulging in any kind of hate campaign as part of the fight against untouchability and caste inequalities. Just like Gandhi argued, the nationalist paper wanted the campaign to be undertaken with the help and co-operation of the progressive-minded among all castes rather than depending on the Government. Referring to the policy of papers like ‘Gajakesari’, that depended on the British Government and its bureaucracy for eradicating untouchability and other social evils, *Mathrubhumi* reminded them that the British officials were not here to stay, but both the savarnas and the avarnas could not go anywhere, they had to co-exist in the country. Hence it was neither practical nor appropriate to advise the depressed classes to try to win their freedom by despising and continuing their discord with other communities, in the hope that they would get the help of foreign rulers for all time to come. The paper observed: “It is not a particular caste that we should despise, but caste as an institution; it is not people belonging to a particular caste that we should fight against, but against those who try to retain caste monopoly, irrespective of whether they are Brahmins or non-Brahmins. It is through the co-operation of the broad-minded persons among the savarnas and avarnas, Brahmins and non-

[180] *Mathrubhumi*, 13 January 1925.

[181] G. Priyadarshan, *Kerala pathrapravarthanam- Suvarnaddhyangal* (Mal.), 1999, p.159.

Brahmins, and not through the fight of the obstinate people in each caste and community, that we can establish secure freedom and welfare in this country".[182]

In 1925 Kozhikode Municipality took measures to clean some of the ponds in Mankavu and Panniyankara, by removing the mud. When people belonging to the lower castes began to use these ponds for bathing, the high caste people complained to the authorities against it. *Mathrubhumi* disapproved of the action of the upper caste people; it asked why they did not clean the ponds themselves without seeking the help of the Municipality. The paper pointed out that it was unjust to disallow the depressed classes from using the ponds which were cleaned using public money. *Mathrubhumi* advised the upper caste people to rectify the evils that had afflicted their community.[183]

When the Government of Kochi mooted a proposal in 1928 to construct a separate road for the depressed classes, *Mathrubhumi* criticised the proposal and warned that its result would be to harden their slavery besides being an insult to them.[184] *Mathrubhumi* expressed happiness at a report that a group of Nayadis, belonging to the untouchable, had walked through a public road in Kuzhalmandam in Palakkad taluk in March 1932. The paper congratulated the Sub Divisional Officer of Palakkad Carlston, whose initiative was mainly instrumental for this socially important incident to take place. *Mathrubhumi* observed in this connection: "It is not any religious reasons that maintain the caste; it is the arrogance of those who are at the top and the weaknesses of those who are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy".[185]

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182 *Mathrubhumi*, 17 March 1925.

183 *Ibid.*, 2 July 1925.

184 *Mathrubhumi*, 3 May 1928.

185 *Ibid.*, 20 March 1932.

Mitavadi's lack of faith in the Congress campaign against untouchability, primarily for the reason that the latter was dominated by the Brahmins, earned it much criticism from the nationalist press. However, it is an undeniable fact that the affairs in the Indian National Congress were managed by upper caste men. Even as the Congress clamoured for self-government, it did not have a concrete programme for upliftment of the lower castes and the out castes, who were having an animal-like existence for centuries. The allegation that *Mitavadi* was against national integration or national progress just because it insisted that the question of caste oppression was as important as the question of political freedom, does not seem to be on firm ground. Any programme for national regeneration should also provide for the awakening and arising of the enslaved millions at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. *Mitavadi* correctly said: "We think that there should be a situation where there is no room to suspect that there are castes higher or lower than ours".[186]

When Sree Narayana Guru reached Palluruthy to attend the SNDP Yogam Conference in May 1927, he was denied stay in the Government Guest House on the ground that only savarnas were allowed to stay there. *Mathrubhumi* condemned the action of the authorities in severe terms. The paper felt that the delegates of the conference should have entered the Guest House in a peaceful manner and used it.[187]

The Government's attitude towards social and religious reform movements was not always favourable. The nationalist press did not hesitate to criticise the Government policy whenever the latter was felt to be unhelpful in this regard. Referring to the unfavourable attitude of the Government towards the Akali movement against the corrupt Sikh Mahants, towards the

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186 *Mitavadi*, September 1916.

187 *Mathrubhumi*, 12 May 1927.

Tarakeshwara Satyagraha in Bengal as well as towards the Vaikom Satyagraha, *Mathrubhumi* alleged that what the British wanted was an India weakened by ignorance, divided by caste spite and tied by blind customs and rituals.[188] The paper was of the view that the Government had every right to interfere and control religious customs whenever they proved to be an obstacle to the progress of the whole community, provided that the opinion of the legislature was sought by the Government in this regard.[189]

Inspired by the Gandhian programme for the eradication of untouchability, nationalist press in Malabar highlighted the atrocities committed by the upper caste men on the depressed classes whenever such incidents took place in Malabar or outside.

The opposition of the upper caste people to the admission of students belonging to the lower castes frequently became the subject of severe criticism from the part of newspapers. Instances were not rare where students belonging to lower castes and depressed classes were denied admission to schools run out of public money.

Mathrubhumi was highly concerned about the tendency among the avarnas to convert to Christianity and Islam. No wonder, when the Government decided to allow fee concessions to those converted from the Scheduled Castes, the nationalist paper protested strongly. It viewed the decision as an exploitation of the Scheduled Castes and an encouragement to conversion.[190]

That Gandhi and Ambedkar had divergent views on how to address the caste issue has been noted earlier. The response of the press in Malabar to the Gandhi-Ambedkar clash was on expected lines. While anti-Congress and

188 *Ibid.,* 17 July 1924.

189 *Ibid.,* 1 March 1933.

190 *Mathrubhumi*, 24 July 1941.

anti-Gandhi papers like the *Mitavadi* supported Ambedkar, pro-Congress and pro-Gandhi papers like *Mathrubhumi* supported Gandhi to the hilt. The Satyagraha started by the Ambedkar led All-India Scheduled Castes Federation in 1946 came in for sharp criticism by *Mathrubhumi*. Elaborating the Gandhian programme for Harijan welfare, the paper argued that the future of the Scheduled Castes and other backward classes was secure in the Congress.

The staunchest opponents of the Gandhian reformist agenda, however, were the Sanatanis, the most conservative section of the caste Hindus. Any meaningful attempt to reform the caste-ridden Hindu society, was fiercely opposed by the Sanatanis. *Mathrubhumi* condemned in severe terms the opposition of the Sanatanis to a bill introduced in the Imperial Legislative Assembly in September 1933, seeking to eradicate untouchability. The argument of the Sanatanis was that the bill was against the Queen's Proclamation of 1858, which had assured the Indian people that the British Government would not interfere in matters relating to their religious faith. Pointing out the difference between religious faith and customs, *Mathrubhumi* accused the Sanatanis of attempting to obstruct all the efforts at reforming the Hindu society by elevating the Queen's Proclamation to the status of a 'Smrithi'.[191]

In an incident that sent shockwaves throughout the country, bombs were hurled at a cavalcade carrying Gandhi at Pune in June 1934. It was rumoured that the Sanatanis, infuriated at the Gandhian campaign against untouchability, were behind the heinous act. Condemning the incident, *Mathrubhumi* warned the people against the likes of the Sanatanis, who were

[191] *Mathrubhumi*, 7 September 1933.

clamouring for swaraj even as harbouring caste mindedness, religious animosity and capitalism.[192]

As a nationalist paper dedicated to the Gandhian constructive work, *Mathrubhumi* fully supported the Congress programmes for the upliftment of the Harijans and other depressed classes. K. Kelappan, who was closely identified with *Mathrubhumi* and who had served the latter in various capacities like editor, manager and director for a long time, was the unquestioned leader of Harijan welfare activities in Malabar. It was not for nothing he was popularly called the 'Kerala Gandhi'. His work among the Harijans got all the encouragement from the *Mathrubhumi*.

As far as Kerala was concerned, the most visible part of the Gandhian campaign against caste evils was the Temple Entry Movement. Even before the struggle against untouchability was made a part of the Gandhian constructive programme, Kerala showed the way by applying the technique of Satyagraha at the Vaikom Temple in March 1924, for getting the roads round the Temple opened to avarnas. The Vaikom Satyagraha and later the Guruvayur Satyagraha were highly successful in mobilising public support in favour of ending untouchability and distance pollution in Kerala.

Mitavadi and its editor C. Krishnan, prominent Thiyya leader, had started a crusade against the caste system and its attendant evils much before Gandhi launched his own programme. Krishnan's daring walk through the prohibited road near the famous Tali Temple in Kozhikode in November 1917, challenging the District Collector's order and *Mitavadi's* powerful editorials on the issue were significant in this context.

But it was the Vaikom Satyagraha, conducted at the auspices of the KPCC and inspired by the Gandhian ideals, which for the first time, attracted

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192 *Ibid.*, 25 June 1934.

national attention on the temple entry issue. The press, especially the nationalist press, played a leading role in popularising and mobilising support for the Satyagraha. How significant a role the press played in the Temple Entry Movement can be gauged from the fact that almost all important leaders of the Vaikom Satyagraha were closely connected with newspapers.[193]

For many weeks, the Vaikom Satyagraha was the main news in the Malayalam papers. Special supplements were published by them on the Satyagraha. The all-India attention that the Satyagraha attracted was thanks to the propaganda of the press.

Mathrubhumi campaigned for the Vaikom Satyagraha so vigorously and devotedly as if the Satyagraha was its own struggle. The paper had to sacrifice its editor, K.P. Kesava Menon and its manager K.Kelappan; both were arrested and jailed in April 1924. In an emotional editorial published after his arrest, Kesava Menon wrote: "The cause for which the *Mathrubhumi* has been working for the last one year, now forces me to leave it for some time. If my sojourn in a prison cell in Travancore will be more helpful to the removal of caste and untouchability from Kerala than my being seated in the *Mathrubhumi* office, I have no doubt that my readers will be as overjoyed as I am at this imprisonment".[194]

Next day, *Mathrubhumi* wrote : " *Mathrubhumi* has sacrificed its editor and manager in the struggle to eradicate untouchability. *Mathrubhumi* cannot make a greater sacrifice than this. The sacrifice made by its editor and manager is the culmination of the constant exhortation of the *Mathrubhumi* to its readers to undergo sufferings and make sacrifices for the freedom, not only

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193 K.P. Kesava Menon (Founder-editor of *Mathrubhumi*), T.K. Madhavan (Editor of *Deshabhimani*), Mannath Padmanabhan (Editor of *Service*), C.V. Kunhiraman (Editor of *Kerala Kaumudi*), and K. Kelappan (Manager of *Mathrubhumi*) were some of the prominent leaders of the Vaikom Satyagraha.

194 *Mathrubhumi*, 8 April 1924.

of the depressed classes but of all the people of India. If it serves as an example to the readers to act likewise, the sacrifice made by the *Mathrubhumi* will not have been in vain".[195]

The *Kerala Kesari* actively supported the Vaikom Satyagraha; its editor Moyarath Sankaran even claimed that nationalist papers like 'Swarat' and *Mathrubhumi* used to quote the exhortations of his paper with regard to the Satyagraha.[196]

As part of its campaign in favour of the Vaikom Satyagraha, *Mathrubhumi* published the speeches and announcements of nationalist leaders stressing the importance of ensuring social justice to all people irrespective of caste or creed. The innumerable editorials the paper published during the course of the Satyagraha lavishly showered praise on the endurance and sacrifice of the Satyagraha volunteers. Referring to the torture of the police on the Satyagrahis, *Mathrubhumi* observed: "If the Satyagrahis hold on to non-violent methods and never deviate their mind from their goals, success is not far".[197] *Mathrubhumi* was never found wanting in inspiring the Satyagrahis to carry on their struggle to its logical conclusion.

Mitavadi was a source of encouragement for the Vaikom Satyagraha in its initial stages. It published a number of editorials and articles in support of the Satyagraha during this period. The paper wrote in an editorial: "First the Travancore Government prevented people from entering school. Now they are preventing the roads. Is it the protection of subjects? We have no doubt that they will make conditions in Travancore more precarious than in Russia... Governments will continue to do such injustices until the misunderstanding that kings and bureaucrats are the owners of the country is replaced by an

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195 *Ibid.,* 9 April 1924.

196 Moyarath Sankaran, op.cit., p. 206.

197 *Mathrubhumi*, 28 June 1924.

awareness that the people are the owners and masters. The 'Peshkar' and his superiors should understand that they are trying to drive away the owners of the road and the temple. Don't play with fire".[198] That *Mitavadi* had revolutionary views on politics is also clear from the editorial.

Mathrubhumi proclaimed that anyone who did not help the Vaikom Satyagraha could not pride himself/herself to be a patriot. The paper exhorted the youngmen willing to offer themselves as Satyagrahis to inform their names and addresses to its editor; it also requested those willing to contribute money to the Satyagraha Committee to send it in the name of the editor. Such exhortations- canvassing volunteers and collecting money for the Satyagraha- are enough to prove how much *Mathrubhumi* strived for the success of the Satyagraha.

Even when supporting the Vaikom Satyagraha, *Mitavadi* questioned the sincerity of the savarnas supporting the movement. Criticising the decision of the Travancore Government to prevent the procession of the Satyagraha Committee through the road leading to the Vaikom Temple, the paper pointed out that even other religionists like the Muhammedans and Christians could walk through the road. *Mitavadi* accused the Hindus (caste Hindus) of taking pleasure in abusing Europeans and hating co-religionists. "What is surprising is that there are simpletons who still think that the avarnas friend is the savarana".[199] It also cautioned avarnas against getting fooled by the hue and cry made by the newspapers of the savarnas infavour of temple entry; these papers would change their opinion and admit their mistake at the earliest opportunity.

Referring to the active participation of E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker from Tamil Nadu in the Vaikom Satyagraha, *Mathrubhumi* wondered whether the

198 G. Priyadarshan, *op. cit.*, pp.147-48.

199 *Mitavadi*- March 1924.

elderly and the matured among the Keralites were not seeing this. The paper said it was high time they awoke from their slumber and plunge into the satyagraha.[200]

'Gajakesari' did not have much hope in the Vaikom Satyagraha realising its objective. Like *Mitavadi*, it believed that untouchability could not be eradicated with the willing cooperation of the caste Hindus, as Gandhi would have wanted. The only hope was the British Government which should put an end to this inhuman practice by using force if needed, without paying any heed to the dissenting voice of the caste Hindus.[201]

Even as the repression of the Government and the conservative savarnas on the Satyagrahis at Vaikom increased, *Mathrubhumi* exhorted the people to come forward with financial assistance to the Satyagraha and there by show to the opponents that their repressive measures would only strengthen their resolve to make the Satyagraha a success.[202]

The *'Gajakesari'* continued to advise the Congress leadership to abandon their agitational programme at the Vaikom Temple. The paper, representing the Thiyyas, observed that even the avarnas did not like the weakening of Government power through means such as the Satyagraha. It also expressed the apprehension whether it would be desirable to create an awareness in the people that by observing Satyagraha they could wrest their demands from the Government and that the Government would have no other way but to submit to such tactics.[203]

When, in May 1924, certain Thiyyas who had joined the Arya Samajam, were allowed by the policemen on duty to walk through the road

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200 *Mathrubhumi*, 8 July 1924.

201 NNPR- 1924, TNA, Chennai.

202 *Mathrubhumi*, 8 June 1924.

203 NNPR-1925, TNA, Chennai.

round the Vaikom Temple, a prohibited area for the lower castes, *Mitavadi*, which had been supporting the Vaikom Satyagraha till then, said that the best possible way for the depressed classes to earn their fundamental rights including the freedom to travel was conversion and that it was time the Vaikom Satyagraha be discontinued.[204] Disagreeing with *Mitavadi*, *Mathrubhumi* remarked that the Satyagraha should continue until the depressed classes were allowed their fundamental rights as human beings.[205]

The 'West Coast Reformer' staunchly opposed the Vaikom Satyagraha. Its view was that what was going on in Vaikom was against public opinion. The paper justified the measures taken by the Travancore Government to suppress the Satyagraha.[206]

Referring to Gandhi's visit to Vaikom in 1925 and his apparent failure to get a favourable decision from the Travancore Government on the Vaikom issue, Sadhu Sivaprasad, a Brahma Samaj leader and close friend of editor C. Krishnan, wrote an article in *Mitavadi*, questioning the effectiveness of the Gandhian programme. Refusing to treat Gandhi as a 'Mahatma', the Sadhu ridiculed, "there were people who believed that the moment Gandhi set his foot on Kerala, the oracles of caste devils will turn to angels". He also cautioned the people, "you will become low people if you put your faith on Gandhi; so get out of his magic circle of Sanatana Dharma as quickly as possible.[207] Gandhi's upholding of the varna system in principle and his devotion to Hinduism were the main reasons for the disapproval of his programme- both the political and the constructive part of it- by a lot of people belonging to the backward castes and depressed classes.

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204 *Mitavadi*, May 1924.

205 *Mathrubhumi*, 15 May 1924.

206 NNPR-1924, TNA, Chennai.

207 *Mitavadi*, 3 March 1925.

Though the Vaikom Satyagraha was only a partial success,[208] it was a huge success in terms of the enthusiasm it generated, which was instrumental in the launching of many other temple entry satyagrahas in the subsequent years.

While the upper castes observed untouchability and 'Theendal' or distance pollution against the lower castes, the relatively high ranking among the lower castes were guilty of committing the same offence against those below them. Citing some instances where the Thiyyas kept away Dalits from temples under their control, *Mathrubhumi* pointed out the duplicity involved in their policy-fighting the caste Hindus for discriminating against lower castes even as doing the same towards those castes which were lower to the Thiyyas in the caste hierarchy.[209]

People belonging to the avarna castes had traditionally been denied access to the streets of Kalpathy in Palakkad town. The socio-religious awakening that had taken place in Kerala by the early decades of the 20th century, led to a movement among the lower castes for the opening of the streets to them, which often created law and order problems for the Government. In January 1925, the Madras Government issued an order declaring the Kalpathy streets open to the general public, as the road was maintained out of Municipal funds. Welcoming the decision of the Government, *Mitavadi* congratulated the lower caste people of Palakkad for not starting a Vaikom like Satyagraha which would have been a blunder.[210] As has been noted earlier, *Mitavadi* did not believe that the lot of the lower castes

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208 By an agreement reached between Gandhi and the officials, the avarnas were given permission to travel by the three roads adjacent to the temple, which were already used by Muslims and Christians. However the remaining one road was kept out of bound for the low castes which was exclusively reserved for the savarna castes.

209 *Mathrubhumi*, 19 January 1924.

210 *Mitavadi*, January 1925.

could be solved by the magnanimity and cooperation of the upper castes; they could move forward only through a movement of their own and, ofcourse, with the help of the British Government.

Mathrubhumi, while upholding the right of the avarnas to use the Kalpathy road, found the Government guilty of not having a clear-cut policy on the issue and of playing divisive politics. The paper also warned avarna leaders not to fall prey to the Government tactics.[211]

In April 1925, the authorities of the Jagannatha Temple, Thalassery, which was founded by Sree Narayana Guru and managed by the Thiyyas, decided to allow Dalits to enter the Temple and offer prayers on a day in a month. The progressive minded people, while welcoming the decision to allow entry to Dalits, also regretted that this was restricted to just one day in a month. *'Gajakesari'*, however, justified the restricted entry, saying that this illustrated the different ways in which the Guru and Gandhi worked. "The Guru does not advise anything that may cause disgust or hate among people of other castes. He does not require to admit Pulaya (Harijan) brothers everywhere without any restriction and thus create turbulence or to observe satyagraha in the absence of non-compliance of such demands".[212] Thus 'Gajakesari, a paper run by the Thiyyas of Thalassery, themselves victims of untouchability, in its eagerness to justify the restricted entry of the Harijans in the Jagannatha Temple, indirectly criticised the Vaikom Satyagraha for demanding unrestricted entry of all Hindus including Harijans to the roads leading to the Vaikom Temple. More than their social conservatism, Gajakesari's observations go to show how much the Thiyya leadership detested the Congress leadership and its Satyagraha programme.

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211 *Mathrubhumi*, 13 January 1925. See also P. Kesavadev, *Ethirppu*.

212 NNPR-1925, TNA, Chennai.

In a reaction to this remark by 'Gajakesari', *Mathrubhumi* ridiculed the latter for its fear of admitting the 'Pulayas' everywhere without restriction. *Mathrubhumi* came to the conclusion that it was to abuse Gandhiji that 'Gajakesari' went to the extent of expressing reservations on admitting 'Pulaya' brothers to temples.[213]

On 6 October 1931, around 200 Harijans under the leadership of A.K. Gopalan, went in a procession through the Kandoth road in Payyannur as part of the temple entry campaign of the Indian National Congress. They were attacked by a group of Thiyyas who, allegedly came with weapons like sticks, and a lot of people including A.K. Gopalan sustained injuries. [214] The nationalist press in Malabar criticised the Thiyyas for the incident, but *Mitavadi* in a two-and-a half column leader, made a frontal attack on the Gandhian programme of temple entry, rather than finding fault with the Thiyyas. *Mitavadi* portrayed the whole incident as the result of a competition between the Nairs and Thiyyas of Payyannur and accused the Congress leadership of using the Harijans as a shield. The paper also justified conversion and atheism as a way out for the backward caste people from the oppression of the upper castes.[215]

The Guruvayur Satyagraha, which coincided with the second phase of the Civil Disobediance Movement gave a major fillip to the temple entry movement in Kerala. It was the KPCC session held at Badagara in May 1931 that decided to launch a satyagraha before the Sree Krishna Temple, Guruvayur, on 1st November 1931, for getting the Temple opened for the avarnas. As during the Vaikom Satyagraha, the nationalist press did admiring work to mobilise public opinion in favour of the Satyagraha.

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213 *Mathrubhumi*, 16 April 1925.

214 A.K.Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, New Delhi, 1973.

215 NNPR- 1931, TNA, Chennai.

"For the *Mathrubhumi*, the Guruvayur Satyagraha was not merely an event of immense news value; it was a struggle that the paper itself had undertaken".[216] The one-week long propaganda tour of K. Kelappan was widely covered by *Mathrubhumi* and brought to the readers of the remotest corners of the state. *Mathrubhumi* spent a lot of columns of publish the views of national leaders like Gandhi, Rajagopalachari and N.F. Nariman in connection with the Satyagraha. Each and every incident relating to the Guruvayur Satyagraha like the beating of P. Krishna Pillai by temple officials for ringing the bell infront of the sanctum sanctorum of the Temple and the cruel assault on A.K. Gopalan, the volunteer caption, were reported by the press with so much passion as to evoke immense sympathy for the cause of the Satyagraha.

Though the Guruvayur Satyagraha failed to get the Temple opened for the avarnas immediately, it was by no means a failure. As A.K. Gopalan observed, 'although the Guruvayur temple was still closed to Harijans, I saw that the movement had created an impetus for social change throughout the country . . . "[217]

On the eve of Gandhi's Kerala visit in 1933, *Mathrubhumi* requested the owners of private temples in Kerala to welcome Mahatma Gandhi, by opening their temples to the avarnas.[218]

After the Travancore Raja issued the famous Temple Entry Proclamation in 1936, *Mathrubhumi* frequently urged the Raja of Kochi to emulate the example of his illustrious neighbour. The paper pointed out the anomaly of preventing the avarna Hindus, who were free to pray in the near

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216 V.R. Menon, *Mathrubhumiyude Charithram* (Mal.), Vol.1, Kozhikode, 1998 (1973), p. 406.

217 A.K. Gopalan, op.cit., p. 38. For details see K. Gopalankutty, "The Guruvayur Satyagraha 1931-32" in the 'Journal of Kerala Studies', December 1981.

218 *Mathrubhumi*, 29 October 1933.

by temples in Travancore state along with their savarna brothers, from offering prayers in the temples of Kochi.[219]

When the Madras Government published on 29th January 1947 the Temple Entry Bill, it was a moment of gratification for the nationalist press in Malabar, which had been campaigning for it so vigorously. *Mathrubhumi* hoped: "When the Bill becomes an Act, the doors of the temples of Malabar will be wide opened for the Harijans".[220]

Leftists had a different perspective regarding the campaign against untouchability. The Congress Socialist organ, *Prabhatham* considered untouchability to be a social injustice, not as a religious wrong. "To root out this is only a basic social justice being done to human beings".[221]

Prohibition

The views of newspapers in Malabar regarding prohibition were in consonance with their general outlook toward the constructive programme. While staunch pro-Gandhi papers like the *Mathrubhumi* campaigned consistently and vigorously in favour of prohibition, certain other papers thought that prohibition was impractical.

The '*Gaja Kesari*', edited by the prominent writer and Thiyya leader, Murkoth Kumaran, in a leader on 10th July 1929, elaborated on the financial implications of the implementation of prohibition as well as its adverse impact on the employment avenues of the Thiyyas: ".....Is total prohibition possible? As far Malabar is concerned it is utterly impossible. It is not an easy thing to keep an army of excise men at the boundaries to prevent smuggling ....How much money will be required to pay them? The total

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219 *Mathrubhumi*, 22 September 1944.

220 *Ibid.*, 30 January 1947.

221 *Prabhatham*, 22 August 1936.

revenue of Madras is 17 crores, out of which abkari income is 5 crores. Not only will this 5 crores be lost but another 5 crores will be required to prevent illicit distillation. If 10 crores are thus lost, how can expenses be met with 7 crores? The land tax will have to be increased and the burden will fall on the poor cultivators . . . Thiyyas will be involved in acute unemployment .. . It will be better to induce people to give up drink . . . " [222]

This financial rationale against prohibition advanced by the 'Gajakesari' would not hold because, if the campaign to induce the people to give up drink, as suggested by the paper, were to be successful, that again would result in loss of revenue for the Government; income from abkari being proportionate to the rate of consumption. The same logic applies in the case of unemployment. Anyway, it is safe to presume that the 'Gajakesari' was more concerned with the possibility of the Thiyyas losing their main occupation, that is, today-tapping, than the financial loss that the Government might have had to incur if prohibition was implemented.

Though not against prohibition, the *Prabhatham* was of the view that the Government should give priority to more pressing issues like that of the rent-burden of farmers. In an article published on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Rajaji Ministry, the paper criticised the wrong priorities of the Government by pointing out that "while the Government has been eager to implement prohibition, it talks of financial difficulty in reducing the rent rate of farmers."[223] For a 'Socialist paper', the miserable condition of the farmers should always be more important than the social evil of drinking.

But it could not be so far the *Manorama* which represented the landed interest. The paper in a leader, criticised the British Government for importing liquor to India, with the result that more and more Indians are

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222 NNPR - July to August 1929, TNA, Chennai.

223 *Prabhatham* 5 Septemebr, 1938.

falling prey to the drinking evil. The *Manorama* alleged that the British were interested only in profit.[224]

However, it was left to *Mathrubhumi* to take the lead in the campaign for prohibition, as it did in the case of other items in the constructive programme. When the Congress formed ministry in Madras in 1937 under the leadership of Rajagopalachari, the paper urged the latter to implement prohibition in the state forthwith. It laid bare the 'fallacy' of 'revenue loss argument' by pointing to the huge social cost of drinking, which if counted in monetary terms could be many times the income the Government got through the abkari. *Mathrubhumi* also put forward the suggestion that the Government could make up the revenue by taxing the wealthy and by reducing the salary of high Government officials.

Promotion of Hindi

The nationalist newspapers actively supported the propagation of Hindi as the national language. The *Mathrubhumi* supported the decision of the Rajaji ministry to make the study of Hindi compulsory upto the third forum.[225] The paper strongly condemned the anti-Hindi agitation of the Justice Party in Madras as narrow nationalism in the name of protecting Tamil.[226] While the '*Mathrubhumi* supported the Rajaji Governemnt on the Hindi issue, the *Prabhatham* condemned the harsh measures of the Government in handling the anti-Hindi agitation. Referring to a speech made by Prime Minister Rajagopalachari in which he warned that his Government would be compelled to use the same oppressive law against the agitators that the Congress had been hitherto objecting to, the *Prabhatham* observed that "the

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224 NNPR - July to August 1929, TNA, Chennai.

225 *Mathrubhumi* 13 August, 1937.

226 *Mathrubhumi* 7 June, 1939.

language used by the Prime Minister is the same that the civilian officers of the imperialist Government normally use".[227]

[227] *Prabhatham* 22 August 1938.

Conclusion

Thus, a study of the press in Malabar during the period of the national movement shows that the major newspapers of the pre-Gandhian era followed the Liberal Nationalist or Moderate political line. The prominent among these newspapers were the 'Kerala Patrika', the 'Kerala Sanchari', the *Manorama* and the 'West Coast Spectator'. These papers had unshakable faith in the British sense of justice and the great tradition of British democracy. They did not demand freedom form Britain, their demand being limited to constitutional and administrative reforms like more Indian representation in the legislatures and more powers to legislatures, Indianisation of the civil service etc. They firmly believed that India was not yet ready for self-rule, that Indian needed many more years of guidance under the British in democratic governance. This political line was in tune with the political atmosphere in the country when the Moderates held the centre stage in nationalist politics. Like the Moderates, these papers were loyalists and enthusiastic champions of India's British affiliation.[228]

Thinking of it now, it is amazing that a foreign Government enjoyed so much loyalty from a major chunk of newspapers during the pre-Gandhian era. Apart from the fact that Indian nationalism was yet to come off age, the nature and character of the British colonial rule got a lot to do with this. As Bipin Chandra has pointed out, the colonial state was not based just on force. The semi-hegemonic state relied very heavily for the acquiescence of the Indian people in their rule.[229] It must also be remembered that the British rule was definitely an advancement over the previous regimes in India, extremist nationalist rhetoric to the contrary not withstanding.

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228 A.R. Desai, op. cit., p. 321.

229 Bipin chandra, *et al.*, op. cit., pp. 506-507.

The moderate political line, however, was destined to become obsolete once the torrential flow of non-violent revolution of Gandhi swept the placid waters of Indian politics. With new politics emerged new newspapers in Malabar with a different kind of political orientation. They were not only not loyal to the British but they also wanted the foreigners to quit India forthwith. They were not only not overawed by the traditions of English democracy and the achievements of Great Britain, but they also considered Indian civilization superior to the English civilization in many respects. For the first time, the legitimacy of British rule in India got seriously eroded by the work of the nationalist press. The Gandhian civil disobedience and constructive work would not have been so popular, but for the propaganda work these papers carried out. Prominent among these papers included the *Mathrubhumi*, the *Al-Ameen* and the *Kerala Kesari*.

Even more radical newspapers than those inspired by Gandhian nationalism were to follow, mainly the class-oriented *Prabhatham* and *Deshabhimani*. Even as these papers were eager to win freedom, as the Gandhian papers were, they were equally concerned over the exploitation of the peasant and workers by the landlords and capitalists respectively. This aspect of the study - the press in Malabar and class struggle - will be attempted in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE PRESS IN MALABAR AND CLASS STRUGGLE

The term 'class struggle' is used in the present context to denote the organised struggle waged by the class organizations in Malabar, especially those of the tenants and labourers. The organized movement of other classes like the students and teachers has also been included in it.

The emergence of class organisations among peasants and workers for redress of their economic grievances and the consequent political awakening among these classes, leading to their increasing participation in political struggles were developments of momentous significance in the history of modern India. It was with the active participation of the peasantry and the working class that the national movement became a real mass movement. In Malabar especially, class organisations, peasant movement in particular, were so powerful that the political landscape underwent radical changes within a few years.

Starting from the mid-1930s, Malabar witnessed phenomenal growth in leftist influence on nationalist politics, culminating in communist domination of the KPCC. Dissatisfaction with the Gandhian programme and the growing impression that the Congress leadership was ‘solicitous of the interests of the capitalists and landed magnates prompted many nationalists to study and embrace Socialist ideology. In 1934 they decided to form the Kerala Congress Socialist Party (KCSP) in the Indian National Congress. Before the end of the 30's most of these Congress Socialists were to become Communists.

The Congress Socialist Party's growth in Kerala was extra-ordinarily rapid. Within a few years it spread to all parts of Kerala and developed strong roots. By building up the class organisations and struggles of workers and peasants, as well as the organisations of youth, women, students, teachers and other sections of the people and by spreading the ideology of scientific Socialism, the KCSP soon rose to the leadership of anti-imperialist movement in Kerala.[1]

The influence of Socialist/Communist ideology was first felt in the trade union sector. By the early 1930s a left wing leadership had already developed within the trade union movement which steadily began to displace the earlier leadership. The Communists wanted the trade union movement to be based on the principle of class struggle and to draw the workers into the vortex of nationalist struggle with a programme based on direct action. Under their influence, the organised workers did not accept the bounds set by Gandhi 'who sought to bridle the mass movement by elevating non-violence to a cult'.[2] They advocated a mass revolutionary movement in which political general strike and insurrection would be major tactical weapons. By 1937 there were sixteen trade unions in Kerala[3] and workers increasingly began to participate in the anti-imperialist struggle.

However, it was among the impoverished tenants and agricultural workers that the Communist ideology found the most fertile ground to take deep roots in the 1930s and 1940's. Already victims of extreme exploitation by landlords, they were especially hard hit by the economic depression of the

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1 K. Gopalankutty, 'The Task of Transforming the Congress: Malabar 1934-40' in Studies in History, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1989, p. 177.

2 A.B. Bardhan, "Role of the working class in India's Freedom Struggle", in Jagannath Sarkar et al., (ed.), *India's Freedom Struggle-Several Streams*, New Delhi, 1986, p.107.

3 N.E. Balaram, "Early Beginnings of Communist Movement in Kerala" in Jagannath Sarkar et al., *Op. cit.*, p.241.

early thirties. The KCSP took the initiative in setting up the Karshaka Sanghams (Kisan Sangh) in the villages of North Malabar; the Sangham became the catalyst for the militant class struggles in which the tenants refused to pay illegal levies to the *janmies* (landlords). The All Malabar Karshaka Sangham was formed in 1937 with P. Narayanan Nair as President and K.A. Keraleeyan as Secretary.[4]

In the course of the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggle which rocked North Malabar for more than a decade, starting from the mid- 30s, there were many clashes between the Karshaka Sangham activists on one side and the police (sometimes in collusion with the hirelings of the landlords) on the other in which several Communists and a few policemen lost their lives. The rightwing Congressmen viewed these developments with alarm and accused the Communists of fomenting violence. Never before had such a mass movement developed in Malabar which combined in itself anti-imperialist and anti-feudal upsurge of the people and roused the villages from their deep slumber. Undoubtedly, the peasant movement played the leading role in making the Communists the dominant political force in Malabar.

The major newspapers in Malabar played a leading part in the political controversies that marked the increasing acceptance of Communist ideology among peasants, workers and other classes of the region. A look at the role newspapers played in these controversies will give us an idea of the ideological dimension of political journalism of the nationalist era in Malabar.

Much before the peasants and industrial workers developed class consciousness and newspapers with clear Socialist/Communist perspective appeared on the scene, there were newspapers in Malabar that evinced keen interest in ventilating the grievances of the marginalised. The *Mitavadi*, for instance, fought the cause of those at the lower strata of society, the toiling

[4] K.K.N. Kurup, *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1989, p. 39.

classes. Being the mouthpiece of a socially and economically backward caste, it could not have been otherwise.

Mitavadi was often sarcastically called the "Bible of Thiyyas", but it is a fact that a large section of the down trodden people of Malabar viewed it as their own paper.[5] Inspite of its editor, C. Krishnan being a landlord, *Mitavadi* was in the forefront in espousing the cause of the tenants of Malabar. The paper found the government guilty of making those people who had never seen land into landlords and those who had converted forest in to agricultural land into tenants.[6] "Unless and until the farmers get rightful possession of the agricultural land, the people of Kerala will never enjoy real freedom", '*Mitavadi*" warned.[7] Though it did not use Marxian terminology, there can be no doubt about the social group *Mitavadi* represented.

Mitavadi's editorials hailing the Russian Revolution prove that the paper stood for revolutionary change in India too. It upheld the Russian Revolution as a model for the socially suppressed people in their fight for the protection of their fundamental rights.[8] No other publications in Kerala had made such revolutionary exhortations before. *Mitavadi* also warned the dominant castes in India, who had been monopolising power and wealth, to learn their lessons from what had happened in Russia.[9]

Mitavadi was the first newspaper in Kerala to have welcomed the Russian Revolution.[10] Infact, the paper did publish articles on the Russian

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5 G. Priyadarshan, *Malayala Pathrapravathanam - Praramba Swaroopam* (Mal.), Trissur, 1982, p.129.

6 *Mitavadi*, November 1914.

7 NNPR, 1914, TNA, Chennai.

8 Ibid., December 1917.

9 Ibid., October 1920.

10 G. Priyadarshan, op. cit., pp.148-149.

situation in April 1917 and again in August 1917, i.e., even before the Revolution came to a successful conclusion, hailing the revolutionaries. It has to be remembered that world media at that time was generally hostile to the Bolsheviks. It is, however, important to remember that the *Mitavadi*, though hailed the Russian Revolution, was not informed by a Marxian approach in this respect and had a 'casteist' approach to problems.

Tenancy

The issue of the tenants, who constituted the vast majority of the Malabar population and suffered untold miseries, was perhaps the first major issue which compelled the newspapers to take a class position. The tenants were victims of the worst form of repression at the hands of janmis. It is now generally acknowledged that tenant miseries had contributed in a large measure to the outbreak of the Mappila uprisings of the 19th century culminating in the rebellion of 1921. The newspapers evinced keen interest in tenancy problems and supported the cause of the tenants' agitation. They repeatedly wrote about the necessity of immediate and decisive remedial measures to alleviate the grievances of the tenants.

In an editorial note, the 'Kerala Patrika', of the 29 January 1921, drew attention to the strained relationship then existing between janmis and tenants in Malabar. "The tenants' association has resolved upon non-cooperation with janmis and many of the janmis were trying their level best to oust their tenants from their holdings. If janmis persisted in this, it will mean much misery to peaceful tenants and it will lead to lawlessness in the country".[11] The note suggested the necessity of early government intervention in the matter and advised members of the Legislative council to expedite the introduction of a tenancy bill.

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[11] NNPR-1921, TNA, Chennai.

The ‘Kerala Kesari’ and the *Mitavadi* warned that if the government continued to be hesitating, halting and debating on the tenant question and pursued a policy of neglect, indifference and drift, a storm might breakout any day.

The increasing interest that the press began to take in the tenancy issue definitely helped to awaken the tenants. The formation of the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham in 1922 and the launching of the newspaper “Kudiyan” with M.M. Kunjiraman Pathiyar as editor were all the results of this new awakening. The formation of the Sangham also marked the beginning of organised agitation of the Kanam tenants. Among the leaders of the agitation, there were also a number of journalists. And the newspapers were highly cooperative in publishing the detailed articles prepared by the Sangham activists, the most prominent of whom was G. Sankaran Nair, who used to visit periodically the offices of the leading newspapers and impress upon the editors of these papers the necessity for tenancy reforms. The ‘Kudiyan’, of course, published prominently the news connected with the Kudiyan Sangham. Of the papers from Madras, the ‘Hindu’ evinced keen interest in the tenancy problems of Malabar and supported the cause of the agitation.

But the most effective campaign for tenancy reforms were carried out by the post-Rebellion newspapers like the *Mathrubhumi*. Right from the beginning of the paper, *Mathrubhumi* took special interest in highlighting the urgent need for improving the conditions of tenants in Malabar. It published an article by its Manager and member of the Director Board, K. Madhavan Nair on 27 March 1923, when the paper was hardly 5 issues old, supporting the tenants’ agitation going on in Malabar. However, *Mathrubhumi* did not envisage a revolutionary change in the existing system, as is clear from its statement that it did not have the opinion that the janmis should be wrested of all their rights and given to the tenants. The paper was banking on the janmis

voluntarily agreeing to confer certain rights on the tenants. It said: "People are not prepared to give up their rights voluntarily eventhough suitable to the public prosperity of the country. It cannot be said that the lords of Malabar would never be ready for this kind of national service".[12] This optimism on the voluntary willingness of the landlords or property owners was a little far fetched.

Though the *Mathrubhumi* did not favour a forcible takeover of the janmi privileges, it did argue for a more equitable system than what was then in existence. "A system where those who work do not get rewarded in accordance with their work and those who do not work, happen to enjoy all the happy things, is not to the good of either classes. When most of the properties of a country are in the hands of a small class and the majority of the people have to depend on that class for their livelihood and happy living, it is an obstacle to the work culture, progress and respect of the people of that country".[13] In accordance, with the Gandhian ideals which inspired the *Mathrubhumi*, the paper wanted the land owning class to voluntarily concede certain rights on the tenants and there by help to promote the common welfare of the society. Apart from the exploitation of the tenants by the janmis the *Mathrubhumi* was also concerned about the mutual conflict among the Indians on economic issues, when they need to wage a united battle against the British. It exhorted both the janmis and the tenants to arrive at a solution in a conciliatory attitude. This had been a consistent policy of *Mathrubhumi*, giving primacy to national unity over the vital issue of social equity and that of exploitation of one class by another.

In a significant article published in the *Mathrubhumi*, K. Madhavan Nair rejected the contention that the exploitation and oppression of the tenants

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12 *Mathrubhumi*, 27 March 1923.

13 Ibid., 29 March 1923.

by the janmis was directly responsible for the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. Though this was one of the factors that filled the minds of Mappilas with hatred, it could not be considered as a prominent reason for the Rebellion. He pointed out that the rebels did not distinguish between janmis and tenants in many areas; not only that, in certain areas the tenants had to suffer more than the janmis.[14]

Hailing from Manjeri, this prominent Congress leader of Malabar, had first hand knowledge about the important incidents connected with the Rebellion. He had travelled extensively, risking his own life, through the areas most affected by the Rebellion and tried his best to dissuade the rebels from committing violence. And his honesty had never been in question. That he belonged to a tenant family himself also adds weight to his observation on the character of the Rebellion and the relevance of the issue of tenancy in it. Though Madhavan Nair wrote this opinion on the Rebellion in his individual capacity, *Mathrubhumi's* stand in this issues was not different.

The attempt to provide some relief to the tenants of Malabar through the Malabar Tenancy Bill was opposed by the feudal elements. In the ensuing political controversy, newspapers played their own part. *Mathrubhumi* prominently reported the discussion on the Bill in the Madras Legislative Assembly. In the course of the discussion, Prabhakaran Thampan, a member of the Assembly, had alleged that the Bill was an attempt to introduce Bolschevik principles in India. Responding to it, *Mathrubhumi* asked '. . . Does he (Thampan) know the news of alliance between Bolshevik Russia and British Government? The British Government is not even led by the lords and capitalists of Britain. Does he know that the Government is of farmers and labourers of Britain?"[15] Upholding the Government of Britain, of the 1920s,

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14 Ibid., 3 April, 1923.

15 Ibid., 28 August 1924.

as a government of labourers and farmers was a crude joke. *Mathrubhumi's* concept of government of farmers and workers had something seriously wrong with it, going by this editorial comment.

Referring to the presidential speech made in the 18th annual conference of the *Yogakshema Sabha* by O.M. Narayanan Nambudiripad, *Mathrubhumi* observed that the attempt of Nambudiripad to ridicule and abuse the tenant movement, which had inspired the entire tenant community who constituted the majority of Kerala's population, as the creation of a few agitators would not be successful.[16] It was *Mathrubhumi* which defended most effectively the tenant movement against the onslaught of the janmis and their supporters. The paper said that only through a powerful and courageous fight could the Malabar Tenancy Bill be made into a law, which was most essential to instill in the people of Malabar with consciousness of freedom and self-respect.[17]

When the Malabar Tenancy Bill was passed by the Madras Legislative Assembly in September 1926, *Mathrubhumi* reminded the tenants that this was only the first phase in their struggle to establish their rights and freedom. The final result of their struggle would depend on the government stand on the future course of the Bill. If the government was to put obstacles before the future course of the Bill, a powerful agitation would have to be conducted by them. Predicting final victory for the tenants, the paper added: "The course of time is in favour of the tenants; not even the all-powerful British Government will be able to prevent it for ever".[18]

Mathrubhumi's spearheading of the campaign for the Tenancy Act greatly annoyed the landlords and their mouthpiece, "Vasumathi", which accused the nationalist paper of bias against a particular class. The

16 Ibid., 7 January 1926.

17 Ibid., 2 March 1926.

18 Ibid., 4 September 1926.

'Vasumathi' felt such a policy to be unbecoming of a nationalist paper, supposed to be representing all classes of people in the society.

Criticising those who were uncomfortable with the Congress's involvement in matters like tenancy and eradication of untouchability rather than focusing on the nationalist struggle for swaraj, *Mathrubhumi* explained that the need and objective of the national movement was not merely to replace the foreigner's rule with Indians' rule; it was also to provide the freedom and opportunity for all people to grow to their full potential.[19] That the *Mathrubhumi's* concept of 'Swaraj' did envisage a government in which the downtrodden including the lower caste people as well as the farmers and workers would have a say of their own is highlighted by its editorial columns, especially of 1920s and early 30s.

The 'Vasumathi' very often abused the newspapers with a pro-tenant attitude. The motivated writings in the janmi mouthpiece could have easily misled its conservative readers. Its contention that all landlords were against any kind of protection and rights being given to the tenants, was factually incorrect. The paper also gave the impression that all the landlords were supportive of all the injustices committed by the Government in political matters. It also frequently abused and ridiculed the lawyers as a class.[20] The reason is not far to seek; the leaders of the Congress and the tenant movement mostly came from the legal profession.

The '*Gajakesari*' followed a pro-tenant policy and opposed the government indifference to the tenants' woes upto 1927. In that year its policy underwent a shift infavour of the government policy and began to criticise M. Krishnan Nair, a strong votary of the tenants of Malabar. This policy shift coincided with the transfer of the control of the paper in to the

19 Ibid., 9 September1926.

20 NNPR-1927, TNA, Chennai.

hands of Kottiyattu Krishnan, MLC; who had always been a supporter of the government policy.

The *Mathrubhumi* was never found wanting in tendering timely advices to the tenants. In 1927, the Madras Government constituted a committee to study the tenancy issue and report to the government; the composition of the committee was so composed that the janmi representatives had a huge majority with only a single representative of the tenants in it. The *Mathrubhumi* condemned this undue representation given to the landlords and exhorted the people not to co-operate with the work of the committee. The paper characterised the action of the Government as "unjust and arrogant".[21] Later when the Government decided to include two more tenant representatives into the committee, the *Mathrubhumi* cautioned the tenants against co-operating with committee, pointing out that even with three members, the tenants would continue to be a minority in the committee, and that, if they were to co-operate with it, they would be bound to accept its recommendations.[22]

The theme of non-cooperation, popularised by the Congress under Gandhi, was frequently emphasized by the *Mathrubhumi* as the most effective policy against the foreign government. Even a favourable gesture from the part of the government was utilised by the paper to encourage the tenants to take a more determined policy of non-co-operation with the government. When the leaders of the tenant movement met the Governor of Madras in October 1927, the Government took a positive and sympathetic attitude to their problems. *Mathrubhumi* pointed out that the favourable change in the Government attitude was due to the policy of consistent non-cooperation that the tenants of Malabar followed during the past few years and that in the

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21 *Mathrubhumi*, 20 &23 August 1927.

22 Ibid., September 1927.

future also, they should be prepared to use the policy with renewed vigour, whenever necessary.[23]

Mathrubhumi's consistent campaign in favour of the Malabar Tenancy Bill continued to evoke strong resentment among the landed interests. One of the oft-repeated complaints was its espousing the interest of a particular class, the tenant class, which was alleged to be against the Congress ideals, as the premier political organisation of the country represented all sections of Indian people. Reacting to this change, *Mathrubhumi* in a leader published on 16 July 1929 reminded the critics that the resolution passed by the last Congress meeting at Bombay had underlined the need for making revolutionary changes in the economic and social structure of the society inorder to eradicate the poverty and misery from which the vast majority of Indian people were suffering. The paper, however, did not have any illusion about the Bombay resolution having made any fundamental change in the class attitude of the Indian National Congress. It said: "It would be a big mistake to infer, from the resolution, that the Congress has ceased to become an organisation representing the Indian people as a whole. It only demands a little bit of sacrifice from every citizen inorder to realise a self-rule which would be comfortable to the majority of the people and, there by, better for the whole country".[24]

Even the 'Manorama', which was earlier favourably disposed towards landed interests, now extended its support to the cause of the tenants. It was not satisfied by the Bill the Government had brought forward. The paper said that the Malabar Tenancy Bill had not only not met the just demands of tenants but also gave room for the apprehension that it might cause more hardships and troubles to them than before, if it be passed in the present

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23 Ibid., 8 October 1927.

24 Ibid., 16 July 1929.

form.[25] The 'Vasumathi', on the other hand, considered the Bill to be an oppressive measure and said that if it be passed in the present form, there was no doubt that a great majority of janmis of Malabar would soon be reduced to unexpected suffering and penury. The janmi mouthpiece also advised the Government to postpone the Bill to the next session of the Council, in order to give time to study it.[26]

Mathrubhumi condemned the formation of the Janmi Sabha in April 1930 which, it alleged, was prompted by its antipathy towards the Gandhian struggle. The paper hoped that the janmis in Malabar would keep away from such an organisation.[27] Quite rightly, the nationalist paper feared that the influence of such an organisation would be reactionary in politics, and warned the people accordingly.

In a significant editorial on 10 September 1933, *Mathrubhumi* made clear its stand on land ownership. Referring to a resolution presented in the Imperial Legislation Assembly by Vraja Kishore which required the Government to include a provision in the new constitution, making it unconstitutional to interfere in the ownership right of citizens over their land without giving them adequate compensation, the nationalist newspaper ridiculed the landlords for their repeated attempts to preserve their privileges at the cost of the tenants. It reminded them that more and more people were accepting the principle that food avenues should not be the monopoly of certain individuals and that it should be utilised for the welfare of the whole community.

Mathrubhumi warned the landlords: "It is a big mistake to think that the landlords need not fear in the future if the protective provisions suggested

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25 NNPR-July to August 1929, TNA, Chennai.

26 Ibid.

27 *Mathrubhumi*, 22 April 1930.

by them are included in the new constitution. The landlords in India are squeezing the lifeblood of tenants . . . . If they are desiring to retain this position, we don't think that will be successful". The paper went on to advise the landlords that there was only one way to ensure their future, that was to remember always that tenants' welfare was their welfare and act accordingly; introduce modern agricultural methods and thus increase productivity; and to share the increased income with the tenants. "If the landlords are not willing to do this, no protective provision and no favours from foreigners are going to help them. In the contest between the haves and havenots of a country, the latter are seen to have secured the final victory. The reason is not far to seek. The haves are too few; the havenots too huge in number. That being the case, is there any doubt about who will win?", *Mathrubhumi* asked.[28]

Critics have pointed out that *Mathrubhumi* really represented middle class bourgeois interests, not withstanding its verbosity on Socialistic ideals. It may be mentioned here that the Malabar Tenancy Act, for which the paper had campaigned so vigorously, benefited mainly the intermediary peasants such as the "Kanam" holders. It was not much concerned with the problems of the ordinary peasants or the "verumpattakarans", who actually constituted the bulk of the peasantry.[29] Later, when the Communists took the initiative to mobilise these peasants and led an organised struggle to end the exploitation of them by the landlords and a corrupt administration, the *Mathrubhumi* vehementally opposed this movement on the plea that it deviated from the Gandhian path of non-violence.[30]

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28 Ibid., 10 September 1933.

29 For a study of the tenancy movement, see V.V. Kunhikrishnan, 'Tenancy Legislation in Malabar 1880-1970', Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Calicut.

30 For details of the Communist - led tenancy agitation and *Mathrubhumi's* opposition to it, see the section under 'Peasant Movement' in pp. 218-236.

Mathrubhumi's active interest in the 'Kanam' tenants problems was also, sometimes, assigned a communal colour. The majority of the Kanam tenants in Malabar were Nairs. It is a well-known fact that the *Mathrubhumi* was characterised by political opponents of the period as a 'Nair paper"; its director board was predominantly Nair in composition. It may also be relevant here to point out that on many occasions the annual conference of the Malabar Tenants Association (Malabar Kudiyan Sangham) was followed by a Nair conference in the same venue; the participants of both conferences being almost the same. K.Madhavan Nair, founder-Director and Manager of the *Mathrubhumi*, was among the prominent leaders of such conferences.

The high-rate of land tax was a major problem faced by the farmers during the colonial period. Whenever the government enhanced the rate of tax, there were strong protests from the part of the newspapers, of all shades of political opinion.

Referring to the enhancement of land tax in Malabar in December 1935 under the resettlement at a time of unprecedented fall in prices of agricultural produce, the *Mathrubhumi* observed: "In the present conditions in the district, it will not be possible to pay the enhanced tax . . ."[31] On the 6th January 1936, the paper again wrote: "The policy followed by the Government in the matter of land revenue is not at all satisfactory . . . If the cries of the people have not reached the ears of the Government, theirs must be an incurable deafness. . . "[32]

On the same subject, the 'Kerala Patrika' wrote: "On no question has there been such unanimity of opinion as is found with regard to the question of land tax in Malabar . . ."[33] The 'Al-Ameen' and the *Prabhatham* suggested

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31 NNPR- January to June 1935, TNA, Chennai.

32 Ibid.

33 NNPR- 1936 January to June, TNA, Chennai.

that a strong agitation should be set on foot all over the country not for securing some minor concessions but for a thorough revision of the whole land revenue policy itself.[34] It is significant that the left oriented *Prabhatham* and the 'Al-Ameen' preferred a more bold approach in the matter from the part of the peasants.

Writing again on the tenancy issue, *Mathrubhumi* observed that what was most important was protecting the interests of those who actually cultivated the land. The farmer who did the cultivation should be able to live of it. The paper also felt that the burden of tax had become unbearable.[35]

In December 1940, the Malabar Tenancy Committee submitted its report to the Government which was published by the *Mathrubhumi* on 18 December 1940. Observing that the report did not contain any recommendation envisaging revolutionary changes, the paper, in a leader, however, hoped that it would help in avoiding certain weaknesses and disabilities now visible in the property rights in Malabar. *Mathrubhumi* also expressed its agreement with the dissenting note submitted by E.M. Sankaran Nambudiripad (EMS). EMS made it clear in his dissenting note, that the basic interests of real cultivators and of the country would not be protected unless fundamental changes were effected in the tenancy system in Malabar. What was needed was to remove all people other than the real cultivator from ownership of land.

Even as agreeing with EMS, the paper added that under the present circumstances, such revolutionary reform was not practical. Therefore, for the time being, there was no other way but to accept the recommendations of the Tenancy Committee.[36] Such ambiguity in taking a definite position on an

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34 Ibid.

35 *Mathrubhumi*, 9 August 1939.

36 Ibid., 19 December 1940.

important issue-professing to be in favour of revolutionary changes, but at the same time supporting postponing of changes in the name of practical difficulty- was not unknown in the case of the *Mathrubhumi*.

The 'Kerala Kesari' of Moyarath Sankaran also campaigned vigorously for the Malabar Tenancy Bill. Moyarath and 'Kerala Kesari' strongly opposed the resolution demanding the rejection of the Tenancy Bill, presented in the North Kerala Nair Samajam. The paper warned the Nairs, most of whom were tenants, against becoming a toy in the hands of a few Nair janmis.[37]

Socialism

The growth of Socialist ideas was a political development of great significance in the history of Indian national movement. The victory of the Socialist revolution and the establishment of a Socialist state in Russia had aroused interest in Socialist and Communist doctrines among the radical nationalists in India.[38] In the vernacular pres there was a marked increase in the number of articles written in support of socialism and in praise of the Russian system. [39] The growth of Socialist and Communist groups and the rise of independent class organizations of the working class made a great impact on nationalist politics.

It was in the 1930s that the idea of scientific socialism penetrated into the socio-political arena of Malabar. A study of how the newspapers of Malabar looked at this revolutionary ideology will be highly helpful in determining the class perspective of these papers.

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37 Moyarath Sankaran, *op. cit.*, pp.205-206.

38 A.R. Desai, op. cit., p. 356.

39 Andalatt (ed.), *Sakhakkale Munnot* (Mal.), Trivandrum, p.180.

As far as the class perspective of the *Mathrubhumi* during the colonial period was concerned, there were two phases. During the first phase which lasted till 1937, the premier nationalist newspaper in Malabar pursued a distinctly pro-poor and pro-socialist policy. A number important editorials published during this period, strongly arguing for the establishment of a socialist pattern of society, vouch for the legitimacy of this observation. It is important, however, to remember that the socialism that the *Mathrubhumi* was arguing for was the Gandhian variety, the paper was opposed to a violent revolution or the use of force.

During the second phase, starting from the late 1930's *Mathrubhumi's* enthusiasm for socialism was seen to be waning, culminating in its strong anti-communism of the 1940s. The internal politics of the Congress in which the *Mathrubhumi* sided with the Gandhians as against the Leftists, the appropriation of the socialist idea by the Leftists, the rapid growth of Communist influence largely at the cost of the Congress in Malabar, and the Congress assumption of power in 1937 and the consequent compromising mentality that was growing in the Congress- all these could have been reasons for this change of attitude on the part of the *Mathrubhumi*. That the prominent individuals, who controlled the paper, basically represented bourgeois interests must also be taken into account.

Mathrubhumi was against the monopoly of a few individuals over the landed property. Its strong campaign infavour of the Malabar Tenancy Act has already been mentioned. The paper said: "Each family should have enough agricultural land to enable it to live without poverty and misery. For that, land should be a national property. No family should have more land than was necessary to live a life as mentioned above".[40] *Mathrubhumi* knew that the suggestion would appear to be too revolutionary to the landlords and

[40] *Mathrubhumi*, 25 May 1929.

their supporters. "They may object to it as being socialism or communism. But there is no doubt that it is through such an economic system that progressive states have experienced welfare and progress, no matter whatever name is given to it". [41] The paper declared that the main objective of the establishment of self-government in India was to make important means of income like land and mine, the basis of public welfare and progress of the country, national property and thus enable everybody to experience its benefits.

The *Mathrubhumi* was in full conformity with the young Jawaharlal Nehru in his quest for the establishment of a socialist order in India as well as the world at large.[42] Agreeing with his socialistic aspirations, the paper observed that real swaraj did not mean the replacement of the British Government by a government of few Indians. "Whatever be the type of government, every citizen should have the opportunity to grow to his full potential; then only the oppressed people can live freely".[43]

The 'Al-Ameen', though not known for its enthusiasm for socialism or communism, did give good coverage to the policies and programmes of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party (KCSP). The alliance between the Congress Socialists and the Nationalist Muslims under Muhammed Abdurahiman, who was also the editor and founder of the 'Al-Ameen', in the fight for domination in the KPCC was the inspiration for this coverage. In a statement issued by the KCSP and published in the 'Al-Ameen', the party outlined its policy and programme. Its aim was declared to be to establish in India a government of peasants and labourers, not of capitalism, landholders and princes; and their plan of action was to capture the Congress, establish peasant's associations,

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41 Ibid.

42 *Mathrubhumi* also published the translation of Nehru's "Whither India", which put forward a strong case for a socialist pattern of society in India.

43 *Mathrubhumi*, 12 April 1931.

trade unions, youth leagues and women's associations, refrain from entering into any political parleys with the British Government, support labour strikes, boycott British goods and avail themselves of opportunities afforded by imperial wars to add strength to the national fight.[44]

Though the *Mathrubhumi* did not favour a class based division in the ranks of the Indians while engaged in a struggle for freedom, it had no doubt that the ultimate objective of the national movement did not consist merely of political freedom. The paper declared that political freedom was only the first step towards the ultimate objective. Indians would not be satisfied with a condition in which the social and economic conditions remained to be the same even after getting political power from the foreigners. "The lives of many crores of Indians have become unbearable due to the exploitation of imperialism and the foreign and indigenous vested interests. Our journey towards the ultimate objective will continue till the poverty stricken peasant and working classes are raised to a level of prosperity and happiness", *Mathrubhumi* reminded.[45]

It was the pioneering efforts of the *Prabhatham* that proved to be most decisive in spreading the socialist ideology in Malabar. It published translated articles from the "Congress Socialist", the official organ of the All-India Congress Party, first published from Calcutta under the editorship of Ram Manohar Lohia and later from Bombay, under the editorship of Ashok Mehta.[46]

The article on the goal of Socialists and their programme of work published by *Prabhatham* in March 1935 was an exhortation to the toiling masses to unite to put an end to their exploitation. It advised the poor masses

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44 NNPR- July to December 1934.

45 *Mathrubhumi,* 15 October 1933.

46 EMS, *How I Became a Communist*, Trivandrum, 1976, p.175.

not to take part in the struggle carried on by the nationalist agitators of the wealthy class, which was geared to realise their own selfish ends. The article concluded with an exhortation to the starving people to join hands and enter the battle field inorder to put an end, once and for all, to the right of ownership of private property, and declared, "What the masses want is economic freedom".[47]

Socialism was seen by the *Prabhatham* as the panacea for all the ills of Indian society. "It is only through socialism that a satisfactory solution can be found to every one of the difficult problems confronting India today".[48] To the criticism that socialism was not suitable to India because of the special conditions existing here, the paper wrote: "What are said to be 'the special conditions in India' are the pitiable illiteracy of the masses, the preponderance of the agricultural classes in the population of the country and the backward state in regard to industries run by machinery. The success that Socialists have achieved in Russia serve as an example to show that those conditions will not stand against the progress of socialism, but, on the other hand, will only accelerate it . . . . A comparison of the conditions in Russia before the Revolution and those in India today will reveal more similarities than differences . . . . "[49]

Mathrubhumi did not accept the contention of the *Prabhatham* that conditions in India in the 30s were similar to those in Russian before the Revolution. It observed: "We have a culture of our own", and to think that a socialist society can be built up here by replicating exactly a foreign model like the Russian, ignoring our cultural traditions, is unwise."[50] Another important point on which the *Mathrubhumi* differed from the Socialists was

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47 *Prabhatham*, 11 March 1935.

48 *Ibid.*, 18 March 1935.

49 Ibid., 22 April 1935.

50 *Mathrubhumi*, 25 December 1936.

with respect to the concept of 'class war'. "Among those who stand for a socialist society, there are people who do not recognise the necessity of class war."[51] With its steadfast loyalty to the Gandhian ideology, the *Mathrubhumi* consistently opposed any kind of violence, no matter how lofty the objective was. The paper stood for bringing all organisations opposing imperialism, including those of peasants and labourers, to be brought under the Indian National Congress.

The *Prabhatham* published an announcement by the All-India Congress Socialist Party, in its issue dated 22 April 1935, which explained the aims and objectives of the party. It claimed that the party "works for a social system in which the fruits of labour will only go to the labourers themselves, and for the destruction of a society in which a few oppress and exploit the rest". The party also professed to work for "destroying the existing right of private ownership of land and other means of production and for vesting them in the community in general."[52]

Jawaharlal Nehru's preaching of socialism continued to evoke heated debates on socialism in the press. Though both *Mathrubhumi* and the *Prabhatham* took opposite sides in the political controversy regarding labour strikes in Malabar and the peasant movement led by the Karshaka Sangham in North Malabar, both newspapers gave good coverage to the speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru, extolling the virtues of socialism and the evils of capitalism. They also welcomed Nehru's initiatives at introducing socialist content in the Congress programme.

*Mathrubhumi*s enthusiasm for socialism already began to wane by the middle of the 30s. The paper now stood for socialism by slow stages and concentrating all efforts on securing political freedom. It deprecated the

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51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., 22 April 1935.

suggestion to make the Congress largely an organisation of peasants and labourers all at once and said that it was not a practical step as not even five percent of the peasants in this country had been yet organised. The nationalist daily also lamented: "It is extremely pitiable to see the leaders fight over creating a new social order when there are several practical problems to be immediately faced, and the country itself, subjected to foreign yoke, is struggling to lift its head."[53]

The 'Manorama', alarmed by the talk of socialism, said that "the attempt to force socialism on India at this juncture is sure to create trouble in the country and that the Government and the capitalists should act with foresight to prevent it."[54] This was, infact, a call for a joint front of the Government and the capitalists against the working class. Such statements from rightwing newspapers underlines the fact that the debate on socialism and the new awakening among the working class had made a huge impact on the politics of Malabar by the middle of 1930s.

Prabhatham, in its issue dated 13 June 1938, published an article entitled, "Socialism and Nationalism", written by Jayaprakash Narayan, the Congress Socialist leader. He wrote: "When poverty and unemployment stares in all its nakedness, "swaraj" and "nationality" could mean only one thing; that is to eradicate poverty and unemployment . . . For this, the despotism of capitalism should be destroyed and all the economic powers should be vested with the ordinary people."[55] He also observed that the Gandhian programme of prohibition, khadi and rural reconstruction was not sufficient and that organising peasants and workers on the basis of their economic grievances was the only way the objective could be realised. The

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53 NNPR- January to June 1936, TNA, Chennai.

54 Ibid.

55 *Prabhatham*, 13 June 1938.

inadequacy of the Gandhian programme for the establishment of an equitable social order was frequently emphasized by the *Prabhatham*.

Referring to an observation made by Prime Minister Rajagopalachari that European capitalists, who were responsible for importing revolutionary literature to India, should own up the responsibility for strikes and other troubles in India, the *Prabhatham* expressed the view that it was not the import of revolutionary literature but the import of the system of production that was the base of that literature and its political form-the parliamentary form of government- that was responsible for these troubles. "That strikes take place in India inspite of stringent prohibition of literature is witness to the fact that strikes will continue to take place so long as capitalism exists in this world."[56] It is significant that the *Prabhatham* found fault with not only capitalism but also with the parliamentary form of government; thus indicating the Congress Socialist view on the structure and form of government which was different from that of the Congress.

Mathrubhumi very often associated the Socialists with the cult of violence. Referring to Gandhi's warning in the 'Harijan' that violence was creeping into the Congress and that if this was not prevented without delay, the Congress would ruin through international dissension, *Mathrubhumi* reminded the Congressmen that it was their duty to prevent those who did not have firm and consistent faith in ahimsa from destroying the non-violent movement of the Congress.[57] When *Mathrubhumi* spoke of 'people having no faith in ahimsa' trying to destroy the Congress, the needle of suspicion was clearly directed against the Congress Socialists.

Prabhatham, on its part, laid bare the hollowness of the Gandhians' ahimsa talk. The leftist organ alleged that the Gandhian doctrine of ahimsa

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56 Ibid., 8 August 1938.

57 *Mathrubhumi*, 16 August 1938.

was anti-poor. The paper said: “If the Gndhians believe they are real spokesmen of ahimsa, they should fight against the exploitation and violence perpetrated against the poor. Instead of doing something in this direction, they are, on the other hand, getting worried at the sight of the organising power of the common people being worked on the economic front. The Gandhians' ahimsa talk is not revolutionary; instead it justifies the violence of capitalism.”[58] The paper claimed that the Socialists were aiming to put an end to the oppression of the upper class and to create a society without violence.

In reply to the charge that the Socialists represented the cult of violence, the *Prabhatham*, thus, tried to prove that it was the Gandhian doctrine of ahimsa which was condoning exploitation and violence inflicted on the poor.

With the emergence of the socialist group in the Congress, the Gandhians began to be characterised as the ‘rightists’ as distinct from the ‘leftist’ Socialists. *Mathrubhumi* questioned the appropriateness of calling the two major sections in the Congress as ‘rightists’ and ‘leftists’. The paper wrote: “ If the socialist ideal is classless and equitable society, then Gandhi and his followers are also ‘leftists’. [59] This attempt on the part of *Mathrubhumi* to put a socialist cover on Gandhism did not take into account the social conservatism and spiritualism of the latter. Neither could Gandhi’s theory of class harmony and his aversion to the use of force, be considered to be in tune with socialist ideology. Human nature being as it is, it is foolish to expect the wealthy class to share its wealth with the exploited have-nots.

The *Mathrubhumi* accused the Socialists of trying to create dissension among the ranks of Congressmen. “The only firm objective of all Indians and the Congress is the complete independence of India. Socialism, before the

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58 *Prabhatham*, 19 September 1938.

59 *Mathrubhumi*, 3 February 1939.

acquisition of freedom is only a theoretical problem . . ."[60] Pointing out the European experience of extremism degenerating into greed for power in totalitarian states, *Mathrubhumi* doubted whether the extremists in the Congress (read Socialists/Communists) were also going the same path.

The *Mathrubhumi* highlighted the socialist content of the Gandhian constructive programme. The paper pointed out that apart from prominent items like Hindi-Muslim unity, campaign against untouchability, prohibition, khadi and village industries etc., constructive work included work for economic equality. By economic equality, Gandhiji did not mean equal division of material resources; that would be impractical. The concept of economic equality as envisaged by Gandhiji, according to *Mathrubhumi*, provided for home for everyone, good food according to one's need and enough khadi to wear. The paper commented that once these are accomplished, the larger dimension of economic equality could be thought of later. It also pointed out that even in Russia, considered to be the land of economic equality, there were economic inequalities among its citizens.[61]

Mathrubhumi was, here, trying to see socialism in a vague Gandhian concept, providing for the basic needs of an individual. This was, indeed a far cry from the 1920s and early 30s when *Mathrubhumi* praised the Russian system and vigorously supported young Jawaharlal's passion for scientific socialism.

In short, what appears, on an examination of the contents of the newspapers of the period, is the undeniable fact that it was the *Prabhatham* which made the most valuable contribution towards the propagation of the socialist ideology in Malabar. Many were the articles which appeared in its pages dealing with such topics as economics, philosophy, state and

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60 Ibid., 8 March 1939.

61 Ibid., 20 August 1940.

revolution, Communist International, fascism, achievements of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Gandhism, Communist Party etc.[62] Among the contributors were EMS Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran, P. Krishna Pillai, K.A. Keraleeyan, N.C. Shekhar, P.C. Joshi, Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan etc. It also carried reports and articles on current developments and struggles.

Communism

It might appear a bit of a surprise that the communist ideology reached rather late in Malabar, now one of the communist bastions in India, in comparison with other parts of the country. As has been pointed out earlier, it was only in the 1930s that concrete efforts were made to form class organisations of labourers and peasants. Early communist leaders of Malabar, preferred to work within the Congress Socialist group till 1939, when the Communist Party was finally formed in Kerala in a secret meeting of the leaders at Pinarayi near Thalassery.

Even while working within the Congress, these leftist leaders were convinced that the final solution for the political problems of the country was communism and had began to propagate the revolutionary ideology among the various sections of people. By the time the Communist Party was formed in Malabar, the *Prabhatham* was no more there to carry forward the ideological campaign. Consequently, in this second phase of the left movement in Malabar, the propaganda campaign was led by the *Deshabhimani*, which came into existence in 1942.

There was a major difference between the *Deshabhimani*, the Communist Party organ, and other nationalist papers like the *Mathrubhumi*. For the Communists, the party organ had to instruct the party members

62 N.E. Balaram, op. cit., pp.244-45.

ideologically and practically; it had to play a significant role in organising the party and class organisations; it had not only to reflect the class struggle but also had to lead them. The *Deshabhimani* was launched with these objectives.[63] Expectedly, the paper took keen interest in fostering the class organisations of labourers, peasants, teachers, students etc.

During its early years, the *Mathrubhumi* was more progressive-minded in its attitude towards social and political issues than what it exhibited later in the late 1930s and 40s. This was also reflected in its attitude towards the Communists; generally, the paper held a positive view of the Communists and the Soviet Union during this first phase. Articles on the achievements of the Soviet Union were not rare. Similarly, it also published biographical sketches of great communist stalwarts like Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin. On January 2, 1926, *Mathrubhumi* published, in one and a half pages, the presidential speech of Shinkara Velu, made in the Indian Communist Conference held at Kanpur.[64]

Mathrubhumi attached great importance to the Indian visit of Shaklathwala, renowned communist leader and a member of the British Parliament, in January 1927. Referring to the great welcome that the citizens of Bombay accorded to him, it observed that even the Indian Government had to discard the notion that communism was a movement which had to be destroyed like a wicked animal.[65]

But the credit for making the communist ideology familiar to the people of Malabar goes to the *Prabhatham*. Even government officials testified to the significant role played by the 'first socialist paper in

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63 P. Narayanan Nair, *Ara Noottandilude* (Mal.), Trissur, 1973, pp.160-161.

64 *Mathrubhumi*, 2 January 1926.

65 Ibid., 18 January 1927.

Malayalam'[66] in this respect. "Slowly but steadily the communist ideology began to spread in Kerala through the paper (*Prabhatham*)."[67]

The *Prabhatham* published an article entitled 'Karl Marx Zindabad" in March 1935, which focused on how the peasants and labourers of the world were inspired by the ideals of the great German thinker. "The capitalist world is trembling today at the spread of socialism. Even great empires are tottering before the strength of revolutionary peasants and labourers. The people, who have been the slaves of oppression all over the world, are marching forward with the Red flag in one hand and the book, "Capital" in the other, raising triumphant cries of "Hail, Karl Marx".[68] The article proceeded to give a brief narration of Marx's life along with a brief history of the workmen's movement. The article concluded thus: "We, who are bound in chains of slavery, may not be able to celebrate the anniversary of the great man in a proper manner. When the reins of the country pass into the hands of peasants and labourers, when the country gets real freedom, then we can celebrate the anniversary of Marx to our heart's content."[69]

Referring to the resolution passed by the Council of States, protesting against communist ideas being spread by Jawaharlal Nehru and others, the *Mathrubhumi* said: "the discussion on the resolution goes to show that the Government and the capitalists have not learnt the lesson that it is not possible to remove unemployment and poverty so long as imperialism and capitalism are ruling over the country."[70]

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66 Puthuppally Raghavan, op. cit., p.220.

67 Home Political (i), 18th September 1937, NAI, New Delhi.

68 *Prabhatham*, 18 March 1935.

69 Ibid.

70 *Mathrubhumi*, 1 October 1936.

Not withstanding its strong opposition to the leftists in the factional politics of the KPCC, the *Mathrubhumi* pleaded for the release of the communist leaders from prison when the Congress Government took over administration in Madras in 1937. Immediately after assuming power, the Government of Rajagopalachari had ordered the release of a large number of political prisoners. However, a number of communist leaders including A.K. Gopalan, Chandroth Kunhiraman Nair, K.P. Gopalan and K.A. Keraleeyan were still behind the bars. The *Mathrubhumi* requested the Government to speed up the procedure required to release them without delay. It pointed out the impropriety of keeping political leaders in prison under a Congress Government.[71]

Reports on the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party frequently adorned the pages of the *Prabhatham*. The report presented in the 18th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, held in Moscow in March 1938, by Stalin was prominently published by the paper in the front page.[72]

The rightwing leadership of the Congress was the target of frequent attack by the *Prabhatham*, for its compromising attitude towards imperialism. In a significant article under the heading "Congress and Communists", the paper made the allegation that the prominent section of the Congress leadership represented the needs of the capitalists and other vested interests in India.[73] The reluctance of the leadership to launch a direct mass struggle was cited as proof of its compromising stand.

The *Pulari*, an out and out pro-Gandhi paper, strongly criticised the Communists for discrediting the Gandhian ideals. The very first issue of 'Pulari' made a frontal attack on the Communists; it regretted that certain

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71 Ibid., 4 August 1937.

72 *Prabhatham*, 3 April 1938.

73 Ibid., 27 June 1938.

people claiming themselves to be "progressives" were discrediting Gandhiji's political ideals as "old-fashioned". The paper alleged the Communists of propagating the view that Gandhiji and the Congress were not doing anything for the peasants and workers, and reminded them that it was Gandhiji who had given the message, "return to the village."[74]

In August 1938, the Rajaji Government issued a communique in which it alleged the Communists of printing and propagating clandestine pamphlets, calculated to incite violence and riots in the state. These pamphlets also contained disparaging remarks about the Indian National Congress and the Constituent Assembly. The Communists were alleged to have threatened, in the pamphlets, to take the head of the premier, Rajaji. In an editorial on the subject, *Mathrubhumi* contended: "While India can accept the broad principles of communism, their means of action is never suited to our country because they believed in violence; they don't have any other objective other than revolution. We should resist with all our might any view that ruins our revered ideals like ahimsa and truth, and traditions of our country."[75]

It is important to remember that the Communist Party at that time was an illegal outfit and consequently, could not have propagated their ideas in a legal manner. In an article published in the *Prabhatham*, EMS claimed that the alleged pamphlet could not have been issued by the Communists, as some of the ideas contained in them were contrary to the policy accepted by the CPI. He pointed out that the Communists had accepted the Congress as the "Pivot of the national struggle."[76] EMS was right in pointing out that the Communists were denied the opportunity to defend themselves against such serious allegations.

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74 *Pulari*, July 1938.

75 *Mathrubhumi*, 13 August 1938.

76 *Prabhatham*, 26 December 1938.

Of all the Congress Governments in power in the provinces during 1937-39, the Rajaji Government was the most hostile towards the Communists. The *Prabhatham* frequently complained about the anti-communist, anti-labour policy of the Government. Referring to a resolution passed by a meeting of merchants at Calcutta in December 1938 which requested the Government to prevent the growth of communism, the paper pointed out that the merchants had singled out the Madras Government as model in this respect. *Prabhatham* added: "It is matter of shame for the Congressmen of the province."[77]

In the Delhi AICC of September 1938, Bhulabai Desai presented a resolution on civil rights which said that civil rights could not include preaching of violence and spreading of false propaganda. It was widely believed that the Communists and Socialists with their theory of class war and their aversion to Gandhian ahimsa, were the real targets of the resolution. The Congress Socialists, in fact, walked out of the AICC in protest against the resolution. While the *Prabhatham* condemned the resolution in severe terms, the *Mathrubhumi* justified it.

The growing intolerance of the *Mathrubhumi* towards the Communists was becoming more and more discernible by the end of the 1930s, through its editorial comments. It voiced its concern at the presence of the Communists in the Congress. The nationalist paper lamented that certain elements with no belief in the non-violent programme as well as in unity and discipline, had crept into the Congress organisation.[78]

When the rightwing leadership of the Congress tried to drive away the Communists from positions of power in the organisation, the *Mathrubhumi* wholeheartedly supported the move. The sub-committee constituted by the

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77 *Ibid.*

78 *Mathrubhumi*, 3 May 1939.

AICC to make recommendations about the required amendments in the Congress constitution submitted its report in 1939. The most significant recommendation was that those who were members of any communal or other organisations which were not in harmony with the Congress programme, could not contest the organisational elections of the Congress. The prohibition with respect to the communal organisations was in existence even before. Now the inclusion of "other organisations" was believed to be directed against the Communists and others, who were members of peasants' and labourers' organisations. The *Mathrubhumi* did not share this anxiety of the leftists in the Congress. The paper opined that the Congressmen who were working for the cause of the workers and peasants need not worry about the new constitution unless they openly challenged the policy and programme of the Congress.[79]

A controversy arose among Congressmen during the aftermath of the Quit India Movement as to whether the Communists should be given membership in the organisations being set up in various parts of the country to carry forward the constructive programme of the Congress in the wake of the Government prohibition on the Congress organisation. *Mathrubhumi* was of the firm opinion that only those who had faith in the Gandhian programme need be given membership in these organisations. The paper observed that those who had been openly violating Congress decisions and principles had no moral right to claim membership in the organisations being set up to implement the constructive programme of Gandhi.[80]

By the 1940s the Communists had grown to be the most dominant political group in Malabar. They had powerful organisations among the peasants, workers, teachers, students etc. As the Communists were growing

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79 Ibid., 20 January 1940.

80 Ibid., 20 January 1940.

from strength to strength, *Mathrubhumi's* criticism of the former also became more and more pronounced.

The Communist opposition to the Quit India Movement was seen by the *Mathrubhumi* as part of an alliance between the British Imperialism and Communism. The paper was also apprehensive of the alleged communist motive of making India a tool for ensuring the victory of the Soviet tactics in international politics.[81] It even alleged that the Indian Communists were party to a Russian plan to make India a "Soviet satellite". A nationalist daily committed to the Congress ideals, the *Mathrubhumi* had every right to question the patriotism of the Communists, for the dubious stand they took during the Quit India days. But seeing in it a Soviet conspiracy to make India a "satellite state" of the Soviet Union, seems a bit far-fetched; at least there were no concrete evidences to substantiate such an allegation.

The decision of the Communist Party to contest against the Congress candidates in certain constituencies in the election of 1946 invited the fury of the *Mathrubhumi*. The paper said that by opposing the premier political organisaion, engaged in the task of winning the freedom of the country, the Communists were adding strength to the hands of British Imperialism and the vested interests growing under their patronage.[82]

It is surprising that a newspaper, claiming to stand for democracy, should question the basic democratic right of a political party to field its own candidates in an election. It could only have been the servility of the paper to the Congress that had prompted it to condemn the Communists for contesting against the Congress candidates. In the process, *Mathrubhumi* was, infact, claiming for the Congress the position of being the sole, legitimate and authoritative organization fighting for the freedom of the country, which was

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81 Ibid., 15 November 1945.

82 *Ibid*., 9 March 1946.

contrary to fact; opposing Congress was interpreted as helping the British, assigning an element of infallibility to the Congress.

In March 1946, Pattabhi Sitaramayya made a statement which exhibited the communist-phobia of the rightwing Congressmen. He said: "It may be our common aim to expel the British from India, but we should not allow Russia to enter into that gap".[83] The *Mathrubhumi*, which was equally a victim of the communist-phobia, hailed the statement as the most timely warning to the people of this country. The paper viewed the Russian foreign policy as an attempt to impose imperialism in new form under the shade of the red flag. "Instead of directly attacking any country, Soviet Russia create in the concerned country a party which dance to its tune."[84] That the *Mathrubhumi* meant the CPI to be an obvious example of such a party is for sure.

Mathrubhumi considered the professed objective of the Communist Party to put an end to capitalism and imperialism and to work for people's welfare as only a pretention. The Party was accused of sowing the seeds of disunion in other parties and thus weakening them. The paper added: "After destroying all other parties with the help of the Russians, the Communists will form a government, subserving the Russians. By the time, the people come to know that an imperialism far more powerful than the former ones had been imposed on them, it will be too late."[85] Of the servility of the communist parties of various countries to the Russian Communists, the paper cited a number of examples like the Chinese Communist Party's recognising the Soviet- Japanese Pact, by which Japan would get control over Manchuria.

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83 *Ibid*.

84 Ibid., 10 March 1946.

85 Ibid.

Mathrubhumi alleged that the Indian Communists who were the servants of the Soviets, did not like a strong national organisation in India. That was why the Communists were bent upon to destroy the Congress; for that purpose, they were even ready to ally with the Government and the Muslim League. The paper also lamented that many innocent Indian comrades were in the dark about the secret designs of their leaders.[86]

In painting the Soviet Communists in the darkest colours and alleging a conspiracy between them and the Indian Communist leadership, the *Mathrubhumi*, it seems, was trying to wean away communist sympathisers in an election time, by appealing to their patriotic sentiments. Such editorials shows that the anti-communism of the paper was at its worst during the mid-40s.

It was left to the *Deshabhimani*, the official organ of the Communist Party, to defend the onslaught against the Communists. And this it did effectively. As the District Magistrate noted in his letter to the Chief Secretary, "this newspaper is the mainspring of the communist machine in Malabar and it continue to spread communist propaganda through out the district."[87]

The Prakasam Ministry's anti-communist measures incited severe criticism from the *Deshabhimani*. Referring to a speech of Premier Prakasam in which he accused the Communists of trying to sabotage and indict his Government through speeches, newspapers and leaflets, the *Deshabhimani* rejected the Premier's charge and said: "We indict the black marketers who steal the cloth and rice belonging to the public; we indict the officials who are corrupt and who molest the public . . . Inspite of the Congress Ministry coming to power, police devilry did not cease as has been proved at the time

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86 Ibid.

87 Letter from the D.M to the C.S. dt. 8/5/47 (Regional Archives, Kozhikode).

of the struggle against Aaron (Congress leader and industrialist). At Golden Rock, it was with the consent of Prakasam that Harrison and the MSP committed brutality to a degree beyond human imagination. We protest against the police excesses as in 1942 . . . ."[88]

The *Deshabhimani* carried forward the campaign for the cause of the peasants and workers from where the *Prabhatham* left off. The campaign was relentless and intensive, resulting, ultimately, in Communist domination of the political landscape of Malabar.

*Mathrubhumi*s response to the Punnapra Vayalar incident, a violent chapter in the history of the Communist movement in Kerala in general and of the trade union movement in particular, again underlines its strong disapproval of violent means by workers in their struggle as well as its apprehensions about the growing 'Communist menace'. However, the primary responsibility for the violent incident was put on the "strong policy" of Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Diwan of Travancore. "There is no wonder, his theory that popular aspirations could be put down by oppression is inviting revolutionary forces in this 20th century."[89] It would appear from this comment that *Mathrubhumi's* major complaint against Sir. C.P's policy was that it paved the way for the growth of the communist movement.

True to its pro-Congress stand in politics, *Mathrubhumi's* support in Travancore politics went to the State Congress. The paper was dismayed that any exhortation by the State Congress to the people to retreat from the path of violence would be misinterpreted by the Communists as an unholy alliance with the Government. Referring to the consultations that was going on between the Government and the State Congress on the issue of responsible government, *Mathrubhumi* said: "It is an unavoidable part of an ahimsa

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88 *Deshabhimani*, 22 October 1946.

89 *Mathrubhumi*, 30 October 1946.

struggle to seek every means to reach a compromise before an agitation is begun."[90] The newspaper cautioned the people not to be misled by the Communists who, not waiting for the result of the consultations with the Government, was hurling mud on the State Congress and trying to strengthen their party even by sacrificing the lives of poor people. *Mathrubhumi's* aversion to revolution can be taken as a reflection of the conservative and statusquoist attitude it took so far as the political structure of the country was concerned.

In an article published in the *Deshabhimani*, P.Krishna Pillai alleged that the district authorities including the Collector and the District Superintend of Police were involved in a conspiracy with the janmis, capitalists and certain Congressmen to crush the Communist movement. He wrote: "The articles in the *Mathrubhumi* with the headings. 'Ryots revolution', the baseless and false reports about Communist excesses, permission to the police to fire indiscriminately and the false reports sent to the Government daily were all tactics employed according to the original plan. They spread a false rumour that the Communists are preparing for a revolution to overthrow the Government."[91] The article also alleged that the imperialists were having an advantageous position because they could give a national colouring to their repressive measure as they were backed by some Congressmen. Infact, allegations of Congressmen's collaboration with the Government in their repressive measures against the Communists, were frequently made by the *Deshabhimani*, most often without any substantiating evidence.

The *Deshabhimani* published an article by EMS on 10 October 1947 in which the author suspected that the proposed enquiry by Dixon, an English official, into the Communist activities in North Malabar was to whitewash the

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90 Ibid.

91 *Deshabhimani*, 9 January 1947.

Malabar Special Police (MSP). Quoting statistics, EMS tried to prove that only one fifth of the rice was being collected by the Government and the rest was going to the black market. "Those who are unable to prevent it, inorder to conceal their incompetency, twist their moustaches before the trade unions, Kisan Sanghs, the Communist Party and the *Deshabhimani*, who expose their inefficiency. Several instances of atrocities, rowdysm and bribery which took under the very nose of these district authorities, with the support of several amongst them and several of them even participating in it, were exposed by the *Deshabhimani* paper, the Communist Party, the Kisan Sanghs and the trade unions", he claimed.[92]

Condemning the bureaucratic efforts to prevent the publication of *Deshabhimani*, EMS said: ". . . We are not surprised at this. What else will the civilian officers- the tools of the imperialist autocracy- do? But there is a fact about which we feel surprised, aggrieved and ashamed. The Congress Ministry, the KPCC, the *Mathrubhumi*, the Congressmen and even the so called Socialists adopted a policy of supporting these actions of the official supremacy . . . . Unfortunately, the Congressmen in the name of the communist bogey are justifying the anti-Congress and anti-social actions of the officers . . . ."[93]

The *Deshabhimani* was the most powerful weapon in the hands of the Communists in the propagation of their ideology as well as in the mobilisation of the people, especially farmers, labourers, teachers and students, around that ideology. Dixon, who had enquired into the communist activities in North Malabar, testified to this fact in his report: "All officials and non-officials, other than Communists, with whom I discussed the question, favoured the suppression of the *Deshabhimani*. . . It has a very large circulation and

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92 Ibid., 10 January 1947.

93 Ibid.

actually reaches a much larger number of people than its circulation would indicate. My information is that it is read out to the public in many village reading rooms and even read out by Communist teachers, who are numerous, to children in the schools. It is the most powerful single weapon which the Communists possess . . . "[94]

Concurring with the view expressed by Dixon, the District Magistrate too demanded action against the *Deshabhimani* under clause 9 of the Press ordinance. In a letter to the Chief Secretary, the DM wrote: ". . . I believe Dixon has reported to Government, what is the general view here, that this paper is a menace to law and order in Malabar. This paper is widely read and is the Communists' chief means of spreading their propaganda throughout Malabar. Its policy, in brief, is to bring the administration into hatred and contempt and to set up communist lawbreakers as heroes . . . "[95] That the Prakasam Ministry was yielding to bureaucratic pressure in taking stringent measures against the *Deshabhimani*, was proved by the frequent recommendations made by officials ranging from the DM to the Police and intelligence officials, demanding severe action, even the extreme measure of banning the paper, against the Communist organ.

In 1947, when the Interim Government under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru was in power, there was a country-wide search of the offices of the Communist Party, communist trade unions and the Students' Federation. The *Deshabhimani* accused that the searches were conducted at the instance of Sardar Patel. The paper also reported that Patel did object to Rajaji raising, in the Congress Working Committee, the "issue of country-wide arrests and crushing of civil liberties, imputing general offence like inciting violence.[96] The mutual mistrust and misunderstanding between the

94 Public Department. G.O. No. 2658 dated 25/8/47 (RAK).

95 Ibid.

96 *Deshabhimani*, 18 January 1947.

Communists and the rightwing Congressmen had grown to such a level where each group entertained the worst fears about the other.

The *Deshabhimani* published a powerful article on 26 February 1947, attacking the Congress Government for the police atrocities on the Communist workers of North Malabar. The following excerpts from the article will help to know how the paper played on the emotions of the communist sympathisers: "The atrocities of the MSP and their mean satellites have exceeded all bounds . . . . Having got the Congress Government in power, the British Imperialism, under the guise of communist bogey, has started a naked fascist hunt . . . . In the present state of affairs, any social pest, drunkard, rowdy, aboriginal or ass could commit anything he likes on the public at large by holding aloft the banner of anti-communism . . . . Some patriots and their papers (an obvious reference to Congressmen and pro-Congress papers like the *Mathrubhumi*) do not even adopt the attitude of having seen them. The present editor of the *Mathrubhumi* will pass urine with dread if he were to see the leader in the *Mathrubhumi* about the removal of the sacred 'marriage thali' from the neck of the wife of the late L.S. Prabhu.[97] Let the patriots just ponder over it . . . .

"Information is to hand that revered mother of K.P.R Gopalan wept and followed till the roadside the policemen who were carrying away all the looted articles belonging to her (Dear respected mother, we will wreak vengeance for it; we will never forget it). When it is known that the entreaties of the lady who had given birth to that Bolshevik hero of Kerala, for even a small eating plate was replied with a derisive laughter and driving away of the lorry with all the articles in it by the policemen, vengeful question asked by an old peasant, "Is there a government existing here?" rises uppermost in the minds of one and all . . . . It is impossible for any person of this country with

[97] The incident which took place in the course of the CDM has already been mentioned in Chapter II.

human feelings to keep quiet hearing and seeing the mean satellites of British hordes destroying the chastity- the very life- of our mothers and sisters . . . ."[98]

The language used by the *Deshabhimani* was so powerful and emotionally surcharged that it was bound to excite the feelings of Party workers and followers. Considering this fact, the major complaint, often raised by Congressmen and bureaucrats against the *Deshabhimani* that it was inciting violence, would appear to be not completely baseless. Nevertheless, to find fault with the *Deshabhimani*, ignoring the root causes, that of janmi exploitation and bureaucratic oppression, is like missing the woods for the trees.

While the *Mathrubhumi* was the target of frequent attack by the *Deshabhimani* for its anti-communist attitude, the former occasionally returned the compliments through articles by rightwing Congress leaders like K. Kelappan. The *Mathrubhumi* published an article by K. Kelappan which condemned the *Deshabhimani* and the Communists for their duplicity. Referring to the killing of two persons, one alleged to be a spy of the MSP and the other the mayhout of a janmi, allegedly by the Communists, K. Kelappan observed that the *Deshabhimani* had never admitted the Communists having ever committed any violence.[99]

The *Communist*, a Malayalam weekly, published from Kozhikode with K. Damodaran as the editor, was started in 1943 to propagate the views and policies of the CPI and to educate the party ranks. Of its influence among the people, the District Magistrate wrote: "The paper has got great influence

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[98] Ibid., 26 February 1947. Police atrocities against the Karshaka Sangham activists has been highlighted by K.K.N. Kurup in his works, *The Kayyur Riot* (Calicut, 1978), *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala*, (Trivandrum, 1989), *Desheeyathayum Karshaka Samarangalum* (Mal.) (Trivandrum, 1991) and *Keralathile Karshaka Samarangal 1946-52* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1996).

[99] *Mathrubhumi*, 26 February 1947.

among middle class labourers and its tone is ordinarily objectionable like that of the *Deshabhimani*"[100] However, the weekly did not last long.

The nationalist press in Malabar opposed the ban imposed on the Communist Party of India by the Government. Even those newspapers, known for their opposition to the 'modus operandi' of the Communists, the *Mathrubhumi* for example, disapproved of the Government ban as an infringement of democratic rights. But on the whole, except for the official organs of the Communist Party, the press was generally anti-communist in its attitude.

Mathrubhumi's opposition to communist violence did not prevent it from effectively pleading the innocence of K.P.R Gopalan, eminent Communist leader, in the Morazha case.

Referring to reports that national capitalists are buying Englishmen's newspapers in India like "The Times of India" and the "Statesman", the *Deshabhimani* said that these papers would continue to be tools of British Imperialism even in the hands of national capitalists and pointed out that editors of most of these papers would continue in their posts. Most importantly, the paper expressed its anger at the shameful compromise between the national capitalists and British capitalists, alleging that the former were the key-keepers of the Congress.[101]

The *Deshabhimani* viewed with concern this growing collaboration between the Indian and the British capitalists, which was on the upswing since the world war II. The proposal for joint venture involving the Birlas and British industrialists to manufacture motor vehicles in India was bitterly opposed by the Communists. The *Mathrubhumi* which had been consistently campaigning for the development of motor industry in India, published an

100 Public Department. G.O. No. 2658 dtd. 25/8/47 (RAK).

101 *Deshabhimani*, 10 April 1946.

article by K. Kelappan, supporting the Birla enterprises and ridiculing the Communists for opposing the joint venture. In reply to this, the *Deshabhimani*, charged Kelappan of justifying the "robbery" and "dubious dealings" of the Tatas and Birlas. The paper also hinted that the Congress was receiving money from the latter. An apprehension was also expressed that this unholy alliance would jeopardize the prospect of India getting her political and economic freedom. Reference was also made to an article by Prof. R.V. Rao published in the "Free Press Journal", in which the renowned economist alleged that in the joint ventures involving Indian and British Industrialists, the real interests of the people was being sacrificed for the benefit of the interest of a few.[102]

While the *Mathrubhumi* reflected the growing affinity of the Congress leadership towards capitalist interests, both Indian and foreign, as well as its eagerness to ensure the industrial development of India, the *Deshabhimani* was more concerned about the fall out of the growing clout of capitalist interests over the national leadership, on the have-nots and the downtrodden.

Left-Right Rift in the Congress

The left-right rift that developed in the Congress in the 1930s was a development of great significance in the nationalist politics, ultimately leading to a parting of ways between the Gandhians and extremist groups like the Communists and the supporters of Subhash Bose. The response of the press towards this political development is very important in so far as the position taken by the newspapers might throw some light on their class character.

Of the important newspapers in Malabar, the *Mathrubhumi* was firmly behind the Gandhian faction; infact it almost functioned as their official

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[102] Ibid., 9 April 1946.

mouthpiece. The *Prabhatham* and the 'Al-Ameen', representing the Congress Socialists and the Forward Bloc respectively, defended the leftists. Cautioning the people against co-operating with the Congress Socialists, the *Mathrubhumi* wrote: "We have not been able to understand the policy followed by the Congress Socialists in Kerala. They do not seem to have understood that the cooperation they get from the people is not because they are Socialists but because they wear khaddar and had once taken part in the civil disobedience campaign and are, therefore, mistaken to be followers of Gandhiji . . . . Today they denounce Gandhi and other respected leaders of the Congress . . . . They attack the Congress programme..... They say that Gandhiji is an agent of capitalists . . . . Those who have faith in the Congress and in the leadership of men like Mahatma Gandhi and Rajendra Babu ought to know the real colour of these Socialists. If the people are co-operating with them, mistaking them for Congressmen, it is time such co-operation is withdrawn."[103]

The fact that the Congress Socialists had been growing in strength and influence in Malabar, especially among the poorer sections of people like peasants and workers, had been a worrying factor for the Gandhian leadership. The *Mathrubhumi*, as their mouthpiece, engaged itself in a campaign to wean away the Congress followers from the "evil" influence of the leftists. The fact that the Congress Socialists did not accept the ideology of Gandhi, whom the people had so much respect for, was consistently driven home, through a number of articles and editorials.

When the left-right divide reached a climax in 1938-39 with the leftists, under the leadership of Bose, successfully challenging the rightists, the *Mathrubhumi* spiritedly supported the latter, even at the cost of some of its cherished principles. *Mathrubhumi's* comment on Bose's explanation for his

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103 *Mathrubhumi*, 10 June 1936.

resignation as president of the Congress is an instance. Bose revealed that the reason for his resignation was the unwillingness of the rightists, especially the old Working Committee members, to allow him any freedom in the formation of the new Working Committee. Bose characterised this obstinacy on the part of the rightists as undemocratic.

The *Mathrubhumi* took it upon itself to defend the undemocratic attitude of the rightists: "The responsibility of the Working Committee is to implement the majority decision of the Congress. It is a primary principle of democracy that such a committee should have no place for any one who does not enjoy the confidence of the majority." It is a dubious argument that the Working Committee of an organisation like the INC, which the *Mathrubhumi* itself had admitted to be a broad umbrella organisation, consisting people of different shades of opinion and ideological perceptions, should have as its members only those who belong to a particular group, even if it is the predominant group. Obviously, *Mathrubhumi*s new interpretation of democratic representation was necessitated by its blind adherence to the rightwing Gandhian leadership.

The passing of the control of the KPCC into the hands of the leftists had its impact on the attitude of the newspapers of Malabar toward the work of the KPCC. The *Mathrubhumi* which hitherto functioned almost as an official organ of the KPCC, began to be more and more critical of the KPCC leadership, while the *Prabhatham* gave full support to the new initiatives and programmes of leadership. In a leading article published in the *Prabhatham* on the eve of the KPCC elections of 1939, EMS claimed that the Socialist-controlled KPCC of the last year was able to implement the Congress programme better than at any other time in its history.[104]

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104 *Prabhatham*, 9 January 1939.

In an article published in the *Prabhatham*, P. Krishna Pillai said that the victory of Bose at Tripuri was a reflection of the desire among the majority of Congress delegates that the Congress should adopt an agitational programme. However, he also acknowledged that Gandhi 's leadership was unavoidable for the Congress. "The formation of a Working Committee which enjoys the confidence of Gandhi was the need not only of the rightists but also of the leftists and the country" Krishna Pillai added.[105]

The *Prabhatham* charged the rightists in the KPCC of trying to lead the Congress into moderation and preventing its forward march. It also made the allegation that the rightists were seeking the help of Janmis, capitalists and other enemies of the Congress in their attempt to conquer the Congress organisation.[106]

Both the Communists and the Gandhians were active in the eradiation of cholera in Malabar in 1943. While the work of the Communists got wide exposure through the columns of the *Deshabhimani*, that of the Grama Seva Sangh, a Gandhian association, was highlighted by the *Mathrubhumi*, revealing the political bias of the papers.

The bitter struggle between the rightwing Congressmen and the leftists for political domination in Malabar was also reflected in the exhibition of flags; the 'red flag' often competed with the tri-colour "national flag" for domination. The sight of the 'red flag' dominating the processions and meetings of farmers and labourers was resented by the rightists. The *Mathrubhumi*, while accepting the significance of the Red flag as representing the working class people of all countries, felt that demonstrating it against the 'national flag' was highly deplorable. "The tri-colour flag represents the national aspirations and respect of Indian people; it is the symbol of our

105 Ibid., 20 March 1939.

106 Ibid., 10 April 1939.

freedom. All Indians should respect it; they should dedicate themselves for it. For the enslaved Indians, it is the victory of the Tri-colour flag that is the need of the hour, beyond everything else. The respect and progress of every Indian, including the labourers, depends on it."[107]

When, in May 1938, the Working Committee members of the left-dominated KPCC voted along with the municipal councillors of Kozhikode to defeat the candidate of the rightwing and to elect their own choice as the municipal chairman, the *Mathrubhumi* vehemently criticised the act as the violation of the fundamental principles of democracy.[108] Likewise, the *Mathrubhumi* was the major weapon of the rightwing Congress leadership against the KPCC leadership in the political uproar over the 'secret circular issue'.[109] In both these issues, the *Prabhatham* and the 'Al-Ameen' strongly defended the KPCC.

When Bose defeated Pattabhi Sitarammayya in the election to the presidentship of the Congress, the *Mathrubhumi* rejected the contention that the 1557 votes that Bose got could be taken to be against Gandhism and infavour of socialism. The paper argued that it was the desire of a large section of Congressmen, who were under the impression that the Congress was returning back to constitutionalism after the formation of ministries in the provinces, to prevent the national organisation from falling into

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107 *Mathrubhumi*, 19 September 1937.

108 Ibid., 19, 20 and 22 July 1938.

109 In June 1938 KPCC President Muhammed Abdurahiman issued a secret circular to subordinate Congress Committees, asking them to enquire and report about the veracity of the allegations of corruption and inefficiency in the administration of the Malabar District Board which was headed by K. Kelappan, the foremost leader of the Gandhian faction in the KPCC and Abdurahiman's bete noire. It was widely believed that the secrete circular was provoked by intense factional fight in the KPCC as well as personal rivalry between Abdurahiman and Kelappan.

constitutionalism that prompted the majority of delegates to vote for Bose.[110] Even if we accept the argument of the *Mathrubhumi*, Bose's victory could still be taken as a victory of the Socialists because it was mainly the latter who strongly opposed the formation of ministries by the Congress and warned against compromising mentality creeping into the organisation and the return of constitutionalism.

After the KPCC came under the control of the Leftists, the '*Mathrubhumi*" frequently accused it of openly defying and despising the ideals and programmes that the Congress had accepted under the leadership of Gandhiji. When the rightwing leaders walked out of the KPCC and formed the Kerala Gandhi Sangham, the paper welcomed it.[111] In its eagerness to support the Gandhian faction, the *Mathrubhumi* seems to have forgotten the organisational principle that the paper itself had underlined time and again that an organisation could ignore unity and discipline only at its own peril.

Trade Union Movement

Organised labour movement in Malabar had its beginning in the late 1920s. Kerala witnessed a new awakening among workers during this period.[112] It was also a period when there was a serious unrest among labourers at different centres in India.[113] The emerging labour movement got strong support from the nationalist press in Malabar. The press attacked the anit-labour policy of the government in severe terms. The nationalist papers defended the right of the labourers to go on strike to get their grievances redressed. The condemnation of the labour policy of the British Government

110 Ibid., 2 February 1939.

111 Ibid., 28 May 1945.

112 N.E. Balaram, op. cit., p.241.

113 P.K.K.Menon, p.515.

was in agreement with the attitude of enmity of the nationalist press towards the British Government.[114]

Even before political leaders began to take active interest in organising the labourers, nationalist newspapers took the initiative in inspiring the organising spirit of the working class. Early in April 1923, barely two weeks since its inception, the *Mathrubhumi* published a brilliant editorial hailing the trade union movement. It observed: "Of all the movements that is now going on in the world, the most important is that of the labourers".[115] Referring to the major demand of the labourers which included remuneration in accordance with work and a say in matters of governance, the paper said that just like the lower caste people had to fight the higher castes for their self-respect, the labourers had to fight the capitalists for their freedom. All the governments, that were dominated by capitalist interests, had always tried to crush the aspirations of the labourers and to reduce their organised strength.

Mathrubhumi was elated at the wonderful awakening among the Indian labourers that was discernible during the early 1920's. It categorically declared that India did not want a system of government that neglected the power and happiness of the working class which constituted 98 percent of the population. If the ruling power of a country was put in the hands of a particular class, it could not be said that the people of that country got real freedom. Reminding the people that the great pillars of national progress and freedom were the lower caste people, the peasants and the workers, who had realised their strength and power and had began to exhibit signs of awakening, *Mathrubhumi* exhorted them to help and advise these classes and to strengthen their organised power.[116]

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114 K. Subramanyam, op.cit., p.168.

115 *Mathrubhumi*, 5th April 1923.

116 Ibid.

The editorial is an eloquent testimony to *Mathrubhumi's* great enthusiasm in the growth of trade union movement in India. The paper's sympathy and support for the working class appears, here, to be so total that even a socialist paper would have been proud to have such an editorial on its page. That this enthusiasm turned into intolerance by the late 30s is another matter.

Mathrubhumi published an article by K. Kelappan, written in connection with the labourers' conference that took place at Palakkad in April 1923. Kelappan stressed the importance of "making the working class of our country to take an active interest in political matters, strengthening their organisational power and resisting the cruelties of the wealthy class on them. There should be organisation of the labouers and other less salaried people all over the world. They should try themselves to redress their grievances. And that will be possible only through organised power."[117]

No opportunity was lost by the *Mathrubhumi* to stress the importance of organised power of the working class. Referring to the All India Labourers' conference, the Railway workers conference and other labour conferences that had taken place in Madras recently, the *Mathrubhumi*, in its issue dated 12 January 1926, opined that these conferences were evidence of the fact that the Indian working class had awakened. Exhorted the nationalist paper, "The liberation of India depends on the liberation of Indian labourers; and the liberation of Indian labourers, on its part, depends on their unity and organised strength. It should be the efforts of all the labourers to strive for this unity and organisational power among themselves."[118] It also reminded all patriots that it was their duty to help the labourers in this effort.

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117 Ibid., 12 April 1923.

118 Ibid., 12 January 1926.

In 1926, the Government introduced a trade union bill in the Imperial Legislative Assembly, which sought to prohibit the use of trade union fund for political purposes. *Mathrubhumi* viewed the Government move as an attempt to prevent the increasing participation of a newly awakened Indian working class in the struggle for national freedom.[119]

Mathrubhumi published an editorial in June 1925 calling the attention of the people to the railway strike of Punjab. Agitated by the callous attitude of the Government towards the strike, the paper made a request to the people to give all possible assistance to the striking workers. "It we allow the strike of the railway workers of Punjab to end in fiasco, it would be harmful not only to them but to all workers of India . . . . "[120]

All the major strikes that took place in India during this period were supported by the *Mathrubhumi*. In a lengthy editorial published in two parts in May 1928, in the context of strikes by the mill workers of Bombay and the railway workers of Bengal, *Mathrubhumi* argued that labour strikes were unavoidable in the prevailing circumstances. The fact that the labour union had accepted an amount towards its fund from the Soviet Union, came handy as a weapon in the hands of the critics of the strike. *Mathrubhumi* rejected the contention of the owners that labour strikes were instigated and forced on the labourers by their leaders or Communists in Russia or other countries. [121]

Rather than getting agitated at the unrest among Indian labourers, what was needed was an attempt to understand patiently, the internal reasons for this unrest and to seek a solution for them, *Mathrubhumi* urged. It also pointed out that the mill owners of Bombay were making huge profits while

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119 Ibid., 9 February 1926.

120 Ibid., 11 June 1925.

121 Incidentally, the paper was to make the same allegation against the Indian Communists in the late 30s and the 40s- that strikes in India were instigated at the instance of Russian Communists.

the workers under them were not getting enough remuneration even for meeting their essential needs. The paper reminded the factory owners that workers were also having an equally important part in the creation of wealth as themselves. Hence, they deserved a remuneration and respect not much lower than the owners or capitalists. There would be no respite from strikes until and unless the vast difference between workers and owners in terms of their wealth and position in society was done away with or atleast considerably reduced, *Mathrubhumi* warned.[122]

The message of labour strike reached Kerala when labourers of Kerala took part in the strike of the South Indian Railway (SIR) in 1928. The strike was fully supported by the *Mathrubhumi*. It published elaborate and sympathetic reports on the strike. In an editorial, the paper wrote that the strike was the "inevitable effect of the awakening and self-consciousness that has recently taken place among the labouring class".[123]

Mathrubhumi extended full support to the G.I.P. Railway strike of 1930. The paper was of the opinion that it was very unlikely that workers would go on a strike for silly reasons or just to threaten their employers. "To think that those who don't have anything for the morrow, would easily decide to forsake what they have today, is untenable. Nobody knows the great miseries a wage labourer has to face when he stops work, better than himself. Such being the case, it is for the authorities to enquire into the causes of the strike and to concede the just demands of the workers."[124] *Mathrubhumi* also warned the capitalists that the end days were being counted, of the system in which all the profits that should be used for the common welfare were being monopolised by a few. At a time when left oriented papers like the

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122 *Mathrubhumi*, 15 & 17 May 1928.

123 Ibid., 31 July 1928.

124 Ibid., 20 April 1930.

Prabhatham were yet to come into existence, *Mathrubhumi* was the leading supporter of the trade union movement and labour strike in Malabar.

The editorial *Mathrubhumi* published on 20 May 1931 is again a pointer to the class perspective of this nationalist paper during this period, i.e., upto the mid 30s. Lamenting at the plight of labourers in Kerala, while trade union movement had grown enormously in other parts of the world, it wrote: "Their (workers in Kerala) wage is not sufficient for a living: capitalists or owners can dismiss them at will; when they get old, they have no income." The paper pointed out that there were a lot of people in Kerala who did not work and were not willing to work, but at the same time lived in luxury. It exhorted all those who were concerned about the future of the world to work to reduce the gap between these two classes. *Mathrubhumi* averred, "Swaraj alone will not make our future bright; even after swaraj is won, capitalism will continue and establish itself here. Getting swaraj will solve only one of the manifold problems being faced by the people of India. If power comes into the hands of a few Indians from the British, that will not be much useful for the vast majority of the people. Whatever be their colour, all capitalists have the same attitude."[125] The editorial concluded with an exhortation to the Congress leaders to make efforts to strengthen the organising power among workers and peasants.

Here again, *Mathrubhumi* fully identifies itself with the class interests of the workers; even a hardcore communist would have nothing to complain about this editorial.

In January 1935, *Mathrubhumi* welcomed the Congress Socialist Party's call for unity among workers. " . . . The Socialist Party's exhortation to establish unity among the various groups of labourers is timely."[126]

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[125] Ibid., 20 May 1931.

[126] Ibid., 16 January 1935.

The press in Malabar generally took active interest in the betterment of the working conditions of the labourers. Referring to the rule made by Government reducing the hours of work in factories from 60 to 54 hours a week, *Mathrubhumi*, *Prabhatham* and 'Kerala Patrika' pointed out that the factory owners in Feroke, Kozhikode, and Kallayi were compelling the labourers to work for five days a week at 10 hours a day and for four hours for a half-day and they deducted the wages of the labourers for the remaining half-day. The papers considered that this action of the factory owners frustrated the object of the rule and deprived the labourers of half a day's wages. They called upon the Government to find out a remedy for such acts of the employers.[127]

The *Mathrubhumi* added: " . . . The new law . .. . has proved to be a bane to the labourers of Malabar . . . It is said that some of the tilery owners here derive enormous profit even after setting apart the interest on the capital invested . . . It is well known that the factory owners in Malabar are frustrating the objects of the new law. It may be said without doubt that the factory owners in Malabar are clinging to the letter, and thwarting the spirit of the law . . . ."[128] The *Prabhatham* expressed the view that fundamental changes in the very structure of society were necessary before there could be an end of the grievances of workmen. The paper advised the labourers to organise themselves.[129] It is important to note the talk of fundamental changes in the social structure by *Prabhatham* reflecting the revolutionary ideology of the Congress Socialist Party.

The dissemination of socialist ideas by left oriented newspapers and journals played a leading role in the growth of class organisations in Malabar. The *Prabhatham* was the first of the prominent left newspaper to be published

127 NNPR- January to June 1935.

128 *Mathrubhumi*, 8 February 1935.

129 *Prabhatham*, 21 January 1935.

from Malabar. It frequently published inspiring articles exhorting the working class to resist exploitation by capitalists. The article entitled "Are not labourers human beings?", published in February 1935 in the background of the strike in the Malabar Spinning and Weaving Company, is an example of such articles. Excerpts from the article:-

". . . . The labourers who are unable to work on account of starvation join together and strike work. The preservers of peace, declaring the strike as tending to a breach of the peace, make them work by threat and molestation.."

"It appears that the police inspector has told the strikers of the Malabar Spinning and Weaving Company that as the Company was paying the income tax, the police would be looking to the interests of the Company.[130]

"Labourers wake up, combine. "God" has created you slaves; the Government has governed you as slaves; you are always slaves to the capitalist. Therefore, wake up and combine for the preservation of your humanity, to establish your freedom, to protect your self-respect, and above all to appease the hunger of your children . . ."[131]

In a leader published on 19 December 1935, *Mathrubhumi* supported the workers strike at the Thiruvannur Cotton Mill, which had been going on for over a month. It also supported labour strikes at private electric company in Kannur and at a cloth mill in Thalassery.[132]

Prabhatham contributed a lot in spreading revolutionary ideas among workers. It aimed at the propagation of labour agitation.[133] It had been

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130 The concerned Police Officer had denied having said this, in his official report to the Department. Public Department, G.O. No.544 dtd. 3-4-35), RAK.

131 *Prabhatham*, 18 February 1935.

132 *Mathrubhumi,* 14-7-37.

133 Appukuttan Vallikkunnu, *Ariyappedatha EMS* (Mal.), Perinthalmanna, 1989, p.324.

pointed out that an article in the *Prabhatham* pointing out the necessity of unifying different unions to strengthen the organised power of workers led to the formation of important unions like the All Malabar Workers' Union, Kannur Beedi Workers' Union, All Malabar Beedi Workers' Conference and the Central Trade Union. [134]

The *Mathrubhumi*, which had hitherto been fully supportive of labour strikes in the prevailing circumstances, made sort of a somersault by the middle of 1937 and began to caution workers against rushing to strikes. There was no material change in the circumstances that could have prompted the nationalist paper to take such anti-strike stand at that time, except that of the Congress's assumption of power in Madras on 14th July 1937. The increasing influence of the leftists among the labour force might also have been a factor in this change of attitude on the part of the paper, known for its loyalty towards the Congress. Though the leftist leaders were still part of the Congress, they did not always complied with the directions of the parent organisation, especially on the labour front.

The Congress President expressed an opinion in September 1937 that trade union activists should be extremely careful not to make any speech that could prompt workers to acts of violence. Agreeing with the Congress President, *Mathrubhumi* warned that if the labourers were to commit violence, the Government would use its force against them. The paper reminded them that it was the duty of a government, whether it was a Congress government or not, to suppress violence. Therefore trade union movement should observe complete non-violence. *Mathrubhumi* also supported the other advice that the Congress President gave to the trade union leaders- that labourers should be careful not to dissipate their strength by indulging in frequent strikes on silly issues. Comparing strike to a double-pointed spear that might wound not only

[134] R. Prakasham (ed.), *Keralathile Trade Union Prasthanathinte Charithram* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1979, p. 92.

the one who was stabbed but also the one who stabbed, the paper cautioned against its frequent use. It also advanced other arguments as to why strikes were a risky proposition for the workers; as the financial position and organisational strength of the workers were much weaker than those of the capitalists, the former would be more badly affected during the initial stages of strike. Therefore strikes should be treated as a last resort, after all other means were exhausted, to resist the oppression of a severest kind. Once a strike was started, that should be brought to a successful conclusion. Otherwise it would destroy the power of labourers.[135]

This was *Mathrubhumi*s logic against frequent strikes. Whether there is any merit in this logic or not, what is surprising is that only a few days back the same paper was hailing workers' strike as part of the efforts for the creation of an equitable society.

In October 1937, the Congress Government of Madras made an announcement clarifying the Government policy regarding labour disputes in the state. The Government expressed its view that the labourers should use strike as a last weapon only, after exhausting all other means, to achieve their rights. *Mathrubhumi*, which had already expressed the same view earlier, fully approved this policy and opined that it would be most ideal if the labourers and factory owners could reach an agreement by deliberations among themselves, rather than compelling the Government to intervene in the issue. At the same time, the paper did not fail to point out the fact that the owners were generally hostile to the labourers organising themselves. If a labourer was to approach a factory owner in the name of some common demands of the labourers, it was not uncommon for him to be branded an arrogant person and dismissed from the job. *Mathrubhumi* also felt that the labourers were being denied many of their important needs and rights.

135 *Mathrubhumi*, 26 September, 1937.

Indicating that the situation in the state was not satisfactory in this regard, the paper drew the attention of the Government to Bombay, where the Labour Department was making a detailed enquiry into the conditions of the labourers. *Mathrubhumi* expressed its view that a similar enquiry should be conducted in the state and a proper legislation made to raise the living conditions of the labourers.[136]

The *Mathrubhumi*, which had been espousing the cause of the labourers and supporting labour strikes throughout India, was now put in a kind of dilemma. Government apathy towards labour grievances had been a subject of severe criticism and a justification for strikes. Now with a Congress Government in power, pro-Congress papers like the *Mathrubhumi* did not want labour strikes to mar the industrial atmosphere in the state. Hence this guarded approach towards the labour issue. Even as justifying the demands of labourers as genuine, the paper wanted them to adopt a path of conciliation rather than that of strike. And the Government was advised to make an attempt to raise the living conditions of labourers.

In December 1937, *Mathrubhumi* wrote that it was out of ignorance that the owners of factories were normally reluctant to recognise labour unions.[137] The paper always supported the right of workers to organise themselves.

The ever growing influence of the Socialists/ Communists among the working class people during the 30's was viewed with alarm by the rightwing politicians. The awareness among the latter that the marshalling of the entire working class people behind the leftists would take the wind out of their political sails, prompted them to be more pro-active on the labour front and organise unions under their control. The decision of the South Malabar

136 Ibid., 23 October 1937.

137 Ibid., 14 December 1937.

District Congress Committee to organise farmers and labourers as well as the decision of the Muslim League leaders of Thalassery to form an organisation of Muslim labourers were part of this strategy.

The *Prabhatham* viewed this move with anxiety. The paper feared that such a move would split the people. It expressed its view that labourers and peasants should be organised into class organisations on the basis of their immediate needs; political parties could have their own groups within the class organisations. Forming separate class organisations by political parties would only weaken them.[138] While the *Prabhatham*'s view was grounded on sound reasoning, it is safe to assume that the prospect of the leftists losing their predominant influence among peasants and workers, if the Congress and the Muslim League, two popular political parties, were to organise separate union, might have been the more worrying factor for the official organ of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party.

Some of the forms of agitation resorted to by the left trade unions like the picketing were not acceptable to Gandhi. In August 1938 he declared that picketing by labourers and propagating the theory of class war were contrary to the principle of non-violence. The *Prabhatham* replied that Gandhi was getting scared of picketing by labourers and the propagation of class theory; but he was not perturbed at the growing compromising mentality in the Congress towards imperialism in the matter of the Federation.[139]

No other mainstream newspaper in Malabar did provide as much space to trade union news as did the *Prabhatham* in the 30s. Resolutions passed in the meetings and conferences of the various unions were invariably published by the paper. The services rendered by *Prabhatham* to the cause of the labouring class did not consist merely on the propaganda front; it also took

138 *Prabhatham*, 8 August 1938.

139 Ibid., 26 August 1938.

initiative in collecting funds to help the families of striking workers as well as the families of workers killed in police firing. In a declaration published, in its issue dated 26 September 1938, the *Prabhatham* announced its decision to collect a special fund to help the families of the "brave souls" who lost their lives in the shooting at Neyyantinkara, Kollam and Puthuppally. The declaration requested the people to donate generously to the fund.[140]

There need not be disagreement about the opinion expressed by Puthuppally Raghavan that *Prabhatham* was the first 'socialist paper' in Kerala.[141] Not that there were no newspapers or journals in Kerala before *Prabhatham* came into existence, that published articles extolling the virtues of a communist society and condemning the evils of capitalist society. However, as EMS pointed out, a communist paper's duty did not consist merely of publishing articles on communist ideology, but it was also expected to help and lead the practical work that would prepare the people for the final struggle for building a communist society.[142] *Prabhatham* did exactly that.

In states where Congress governments were in power, even workers' demonstrations against anti-labour legislations began to be criticised by the *Mathrubhumi*. Its criticism against the labour unions of Bombay for demonstrating against the proposed implementation of the Industrial Disputes Act by Government of Bombay, is an example. The paper claimed that the Congress Government would not sacrifice the interests of workers. Demonstrations questioning the honesty of purpose of such a government and destroying its influence would retard the progress not only of the workers but also of the country. *Mathrubhumi* wanted the leaders of the unions to accept at face value the assurance given by the Government that it would not hesitate

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140 Ibid., 26 September 1938.

141 Puthuppally Raghavan, *op.cit.*, p.220.

142 M.R. Chandrashekharan, *Keralathile Purogamana Sahitya Prasthanathinte Charithram* (Mal.), 1999, pp.224-225.

to make necessary changes in the Act if its working proved to be detrimental to labour interests. The paper, however, accepted the fact that the Act was not free of defects.[143] Still it found fault with the unions for conducting demonstrations and strikes against a defective law, with anti-labour and pro-owner provisions, simply because the law was enacted by a Congress Government.

A different view was presented by the *Prabhatham*. The paper criticised the Act which, it alleged, would curtail the freedom of labour unions to work in industrial concerns and give more powers to factory owners in this respect. The paper accused the Bombay Government of trying to crush labour strike and added that an organisation like the Congress was expected to help and encourage labour unions.[144]

The relation between the Congress Government in Madras and the leftists in the Congress party was not at all warm; some of the actions of the Government were criticised by the Communists and their newspapers as anti-labour and even fascist. In December 1938, when disciplinary action was taken against certain leftist members of the Legislative Assembly, the *Prabhatham* characterised the action of the party as fascist. The paper specifically cited the case of Thevar, who was found guilty of picketing. *Prabhatham* observed that what was questioned here was the labourer's right of strike and the right of labour activists to become MLAs.[145]

In an editorial note, the *Prabhatham* ridiculed Prime Minister[146] Rajagopalachari for his remark that he had great respect for Hitler for making Germany free of strikes. The paper wondered why the prominent disciple of

143 *Mathrubhumi*, 8 November 1938.

144 *Prabhatham*, 14 November 1938.

145 Ibid., 19 December 1938.

146 Chief or Head of the Cabinet of Ministers in the Provinces was called Prime Minister.

Gandhi turned to Germany without looking at the Soviet Union which was also free from strikes.[147]

Trade Union activity in Madras province witnessed an upswing during the late 30s. This might have had something to do with a more congenial atmosphere for trade union activities under a popular Government. But the Government under Rajaji was annoyed at the frequent strikes in different parts of the province, which took place mainly under the leadership of trade unions under communist control. In March 1939, the Prime Minister warned the labourers that Government would not encourage their "stay in strike" which, he thought, was based on violence.

The *Mathrubhumi* welcomed the Prime Minister's warning as a timely one. Even while accepting the growth of trade unions as conducive to the protection of the interests of labourers, *Mathrubhumi* expressed its concern that if the labourers were to misuse their organisational strength and their right to strike, that would be detrimental to themselves and to the industrial development of the country. The paper considered stay-in- strike and picketing as violent means of pressing their demands, which, a Government, bound to protect law and order, could not allow.[148]

Mathrubhumi's attitude towards labour strike was getting more and more unfriendly by this time. Apart from the fact that a Congress government was in power, the unbridgable divide that was developing between the Gandhians and the Leftists in the Congress might also have been a significant factor in this change of attitude.

The left trade unions of Kozhikode observed a public strike in the city of Kozhikode on 27 December 1939, to draw the attention of the Government as well as that of the public to the labour strike, going on in the Premier

147 *Prabhatham*., 10 October 1938.

148 *Mathrubhumi*, 31 March 1939.

Hosiery Works, Kozhikode. Pointing out that the union leaders did not give prior notice of the strike to all the people concerned, *Mathrubhumi* said that the denial of social rights of the common people, caused by such strikes, could not be justified. The paper characterised this public strike as suicidal and a misuse of the right of strike. The public strike, being the last weapon in the hands of workers, the paper thought that the use of it, in such an unwarranted and irresponsible manner, was highly harmful to the public. It charged the union leadership of sacrificing the best interests of the workers for some hypothetical revolutionary programme. *Mathrubhumi* rejected the claim that such strikes would be helpful either to earn government sympathy or public favour. On the other hand, it would undo whatever public favour the workers enjoyed.[149]

If the public strike was an indication of the growing impatience of the workers at the government apathy towards their problem, the *Mathrubhumi's* editorial was an instance of the growing intolerance of rightwing papers toward communist trade union activities.

On 4 January 1940, there was police lathicharge at a public meeting of workers, convened by the Communists in violation of the prohibitory order under section 144 of Cr PC, at the Mananchira Maidan, Kozhikode. *Mathrubhumi* in a leader, said that there was no sufficient provocation for the indiscriminate lathicharge that took place; it could well have been avoided, had the police shown some restraint. But what is more important about this leader is some other observations the paper made about trade union activists and their leaders. After reminding that it was the offensive demonstration and agitations of workers in recent period that caused the clamping of section 144, the nationalist daily held the “irresponsible leadership” of the labour unions

149 Ibid., 29 December 1939.

(read Communist leadership) responsible for creating such a situation.[150] If *Mathrubhumi*s criticism of workers and their leaders echoed the familiar complaint raised by those in authority and power-that of the unruly behaviour of workers - it could not have been mere coincidence.

Mathrubhumi shared Gandhi's view of trade union work. In a leader written on the Ahmedabad Mill Workers' Union, the paper explained how Gandhi's view of the role of labour unions differed from that of the Communists. Gandhiji's aim was not to establish a dictatorship of the labourers by making different classes of fight each other. "While many of our union activists dream to get to the stage to a classless socialist state through revolution, massacre and dictatorship, Gandhiji hopes to reach a permanent, eternal and classless social structure by convincing the temporary owners of wealth that wealth is only a tool to be made use of for public welfare. While endless class war becomes unavoidable in the former case, as per Gandhian ideology it becomes possible for the seemingly divergent classes to work in mutual harmony."[151]

Referring to the annual report of the Ahmedabad Mill Workers' Union (in the growth of which Gandhi had earlier played a major role) for the year 1938-39, *Mathrubhumi* pointed out that the Union considered as their greatest achievement the fact that there was not a single strike in the year. Their criterion of success was not how much strikes they had conducted, but how they had been able to get their demands accepted without resorting to strike. The paper hoped that the success of unions like that of the Ahmedabad mill workers would lead to a future where everyone who was part of a vocation took equal part in the prosperity of that vocation.[152]

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150 Ibid., 5 January 1940.

151 Ibid., 21 January 1940.

152 Ibid.

While generalising the Ahmedabad case, the *Mathrubhumi* ignored the fact that this model had little chance of success where the owners happened to be greedy and profit-motivated, which in most cases they were. It must, however, be admitted in *Mathrubhumi*s defence that instances of workers being dragged to strikes by union leaders, before exhausting other means, were not unknown.

Mathrubhumi again criticised the Communist leadership for dragging the labourers to "unnecessary strikes" in Kozhikode and Kannur in May 1940. It alleged that the Communists were seducing the workers of Malabar. Regarding the strike of the weaving workers of Kannur, the paper acknowledged their demand for wage increase as just. However, resorting to strike was considered to be undesirable by it; rather the workers should have gone for mediation.

On the strike at the Aaron Company at Pappinisseri, *Mathrubhumi* claimed that out of around thousand workers, more than 800 did not participate in it. The prohibitory orders implemented in Pappinisseri as well as the police cases and punishments were considered by the paper as unfortunate. But, as was its wont, it held the labourers and their leaders largely responsible for these unfortunate incidents. The strike by the municipal workers of Kannur on May Day, 1940, was also found to be an irresponsible one by the *Mathrubhumi*. The paper declared that our labourers deserved a more wise and responsible leaders.[153] As labours' strikes became more frequent under a militant Communist leadership, *Mathrubhumi*s opposition to it also became more pronounced.

The entry of the Soviet Union in the world war II had a significant impact on politics in Malabar too. Along with their decision to cooperate with the British Government in their war efforts, the Indian Communists also

153 Ibid., 26 May 1940.

decided to put an end to labour strikes and to help increase production, even by working extra hours. Quite naturally, the decision was deeply resented by the Congress and other nationalists. However, because of stringent press restrictions, nationalist papers like the *Mathrubhumi* were not free to air their view on the matter. The "Swatantra Bharatham", on the other hand, was not bothered about the press restrictions; it being a clandestine publication.

The "Swatantra Bharatham" was highly critical of the Communists' collaboration with Imperialists during the world war. It congratulated the National Labour Union for passing a resolution which exhorted the labourers in India not to submit to the retrogressive policy of the Communists. Pointing to the labour strikes taking place in various parts of the country (at the initiative of the Socialists), "Swatantra Bharatham" claimed that labourers in Kerala has proved many a time that their support was always with the Congress. The paper also declared that the only solution to all problems being faced by farmers and labourers in India was economic independence.[154]

In an editorial, published on the occasion of the Labour Congress of 1945, *Mathrubhumi* observed: "The labour population of India is not instinctively interested in their freedom. If the labourers don't play a genuine role in the freedom struggle, their leadership has to bear the responsibility. The labour organisations have been coming under the control of an adventurous political group (read Communists), which does not hesitate to accept any opportunistic policy."[155]

One of the major allegations that *Mathrubhumi* frequently made against the Communist leadership of trade unions was its lack of nationalist spirit. Referring to a speech made by K. Kelappan, the paper write: "The unprejudiced men would agree with Kelappan that the policy and tactics of

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154 *Swatantra Bharatham*, 2 November 1942.

155 *Mathrubhumi*, 23 January1945.

the Communists had adversely affected the best interests of the workers. By all means it is necessary to organise the workers of the land absolutely on national basis. A broad and active international temperament is essential to all the movements. . . . But the fundamental and chief goal of a slave country like India is national freedom . . . . It is not surprising if anybody condemns the leadership of the Communist Party as mistaken in this matter. Those who try to debilitate the bounds of the Congress through baseless allegations and meaningless quarrels are anti-nationalists. As soon as the labourers keep away from their nexus, they can pave the way for the common good of the nation, and the realization of their best interest."[156]

What is reflected in the view expressed by the *Mathrubhumi* was the failure of the rightwing nationalist leadership to harmonize the freedom struggle with the struggle of workers for liberation.

Considering *Mathrubhumi's* penchant for nationalist spirit among workers as well as its loyalty to the Congress, it was only natural for it to welcome the formation of the All Kerala Labour Congress in 1945. The paper saw the formation of the new organisation as a clear example of growing national consciousness among the workers. *Mathrubhumi* alleged that it was the wrong leadership of the Communists which ruined not only the national consciousness of labourers but also their self-respect. It put the blame for dissension in the ranks of the working class squarely at the door of the Communists.[157]

The year 1946 was characterised by a number of major strikes in South India, more so in Malabar. The *Deshabhimani* gave full support to these strikes by publishing inspiring articles and statements by Communist leaders, with a view to inviting public sympathy for the strikes such as the Postal

156 *Mathrubhumi*, 23 January 1945.

157 Ibid., 13 November 1945.

strike, South Indian Railway (SIR) strike, the scavengers' strike etc. That the articles appeared in the *Deshabhimani* had great impact on the working class people is clear from an observation made by a police officer: "Their (*Deshabhimani* articles) effect on the sections of population such as peasants and labourers is considerably injurious."[158]

Deshabhimani published articles highlighting the exploitation of coolies in the plantation of Wynad. Condemning the behaviour of European planters towards the coolies, these articles exhorted for an agitation to convert these estates as public properties. Reference in the official notes of the police department testified to the effect of such articles in making the labourers of Wynad politically conscious.[159]

The police and the government were criticized in most scathing terms in the *Deshabhimani*, the former as cruel and brutal, doing all sorts of beastly acts towards the public, especially the labouring classes, and the latter as conniving at the actions of the police.

The S.I.R strike of 1946 was a major strike involving thousands of workers as well as the major traffic network of South India. Reports on the strike as published by the *Mathrubhumi* and the *Deshabhimani*, two major newspapers of Malabar at that time, give two entirely different pictures. While the *Deshabhimani* prominently reported daily of the enormous success of the strike in terms of both workers participation and people's support, *Mathrubhumi* had a different version. It reported that the majority of workers stayed away from the strike; there were reports of more and more workers joining duty each day when the strike was in progress. There were also

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158 Official note by the Superintendent of Police Special Branch, CID [Public Dept. G.O. No. 692 dtd. 4/3/47, (RAK)].

159 Ibid.

reports, in the *Mathrubhumi*, of the growing resentment among the people towards the strike.

Beyond the question of the exact percentage of the railway workers who had participated in the strike or the kind of popular support the strike had generated, what is significant is the total support that *Deshabhimani* gave to the strike. On the other hand, *Mathrubhumi* was of the opinion that the strike was launched at the most inopportune time as the people were seriously suffering from scarcity of food. Even while opposing the strike as most being untimely, the paper sympathised with the workers' demands. The fact is that *Mathrubhumi* was opposed to the workers resorting to strikes whenever a Congress government was in power. On the other hand, the left trade unions were more emboldened to go on strike when a nationalist government was at the helm of affairs; the reason being that a nationalist government would be less inclined to use the big stick to suppress the strike.

The scavengers of Kozhikode went on a strike in August 1946 demanding salary increase, education facilities for their children etc. Again, *Mathrubhumi* sympathised with their demands but opposed their strike. The paper alleged that the strike was instigated by the Communists for political reasons and that they were engaged in an effort to furnish the image of the Congress Government. The general grievances of labourers were only a tool in their hands.[160] *Mathrubhumi's* sympathysing with the workers demands was characterized by the Communists as mere eyewash and pointed out that even after three years of the formation of the union of municipal workers and articulation of their demands *Mathrubhumi* feigned ignorance of them.[161] Although *Deshabhimani's* criticism of *Mathrubhumi's* attitude towards the scavengers' strike was not unreasonable, the real reason for the latter's

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160 *Mathrubhumi*, 28 August 1946.

161 *Deshabhimani*, 27 April, 1946.

opposition to most of the labour strikes during the late 30's and the 40's including the scavengers' strike, does not seem to be any lack of sympathy on its part to the workers' cause. The real reason has to be sought in the deep distrust of *Mathrubhumi* in the Communist leadership of the trade union movement.

Along with its disapproval of strike as a form of agitation, except as a last resort, *Mathrubhumi* also urged the authorities to redress the grievances of the labourers. The authorities were reminded that many of the disabilities of the working class were of an urgent nature. The paper warned: "To think that the labouring class can be suppressed without finding a solution to their grievances, is a vain hope. That will only strengthen the hands of those who are bent upon to lead the working class in to peril."[162] *Mathrubhumi's* concern at the prospect of a strengthening of communist influence among the working class was expressed in unambiguous terms, even when sympathising with the workers' disabilities.

The alleged anti-labour policy of the Prakasam Government came under severe attack from the *Deshabhimani*. It published detailed and emotional reports on the police firing at the agitating workers at Golden Rock, Trichy, attacking the District Superintendent of Police, Harrison for the police action. An article entitled, "What Harrison conducted at Trichy is another Jallian Wallabagh" was also published.[163] *Mathrubhumi*, on the other hand, found the Communists guilty of precipitating the police firing at Golden Rock. The paper cited the reports of the Trichnopoly Magistrate, the Congress Committee and the Muslim League Committee of the area incriminating the Communists for the untoward incident and added that it was

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162 Ibid.

163 *Deshabhimani*, 7 & 8 September 1946.

impossible to believe that these three parties would conspire among themselves inorder to incriminate the Communists.[164]

In May 1947, the Congress decided to form the INTUC, splitting the AITUC, as the latter came completely under the control of the Communists. Welcoming the decision, the *Mathrubhumi* said that though the decision, adversely affecting the unity of the labour class in India, was painful, it was unavoidable. The paper alleged that it had become impossible for the nationalist labourers to continue under the present leadership of the AITUC, the political opinion of which was not conducive to the benefit of either the labourers or the country.

The most important complaint that *Mathrubhumi* had against the Communist leadership of the AITUC was that it instigated frequent strikes, which were, for the most part, unnecessary ones. It pointed out that most of the demands, for which the strikes were conducted, could have been won without strikes or could never have been won even with strikes. The end result was loss of production and miseries to the workers. Pointing to the Communist somersault during the world war II consequent on Soviet entry into the war and their decision not to disturb production by strikes, *Mathrubhumi* maintained that the owners got bigger profits and the labourers got comparatively lesser wages at that time. But now, when they were getting comparatively better wages, and had other avenues than strike to get their just rights accepted and had a popular government in power, the Communist leaders were dragging them into unnecessary strikes.

With only a few months left for Britain to quit power, *Mathrubhumi* thought that causing disorder and confusion through strikes should be avoided when the transfer of power was in the offing. Weakening popular governments at such a critical time was treason. "Apart from the speeches on

164 *Mathrubhumi*, 11 September 1946.

their respective ideologies, experiences have shown that there are not much differences between fascism and communism, especially with respect to the means both use for getting power", the nationalist paper argued. The formation of the INTUC was considered by the paper as proof of the fact that the Indian labourers were not willing to sell their own country to any foreign power.[165] Thus, by the time of Indian independence, communist phobia of the *Mathrubhumi* had reached ominous proportions.

In short, *Mathrubhumi's* policy was not one of encouraging labour strike. Even when it sympathised with labour grievances, the paper rarely supported strikes, especially from the late 30s onwards. Its view was that labourers should exhaust all other means before embarking on a strike; they should also think of the adverse effects a strike would have on society and nation. *Mathrubhumi* was suspicious of the role of the Communists in labour strikes, they were accused of exploiting the grievances of the working class for their revolutionary ideology.[166]

Conflicting political positions taken by *Mathrubhumi* and *Deshabhimani* was reflected in its reporting on labour issues. Conflicting reports on the labour problem in the company owned by Samuel Aaron, prominent Congress leader, is a case in point. *Mathrubhumi* charged the Communist leadership of fomenting labour troubles in the company because of political animosity to Aaron. *Deshabhimani*, on the other hand, accused the company management of anti-labour policy. In their eagerness to show the other side in poor light, there seemed to have been motivated reporting by both the papers.

Even when acknowledging the support that *Mathrubhumi* gave to the fledging labour movement in the 1920s, the fact remains that real awakening

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165 Ibid., 8 May 1947.

166 Ibid., 3 June 1947.

among the working class of Malabar took place in the 1930s, and in this awakening the Kerala Congress Socialist Party and its organ the *Prabhatham* played the leading role. Inspired by the class ideology of socialism, they believed that the struggle to end the exploitation of one class by another was as important, if not more, as the struggle for freedom. In the enormous growth of trade union movement in the 1930s, the service rendered by the *Prabhatham* was inestimable. After the demise of *Prabhatham* in the late 30s, *Deshabhimani* took its place from 1942 onwards and continued its mission with dedication. If the workers of Kerala, now, are the most politically conscious and also the best paid in India, the credit must also go to these left organs, the *Prabhatham* and the *Deshabhimani*.

Peasant Movement

In Malabar, the class struggle of peasants proved to be more powerful and militant than that of the industrial labour. The peasant struggle was largely instrumental in establishing the Communists as the predominant political force in the area. Class organisations, in the real sense of the word, did not arise among the peasants of Malabar until the mid 30s. Before that, there were certain organised attempts to mitigate some of the miseries of the tenants. The work of the Malabar Kudiyan Sangham, especially its efforts to get the Malabar Tenancy Bill passed, and the great support that the nationalist press extended to these attempts, has already been noted earlier.

Such early organised attempts were, however, not inspired by any revolutionary class ideology, envisaging fundamental changes in the existing social structure, which favoured exploitation of the tenant farmers by the landlords and the administration. In this sense, real class organisation of peasants in Malabar began only with the spread of socialist/communist ideas among them. The militant class struggle that ensued in Malabar, especially in North Malabar, was well supported by the *Prabhatham* in the 30s and the

Deshabhimani in the 40s. Other nationalist papers, though acknowledging the extreme poverty and misery among the peasants, wanted to concentrate on a Gandhian form of struggle against the foreign government and largely ignored the severe oppression of the tenants by the landlords.

For instance, the 'Swabhimani', referring to the impending resettlement and tax-hike, urged the janmies and tenants of Malabar to emulate the Bardoli farmers: "Land tax is already too heavy in Malabar and it is deplorable that peasants and janmis are alike apathetic. . . Let Bardoli be an example to the janmis and tenants of Malabar. Power of endurance and courage of the villagers of Bardoli saved them from a similar danger . . ."[167] True to its Gandhian credentials, 'Swabhimani' did not show any class difference between the landlords and the peasants and sympathised with both of them. That the tenants were as much exploited by the janmis as they were burdened by the governments tax policy did not seem to have weighed much with the nationalist paper.

The *Mathrubhumi* was little more realistic in acknowledging that there were other serious problems than the tax burden to the peasants. The paper reiterated the need for continuing the struggle with renewed vigour until the Government took a favourable decision in the case of reducing the land tax. The editorial reminded the peasants that there was no use in cursing fate. "Apart from tax burden, there are other serious problems like debt liability. To address all those problems, the land tax conference should be transformed into a real peasant conference", *Mathrubhumi* suggested.[168]

But the *Prabhatham*, armed as it was with the Marxian analytical tool, did not see the peasant problem merely as a consequence of British mis-rule, terrible though they were. The Congress Socialist organ also threw light on

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167 *Swabhimani*, 16 August 1929.

168 *Mathrubhumi*, 5 October 1933.

the prevalent social structure which bred exploitation of one class by another. After explaining the miserable condition of the Indian peasant as a result of the administrative policy of the British, the *Prabhatham* concluded an article on "The peasants of India under the British administration" as follows: "The peasants cannot lift their heads unless they free themselves from the iron fists of janmis and capitalists."[169]

Pointing out that the foundations of the Empire and Capitalism were fixed on the feeble skeletons of the peasants, another article published in the *Prabhatham* declared that the condition of the peasants cannot be bettered by small changes in the administration. "For that, the present day social order has to be destroyed and remoulded. If their state to be bettered landlordism will have to be destroyed . . . The peasants will have to get the real ownership of lands. All this may mean shaking the foundations of the Empire. Hence the need for complete independence which is the birth right of the peasants . . . They will not conclude any treaty with the British Empire. They will join shoulders with the labourers and will fight till the end for swaraj." The article, then, went on to exhort all to unite these two classes by means of forming their unions in villages on trade union lines and other ways.[170]

Even 'Manorama', not known for progressive outlook, vigorously argued the peasants' cause. In a leading article, the paper dealt with the increasing hardships of the ryots and characterised the measures proposed by the Government to meet the situation as tardy. 'Manorama' contrasted the attitude of the Government of Cochin and Travancore in this matter and observed that with a view to giving some immediate relief to the ryots, the Government should be prepared to reduce the land revenue in proportion to the drop in the prices of agricultural produce and that the landlords should

169 *Prabhatham*, 4 March 1935.

170 Ibid., 11 March 1935.

likewise reduce rents and that sales of properties for debts or arrears of revenue should be suspended.[171]

The growing influence of the leftists among the peasants of Malabar and the formation of the Karshaka Sangham (Kisan Sangh) under their leadership was viewed with alarm by the *Mathrubhumi*; it feared that this would result in the Congress losing its influence among a large section of the people. In a leader entitled "Congress and Karshaka Sanghams", it expressed this fear in unmistakable terms. "Though the oppressed classes with specific economic interests may have to organise themselves for securing their own needs and rights, we should not forget that Congress is the only national organisation struggling for Indian freedom from the British imperialist power. Therefore, the development of other organisations in the political field, which tend to decrease the strength of the Congress or to compete with it, is likely to obstruct the national requirement of winning freedom. Without getting complete independence, the interests of labourers and farmers will not be protected." Without naming them, *Mathrubhumi* also made the accusation against the Communists that 'a group of extremists, who were keen to organise peasants against the Congress and to display the red flag against the national flag, were working amongst the farmers'. The paper exhorted every Congressman to oppose such attempts to create undesirable dissension in the political field.[172]

The formation of the Congress ministry under the leadership of Rajagopalachari had raised great expectations among the farmers. Though the nationalist Government took certain measures to provide relief to the farmers, these were not enough to satisfy the high expectations of the latter. Not satisfied with these half-measures, the *Prabhatham* exhorted the peasants

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171 NNPR, July to August 1935, TNA, Chennai.

172 *Mathrubhumi*, 19 December 1937.

to organize themselves into a great force so that the Congress would not be able to ignore it. The paper did acknowledge the new vigour visible in the five agricultural sector owing to the agricultural programme of the Congress Government, but felt it to be too meager to be of much help to the aggrieved farmers. *Prabhatham* specifically mentioned the alleged surrender of the Rajaji Government before the agitation of landlords and moneylenders with respect to the provisions of the Agricultural Relief Act and also added that debt relief was only a temporary solution to the problems of farmers. The paper demanded reduction of rent.[173]

The *Prabhatham* frequently accused the rightists in the Congress of colluding with the janmis, moneylenders and vested interests in opposing the Karshaka Sangham. An article on the Hosdurg Taluk Gandhi Sangham alleged that it was not the love and faith in Gandhism or in the Congress that was behind the formation of the Gandhi Sangham; rather it was formed by those vested interests panicked by the awakening among the exploited peasants, after they organized themselves seeking redress their grievances.[174]

In December 1938, hundreds of peasant representatives, led by the Karshaka Sangham, marched to the district headquarters in Kozhikode, to make a representation to the Collector, E.C. Wood. But they could not meet him because he would not change his already fixed it itinerary, according to which he would be on an official visit to Malappuram on that day. Both the *Prabhatham* and the *Mathrubhumi* condemned the action of the Collector. Expressing strong resentment at the behaviour of the Collector, *Prabhatham* said that it suggested that his convenience was more important than the convenience of around a thousand peasant representatives.[175] The *Mathrubhumi* thought that the Collector should have cancelled his other

173 *Prabhatham*, 22 August 1938.

174 Ibid., 10 October 1938.

175 Ibid., 12 December 1938.

programmes to make use of the opportunity to meet the peasant representatives and understand their grievances in person. If his official programme was unavoidable, he could have deputed one of his subordinates to meet them.[176]

Both the papers also disapproved of the actions of the Deputy Tahsildars of Kottayam and Chirakkal in issuing a circular, under instruction from the Collector, which envisaged deploying of special police in the troubled areas (there were violent clashes between the police and the Karshaka Sangham activists in certain areas) at the expense of the people of those areas. The *Prabhatham* viewed the circulars as also the Collector's unwillingness to meet the peasant representatives as part of the efforts made by the janmi-bureaucrat combine to destroy the Karshaka Sangham.[177] The *Mathrubhumi* felt that the circulars were unnecessary and unwarranted , as the Revenue Minister Prakasam had already made it clear that the Government did not intend to deploy punitive police.

Even while criticizing the Rajaji Government for not doing enough in the agricultural sector, the *Prabhatham* acknowledged that the Government was alive to the problems of the peasants. According to the paper there were mainly three obstacles before the Government in the implementation of the kind of reforms that the Congress and the peasants would like it to do. They were the special powers of the Governor, non-co-operation from the higher officials and the organized power of the mighty. Referring to the second All Malabar Peasant Conference being organized at Chevayur (December, 1938), the paper advised the peasant representatives to prepare such resolutions and programmes as to strengthen the Congress. It also reminded them that there were people in the Congress who were against the interests of the peasants;

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176 *Mathrubhumi*, 13 December 1938.

177 *Prabhatham*, 12 December 1938.

therefore, the peasants should prepare themselves to make the Congress a real mass organization, by putting an end to its compromising attitude.[178]

Thus, even at the end of 1938, the Communists, who led the peasant movement, were still talking of strengthening the Congress and making it more representative of the mass of the people. However, the Gandhian Congressmen and newspapers supporting them like the *Mathrubhumi* viewed this talk of strengthening the Congress as a mere tactic, just to make use of the Congress legacy to strengthen their influence on the peasants and the labouring class.

The Chevayur Conference of the All Malabar Karshaka Sangham was a huge success, both in terms of participation and the enthusiasm it generated. Even *Mathrubhumi* acknowledged that the Karshaka Sangham represented the people's power that would provide a new energy and aim to the national reconstruction enterprise. This appreciation was, however, qualified by an apprehension that if the flow and working of this power was not led through an ideal and respectful path, social life would beget misfortune in place of blessing from it.[179] Though *Mathrubhumi* did not elaborate on this "ideal and respectful path", there could not have been any doubt that it meant the Gandhian path.

Referring to the participation of KPCC president, Kozhippurath Madava Menon, a rightwing leader, in the rally held in connection with the Chevayur Conference and *Mathrubhumi*s support to the resolutions passed at the Conference, the *Prabhatham* pointed out that the participation of those Congressmen who did not believe in class war showed the justness of the demands of the Karshaka Sangham and that these demands came within the scope of the election manifesto of the Congress. The participation of the

178 Ibid., 19 December 1938.

179 *Mathrubhumi*, 21 December 1938.

Congress rightists was also taken by the paper as proof of the fact that the peasant movement could become a prominent part of the national movement.[180]

The allegation, often made against the Karshaka Sangham that they were using social boycott as a weapon in their struggle against the janmis, was found to be true by the *Mathrubhumi*. The newspaper observed that there was no justification for such an agitational programme, when a national government (Rajaji Government), responsible to the people, was in power; it would only strengthen the retrogressive forces.[181]

It is not that the *Mathrubhumi* laid full responsibility for the violence in North Malabar at the door of the Karshaka Sangham. The newspaper advised restraint on the part of the janmis. It acknowledged the complaint of the Karshaka Sangham that the janmis were extracting, apart from the tax and rent, various other dues which did not have any legal sanction. *Mathrubhumi* also recognized the troubles the peasants had to face when the janmis also happened to be the 'adhikaris' (Village officers). The oppression that the janmis and their managers could inflict on the illiterate tenants in the prevailing socio-political conditions was also recognized by the nationalist paper. Most of all, it acknowledged the fact that the root cause for the present troubles was the awakening seen among the farmers in recent times and their efforts to resist the extraction of illegal dues. *Mathrubhumi* warned the bureaucracy not to mistake this awakening for a propensity to riots and try to suppress them.[182]

Mathrubhumi, here, authenticate almost all charges that the Karshaka Sangham and the *Prabhatham* had made against the landlords. Still, it

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180 *Prabhatham*, 26 December 1938.

181 *Mathrubhumi*, 23 December 1938.

182 Ibid.

consistently opposed the peasant movement led by the Sangham, alleging violence on their part.

Referring to the visit of Revenue Minister. T. Prakasham to Malabar in December 1938 to inquire in person the drought-related problems in the agricultural sector as well as about the alleged no-rent and no-tax campaign of the Karshaka Sangham, the *Prabhatham* said: "The Minister is convinced that the Karshaka Sangham is not working through violent means for some unreasonable demands, as is alleged by critics."[183] Mean while, the newspaper continued to highlight the police highhandedness against the Karshaka Sangham workers and their families in North Malabar.

The *Prabhatham* charged the janmis of Malabar of propagating the view that the Karshaka Sangham was against the Congress and made it clear that actually the peasants were with the Congress. [184] That the *Prabhatham*'s complaint about police atrocities was not baseless is born out by the fact that even *Mathrubhumi*, a firm supporter of the Rajaji Government, said that the assumption of power by the Congress in the province had not made difference in the attitude of the police.[185]

The *Prabhatham* went out of publication in 1939. For three years after that, the Communists and the class organizations under their leadership were without the service of a powerful propaganda machinery. But the launching of the *Deshabhimani* in 1942 more than filled the vaccum created by the demise of the *Prabhatham*.

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183 *Prabhatham*, 2 January 1939.

184 Ibid., 1 January 1939.

185 *Mathrubhumi*, 17 June 1939.

Referring to the letter written by the Kayyur martyrs[186] to P.C. Joshi, the Secretary of the Communist Party of India, the *Deshabhimani*, in an inspiring editorial entitled "The Call of the Gallows" wrote: "What the blood of Kayyur comrades demand from us is to establish national unity, establish Congress-League unity, inspire each farmer to join the Sangham (Karshaka Sangham), and inspire each student, teacher and woman to strengthen and widen their respective organizations . . . That is the call of their gallows …"[187] The newspaper, here, makes use of the sympathy for the martyrs and the anger at their execution to exhort the people to strengthen the class organizations by pointing out that that was the best homage that could be given to the brave souls.

The growing peasant unrest in North Malabar, leading to frequent violent incidents was a major theme of the *Deshabhimani* in the 1940s. The communist organ highlighted the police atrocities against the peasant activists and their families. However, the bureaucracy and the critics of the Communists maintained that most of the reports on police atrocities published by the *Deshabhimani* were exaggerated and some of them even false. In a report entitled "Police Raj" on the police excesses in Pappinisseri, the 'Deshabimani' wrote: "The police dragged, beat and insulted the women volunteers. The Union secretary, Kanthalot, was tied with rope and kicked. He became unconsiousness . . . The police fisted a pregnant woman named

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186 The Kayyur incident took place on 28 March 1941 at Kayyur near Kannur, in which a 200-strong peasant procession forced a police constable who came along their way to join the procession with a red flag in hand. When the procession came near the local ferry, the constable jumped into it in the hope that he could swim himself to safety. But the mob pelted him with stones and he was drowned. In a sensational trial in which 60 persons were chargesheeted, four of the accused were sentenced to death on charge of murder. They were hanged on 29th March 1943. For a detailed study on the Kayyur incident, see K.K.N. Kurup, *The Kayyur Riot* (Calicut, 1978).

187 *Deshabhimani*, 28 March 1943.

Kavilavalappil Kalyani, and she is ill. Several have received injuries. Kazhutholan Kannan has a bayonet wound . . . "[188]

Later, a police inquiry report stated that the report of the pregnant woman being beaten was false. K. Kelappan, who paid a visit to the trouble-torm areas, also stated the *Deshabhimani* report to be false, after talking to the woman concerned.

The collusion between the bureaucracy and the landlords of Malabar was a frequent allegation made by the *Deshabhimani*. That the Deshabhimanni's allegation was not without substance is clear from the fact that the MSP in several places were the guests of the local landlords. They were given proper accommodation, maintenance, etc. for suppressing the peasant activities.[189] The resistance offered by the peasants to this unholy alliance was pointed out to be the provocation for most of the violent incidents that took place in North Malabar.

In its issue dated 7 July 1946, *Deshabhimani* published an article which alleged that the District Magistrate was working against the Congress Government's food scheme.[190] A cartoon published in the same paper on 12th July 1946 showed the District Magistrate brushing aside directions of the Government and issuing 35000 bags of rice to the wholesale merchants. Some currency notes were seen on his table and some in his pockets, suggesting dishonest practice.[191]

An article with two cartoons depicting two stages in the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 with an anecdote of memoirs, compiled Kunhiraman Nair,

188 Ibid., 26 May 1946.

189 Audit account of the official receivers appointed by the sub-court, Tellicherry, in O.S. 28/1945, Vengayil family, Quoted in KKN Kurup, "Agrarian Struggle in Kerala", Trivandrum, 1989.

190 *Deshabhimani*, 7 July 1946.

191 Ibid., 12 July 1946.

was published by the 'Deshabimani' in connection with the 25th anniversary of the Rebellion. In the article, Wariyankunnathu Kunhammed Haji, the rebel leader, was extolled as a leader of the aggrieved Hindu and Muslim peasants, who led the latter against the landlords and British Imperialism. In one of the cartoons, the murder of a retired police inspector who opposed the peasant's movement was justified.[192] What is particularly significant about these articles is that it was for the first time that the Rebellion of 1921 was prominently characterized as a peasant rebellion, as contrasted with the prevalent view of it being a communal bursting.

That the Congress Government under Prakasam was no different from the previous imperialist Government in its attitude towards the peasant and trade union movements was a constant theme pursued by the *Deshabhimani*. The Communist organ was justified in its complaint about the Prakasam Ministry in this regard in so far as the latter made use of the same laws against the Communists which the Congress leaders had severely criticized earlier when used against them by the previous imperialist Government. In its issue dated 15th September 1946, *Deshabhimani* published the photos of the ten accused in the Kayyur, Moirazha, Mattannur and Tellicherry cases along with remarks of some leading Communists about the disturbances in 1940 and extolling the way in which the accused carried out the struggle in defiance of the prohibiting orders. An allegation was also made that the same police, the same lathis, the same bullets and the same 144 orders were being employed today also by the Congress Government under Prakasam.[193]

M.S. Devadas, the editor of *Deshabhimani* wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister, T. Prakasam, protesting against the Governor's order forfeiting his paper's security of Rs.1000/- for publishing the article, "1921's

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192 Ibid., 25 August 1946.

193 Ibid., 15 September 1946.

Echo and Warning-Communist Party's Proclamation". In the letter Devadas cited the newspaper's fearless reporting of the police atrocities on the Karshaka Sangham activists and their families as the immediate provocation for the action against it. The editor wrote: "Publication of the news of atrocities, and provocative harassment which the MSP (Malabar Special Police) are committing on the poor villagers of North Malabar and their women and children, should be highly embarrassing to the British officials and their underlings . . . It is reported that the present operations of the MSP in North Malabar have been planned directly by the present Collector and the Tellicherry Joint Magistrate, also a white official, in co-operation, of course, with the reactionary anti-Congress big landlords of the area who have been notorious for their semi-feudal ways of oppression ever since the time of the last Congress ministry. The British officialdom knows that the only "safe" allies they have got in these days of popular upheaval against themselves are these anti-national pillars of native feudalism who have always been pro-British and anti-Congress . . ."[194] The anti-national and pro-British attitude of the landlord class and the great potentialities of politicizing the peasants and workers, to strengthen the national movement, were frequently emphasized by the *Deshabhimani*.

K.A. Keraleeyan, prominent leader of the Karshaka Sangham, in an article published in the *Deshabhimani*, held the Congress Government responsible for the Karivellur incident, in which two persons were killed. The police opened fire on the activists of the Sangham, when they tried to forcibly prevent the transportation of paddy form the granary of the Chirakkal Raja. Keraleeyan claimed that the peasants were actually trying to implement the procurement scheme of the KPCC, according to which paddy should not be taken out of deficit villages. He wrote: "The attempt of the Congress Ministry to help the landlords and the wholesale hoarders by shooting to death the

194 Public Dept. G. O. No.692 dated 4/3/47 (Regional Archives, Kozhikode).

countrymen who sincerely worked for making the Government procurement of rationing scheme a success, will only end in a final collapse of the scheme."[195] However, the *Mathrubhumi* maintained that the existing law did not prevent the Chirakkal Raja from taking out the paddy from his granary or the village and that it was the use of force by the Karshaka Sangham activists which provoked the police firing. As in the case of many other violent incidents in connection with the peasant movement in North Malabar, the *Mathrubhumi* and the *Deshabhimani* gave different versions on the Karivellur incident. Invariably, *Mathrubhumi*s version fitted well with the version of the Congress Government.

Mathrubhumi, referring to the Karivellur incident, alleged that the Communists were misusing the democratic freedom under the Congress Government, to strengthen their organization and to put their programme into practice through undemocratic means. Recalling that the Congress had already acceptd an economic programme similar to the socialist ideals, the paper said that the Communists did not have the patience and wisdom to wait for the reforms under the consideration of the Congress ministry. Pointing out that the Karivellur incident was followed by another clash with the police at Ellaranhi, *Mathrubhumi* observed that it was the duty of the Government to save Chirakkal taluk from a possible civil war and requested it to take firm measures to avoid such a situation.[196]

The *Deshabhimani* made the allegation that the Congress leaders were only tools in the hands of officials and janmi capitalists.[197] The paper also called the *Mathrubhumi* the 'black market-landlord-police" paper.[198]

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195 *Deshabhimani*, 25 December 1946.

196 *Mathrubhumi*, 2 January 1947.

197 Op. cit., 9 January 1947.

198 *Deshabhimani* 27 February 1947.

Mathrubhumi published an article written by K. Kelappan, after visiting Karivellur. He denied the Communist allegation of horrible police oppression and torture having taken place in Karivellur. Kelappan supported an enquiry into the incident, as demanded by the Communists; but he wanted Communist activities in the area also to be made a part of the enquiry,[199] hinting, there by, that police alone could not be made responsible for the violence in North Malabar.

In an article published in the *Deshabhimani*, A.K. Gopalan, the Communist leader, demanded an open enquiry into the state of affairs in North Malabar, which was marred by violence. Printing out that the official version of the situation in the problem areas was radically different from the Communist version as expressed in the pages of the *Deshabhimani* which was again different from what the Congressmen and the *Mathrubhumi* propagated, he observed that a public enquiry by a non-official would be able to clear doubts in the minds of the people. He also put forward the condition that the MSP should be withdrawn from the area so that people could fearlessly come forward to tender evidence.[200]

The *Deshabhimani* often accused Congressmen of colluding with policemen in harassing the farmers and even in molesting their women. The following report is an instance: "The MSPs and the mean fellows clad in khaddar who follow them to betray people and loot them, went to Kottayattu the day before yesterday and violated three peasant women . . . . these murderous, beastly and khaddar-clad rowdies caught hold of these poor women; to prevent their cries being heard outside, balls of cloth were thrust into their mouths and they were pushed down and all these devils raped them . . ."[201]

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199 *Mathrubhumi*, 5 January 1947.

200 *Deshabhimani*, 15 January 1947.

201 Ibid., 16 February 1947.

Almost daily the *Deshabhimani* published reports of alleged police atrocities against Karshaka Sangham activists and their families. A specimen of such a report can be cited here: "Reports are being received every day from Chirakkal taluk about the policemen trespassing into the houses of Sangham workers and carrying away even salt bowls and rags as loot. Even the tiles over the roofs of the houses of Subramonya Shenoy and P. Kunhiraman have been removed and taken away. Even the cooking utensils were removed from the houses of Kanthalot Kunhambu, K.P.R. Gopalan and P.Krishna Pillai. Are the countrymen to understand that K.Kelappan's sense of justice justifies all these? . . . .[202] The paper characterized such actions from the part of the police as the "most despicable, uncivilized and beastly form of wreaking vengeance".

The *Deshabhimani* hailed the Karivellur and Ellerinhi incidents, in which a few peasants fell to the bullets of the police, as milestones in the history of the peasant movement of Malabar. It exhorted the peasants: "Advance forward without caring anything for the oppression, without getting upset due to the harassment of the enemy, without caring anything for the threats of the blacklegs, without worrying over the defeats sustained in the process of the struggle of the movement and with taking lessons from all of them for a successful finale."[203]

The Communist led peasant struggle in North Malabar which often led to violent incidents, was justified by the *Deshabhimani* thus: "This is not the first time that political workers have resorted to geurilla warfare; the struggle of 1942 being an example. In the Bomb case (Kizhariyur Bomb case) the creation of imperialism- some of the accused were in hiding. That was a struggle of the Congress. Their houses were not looted then. No policemen

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202 Ibid., 23 February 1947.

203 Ibid., 27 February 1947.

entered the house of Aruna Asaf Ali, Achyut Patwardhan, Mathai Manjuran and Kidavu (the last two were accused in the Kizhariyur Bomb case) who were in hiding during the struggle of 1942 . . . "[204]

It is very well to remember here that the Communists and the *Deshabhimani* were bitter critics of the 1942 struggle, including the Kizhariyur incident, which they now claim to emulate. Infact, the issues of *Deshabhimani*, of the 1942-43 period, were full of reports and editorials, warning the people of sabotage by fifth columnists, referring to the geurilla tactics of the Socialists, the heroes of the 1942 struggle. The justification of guurilla tactics by the *Deshabhimani* can also be taken as an acknowledgement of the allegation made by the rightwing Congressmen and the *Mathrubhumi* that the Karshaka Sangham was involved in a violent struggle.

The police authorities were so annoyed by the "virulent and poisonous propaganda work" done by the *Deshabhimani* that they frequently requested the Government to suppress the paper. The *Deshabhimani* reported on 9 April 1947 that MSP men raped two women, viz., Cheyayi aged 30 and Kunhakkam aged 55, in the Ellerenhi village.[205] The Inspector of Police who enquired into the reported incident, was able to trace the two women. When Cheyayi was asked about the reported incident, she "expressed unconcealed surprise" and said that it was "only a story woven by some interested persons to suit their purpose." Kunhakkam, who appeared to be aged around 60, when told about the allegation involving her, said that she was "old enough to be the grandmother of the oldest among the MSP men" stationed at Ellerenhi. She added that the men had been treating her with all consideration and courtesy which her age demanded. The Inspector alleged that the

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204 Ibid., 23 February 1947.

205 Ibid., 9 April 1947.

Deshabhimani contained "malicious and scurrilous propaganda, aimed at discrediting the police and undermining the public confidence in them".[206]

The Deputy Superintendent of Police, Kannur, who also enquired into the alleged incident reported that the 'allegations were palpable falsehoods published by the unscrupulous *Deshabhimani* which had no respect for truth and decency in their malice towards the police. He also reported that the source of the report could not be located as the *Deshabhimani* refused to divulge the name of their correspondent.

The District Magistrate, in his report, recalled that on previous occasions too, rape reports published by the *Deshabhimani* were found to be untrue.[207] (An earlier report in the *Deshabhimani* had said that the MSP men raped three women in Kandakayi village. When the Deputy Superintendent of Police asked the Manager of the paper to disclose either the name of the correspondent or the names of the three women alleged to have been raped, he refused). The District Magistrate vehemently opposed a public enquiry by a non-official, saying that: "this will be a triumph for communism and for communist methods."[208]

Whether all such reports about police brutality published by the *Deshabhimani* were factually correct or not, it is difficult to find out. But it is significant that such reports about rape and molestation of women did not appear in other leading newspapers like the *Mathrubhumi*. Considering the fact that respected leaders like K.Kelappan had also found, on personal enquiry, certain reports to be untrue, it is difficult to accuse *Mathrubhumi* of deliberate black-out. As for the police enquiry, however, there is much logic

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206 Public Department, G.O. No. 2658, dated 25/8.47 (RAK).

207 Letter from District Magistrate to the Chief Secretary, Government of Madras, dated 8/5/47 (Public Dept. G.O. No.2658 dtd. 25/8/47), RAK.

208 Letter from the District Magistrate to the Chief Secretary dated 9/5/47 (Public Dept. G.O.No.2658 dt 25/8/47).

in the contention of the *Deshabhimani* that if police officers and other Government officials questioned the victims of rape, females would naturally deny, out of modesty, that they had been molested. The unwillingness of the police and the bureaucracy to face a public enquiry by a non-official indicated that they had something to hide from the public.

Thus it can be seen that it was first the *Prabhatham* and then the *Deshabhimani* which spearheaded the campaign infavour of the peasant movement in North Malabar. The *Mathrubhumi*, while acknowledging the genuineness of the grievances of the tenants, was critical of the violent nature of the Communist-led movement.

Oppressed Classes

"Each class had its own perception of a free India. The dominant social classes influenced the nationalist call given by the Indian National Congress from the point of view of their own vested interests while the oppressed social classes interpreted this call in relation to their own economic and social grievances", observed Kapil Kumar.[209] The Congress, during the nationalist struggle, is found to have adhered to the dominant classes. However, the workers and peasants interpreted the Congress messages of nationalism in relation to their own economic and social grievances.

It was with the rise of a socialist group in the Congress that the mobilisation of workers and peasants was undertaken as a serious mission. The left-oriented press played its own role in this awakening among the oppressed and marginalized classes. In Malabar, this role was played mainly by the *Prabhatham* and the *Deshabhimani*. When, in the mid-30s, the Congress Socialists had been making all efforts to organize the peasants and workers and the *Prabhatham* had been publishing leaders, and articles and

[209] Kapil Kumar (ed.): "Congress and classes- Workers and Peasants" Introductory.

even poems, stressing the need for organising these marginalized classes with great potential for revolution, the Gandhian Congress and the newspapers supporting them, did not do much in this direction.

In an article on the policy and programmes of the Congress Socialist Party, the *Prabhatham* said: "the Party is trying to organize the peasants and labourers with Congress aid, if possible, and independently, if necessary . . . No one can say that such work is inconsistent with the ideals and the working programme of the Congress."[210]

No other newspaper in Malabar did as much to bring the peasants and workers into the mainstream of nationalist politics in the 1930s as did the *Prabhatham*. The paper believed that the fight for swaraj could not end unless the reins passed into the hands of the peasants and labourers. It exhorted political leaders to unite these two classes by means of forming unions and to make them understand that the swaraj fight was for their cause and that swaraj was their utopia.[211]

The *Prabhatham* held the view that the fight for swaraj should be synonymous with the fight which the labourers and the ryots were carrying on to free themselves from the oppression and exploitation to which they were subjected. The paper reminded that it was not the encouragement of village industries (an obvious reference to the constructive programme of the Congress under Gandhi), but the economic war of the poor against oppression that would bring swaraj, not the mockery of a swaraj that simply transferred authority from the whiteman to the blackman, but the real swaraj resulting from a fusion of national independence with economic independence. It would be a swaraj in which the Government would be in the hands of the labourers and the agriculturists and where there would be no landlord,

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210 *Prabhatham*, 4 March 1935.

211 Ibid., 11 March 1935.

moneylender, capitalist, banker or king. The *Prabhatham* exhorted: "Let the whole country be spotted with organizations of peasants and labourers who possess self-consciousness and are imbued with a war mentality."[212]

In the fourth Kerala State Congress Socialist Conference that took place in June 1937, Meharali, in his presidential address, referred to the 'hostility being expressed by Gandhi and his followers to class organizations of workers, peasants and others'. This did not go unreplied by the *Mathrubhumi* which reminded the Socialist friends that it was Gandhiji who for the first time, stressed the importance of the Congress getting the support of the masses and mass organisations. It should also be remembered that it was Gandhiji who started the Ahamedabad Mill Workers' Union, among the oldest of workers' unions in India and also in the forefront in terms of organizational strength and financial position. *Mathrubhumi* observed: "Casting aspersions on such a person is not mere lack of gratitude, but is severe ingratitude."[213] Even while fiercely defending Gandhi, the nationalist paper acknowledged the praise-worthy service rendered by the Congress Socialists in organizing the masses.

The *Prabhatham* published the summary of a speech made by P. Krishna Pillai in June 1938, which again, stressed the importance of organizing the peasants, who constituted 70 percent of the population, on the basis of their immediate economic needs, in order to realize complete independence. Krishna Pillai argued that the freedom movement was infact a struggle of the ordinary people of this country against the economic exploitation of the British imperialists and their Indian collaborators. As such the struggle of the peasants and workers against exploitation was also freedom struggle. The communist leader condemned the attempt to create

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212 Ibid., 29 April 1935.

213 *Mathrubhumi*, 22 June 1937.

misunderstanding about the red flag. He maintained that the red flag was the flag of labourers and peasants of the world and that it was not imported here from Russia.[214] It is relevant here to point out that the *Mathrubhumi* often condemned the tendency to give primacy to red flag over the national flag in the processions of workers and peasants.

By the late 1930s peasants and workers organization under Communist leadership were taking active interest in the nationalist politics, but this was viewed with suspicion by the rightwing leadership of the Congress. On the eve of the Delhi AICC of 1938, the *Prabhatham*, through a leader, exhorted the apex body of the Congress to extend a friendly welcome to the anti-imperialist peasant organizations, labour unions and student organization, instead of viewing them with suspicion.[215]

Evidently, the Communists did not have faith in the Indian National Congress so far as the protection of working class interests was concerned. The *Prabhatham* exhorted the working class of Kerala to be prepared for a resistance if the Congress, which represented all interests, sacrificed the interests of the working class. "By such resistance, the working class is not opposing the Congress, but only a specific action of the Congress leadership" the paper contended.[216]

The *Prabhatham* wanted the Congress leadership to properly understand the role of peasants, labourers and students in making the Congress struggle against British imperialism an effective one. In a leader published on the eve of the Poorna Swaraj Day of 1939, the paper noted that the Congress had been able to resist, to an extend, the fraudulent policy of imperialism. It was not merely the 50 lakh or so Congress members who

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214 *Prabhatham*, 27 June 1938.

215 Ibid., 19 September 1938.

216 Ibid.

made possible this success; it was also the organized farmers, labourers and students who made this success possible. It exhorted Congressmen to take an oath on the Poorna Swaraj Day to make use of the people's power provided by these class organizations in the struggle for freedom. The paper also cautioned the people against the inclination of some Congress leaders to break this great people's power.[217]

The *Mathrubhumi* voiced the concern of the rightwing leaders when it doubted whether the strengthening of the workers and peasants organizations under the Socialists would help the progress of nationalist struggle, as the Socialists were allegedly engaged in discrediting the Congress and its programme. The paper even alleged that the socialist programme would help only in leading the workers and peasants organizations into the control of the Communists and there by into foreign control, meaning there by the Comintern and the Soviet Communists. [218] Later, *Mathrubhumi* could feel vindicated when prominent leaders of the Congress Socialist Party via, M.R.Masani, Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan and Asok Mehta, resigned from the Executive Committee of the Party citing among other reasons, that the party was being brought under the control of the Comintern.[219]

The great interest that the left newspapers took in the mobilization of the oppressed and marginalized classes like the peasants and workers was quite natural. The pioneering role of *Prabhatham* in this regard was especially very significant.

Student Politics

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217 Ibid., 23 January 1939.

218 *Mathrubhumi*, 6 June 1939.

219 For details of the widening gulf between the congress Socialists and the Communists, see Mino Masani, "Bliss was it in that Dawn" New Delhi, 1977, pp.125-156.

The active participation of students in the national movement in Malabar started with the Gandhian movement-both in its agitational and constructive forms. A large number of students boycotted their schools and colleges during the Non-cooperation movement. However, students as an organized political force, came into being only in the 1903s. The increasing acceptance of socialist ideology among them and the formation of the All India Students Federation (AISF) were important catalysts in the respect. Nevertheless, not all political groups and newspapers welcomed this new development in Malabar politics; while the left political groups and their press organs extended full support to the emerging student movement, the rightwing political groups and their supporters in the press thought that the politicization of the student community could spell disaster for their future.

The *Mathrubhumi* belonged to the latter category. Referring to a speech of Rajagopalachari in which he cautioned against the students taking "excessive interest" in politics, the nationalist paper observed: "Student life is an opportunity to acquire the knowledge and ability to lead a successful life; if that is misused for trivial agitations, the students will be doing great disservice to themselves and the nation."[220] *Mathrubhumi* which always stood with the Gandhian leadership, fully agreed with Rajaji in comparing the student agitation during the Non-cooperation movement to a farmer feeding his family with seeds during a famine. It advised students that such agitations should not be a regular feature of their student life.

In November 1937, a group of students, allegedly under Communist inspiration, marred a public meeting attended by K.Kelappan at Thalassery. Consequent on this incident, Kelappan wrote an article in the *Mathrubhumi* criticizing the students' over-indulgence in politics under "extremist

220 *Mathrubhumi*, 19 October 1937.

influence" (read "communist influence"), regretting that they were going astray and requesting them not to proceed on the wrong path.

EMS joined issue with Kelappan and alleged, in an article published by the *Mathrubhumi*, that rightist leaders like Kelappan were now turning against student politics because the students were now willing to accept non-Gandhian leadership. He pointed out that the Gandhians did not find any fault with the students participation in the Non-cooperation movement, the anti-Simon agitation and the Civil Disobedience movement; they encouraged the students to involve in the implementation of the Gandhian constructive work during vacation period. The students were intelligent enough and matured enough to do all this. However, when they demanded modernization of the education system and reduction of fee, the same leaders thought that they were unintelligent and immature, EMS contended. He also explained that until recent times, the student movement had been only a tool of Congress propaganda. Now the situation had changed; the students, with all their love and respect for the Congress were not willing to be mere shadow of the Congress.[221]

EMS's reply to K. Kelappan could be taken as a reply to the *Mathrubhumi* as well; both had similar views on student participation in politics.

The Congress Socialist Party organ, the *Prabhatham*, on the other hand, encouraged the new political awakening among the student community in Malabar and favoured their active participation in the struggle against the foreign imperialists and their Indian collaborators. In October 1938, Gandhi, through a statement, criticized the use of force by the students in their agitation against the Government of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer in Travancore. The *Prabhatham* said that it was a pity that Gandhiji should despise the

[221] Ibid., 11 November 1937.

students, who braved the lathis and rifles of the notorious Travancore police, as aggressors.[222]

Mathrubhumi's disapproval of student politics especially under Communist guidance, was again expressed in an editorial it published about a resolution, passed by the Working Committee of the left oriented Kerala Students Federation on student disturbances in the Annamalai University. The resolution expressed anxiety at the situation obtained there by the dismissal of Baladandayudham and the suspension of five others by the University authorities. The resolution also criticized the action of the Vice-Chancellor in handing over students to the police. The *Mathrubhumi*, even as it accepted that student organizations had a role to play in society, said that if that has to become meaningful they should be conscious of their responsibility. It lamented that lack of responsible behaviour and indiscipline was increasing among the students.

The decision of the University authorities to expel Baladandayadham was justified by the *Mathrubhumi* by pointing out that he had proved himself to be not averse to the use of violence. The action of the Kerala Students Federation was seen by the paper as a declaration of lack of faith in discipline and proper conduct.[223]

With emergence of students organization under Communist guidance, the incidence of student strikes began to increase. *Mathrubhumi* viewed the development with alarm. A students conference presided over by Batlivala the Socialist leader, in Madras in January 1939, passed a resolution which expressed the view that student strike should not be seen as a sign of indiscipline; on the other hand, they must be seen as an expression of the growing self-confidence among the students. The *Mathrubhumi* refused to

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222 *Prabhatham*, 24 October 1938.

223 *Mathrubhumi*, 3 December 1938.

accept the contention. The paper said: “Atleast some of the strikes by students are expressions of thoughtlessness and recklessness that are natural to persons of low intelligence. .. Education is now being controlled by a ministry with national consciousness, which is involved in formulating an educational reform scheme that will help the full development of the personality of our future citizens. To indulge in strikes and agitations at such a juncture in the name of expression of self-confidence will not strengthen the hands of the reformers.”[224]

Mathrubhumi's aversion to student strikes appeared to be stronger whenever a Congress Government happened to be in power; when the students conference passed the resolution hailing strike as an expression of self-confidence, the Rajaji Ministry, “a ministry with national consciousness”, was in power.

In January 1947, the Malabar Students’ Congress, meeting in Kannur, expressed dissatisfaction in the national leadership of the Congress and interpreted the amendment made in the ‘Poorna Swaraj’ oath incorporating faith in the “charka”, as indicative of a retrogressive policy, and exhorted ‘the students to take the old oath, instead of the amended one. In a strongly worded leader, “Whither the students!” the *Mathrubhumi* condemned the action of the Students’ Congress in passing a resolution expressing no-confidence in the Congress leadership. In this context, the newspaper expressed its opinion that “students should involve directly in politics only in the rarest of rare occasions like, eg:- when the very existence of a state is in anger or when, in the course of a freedom movement, there is a phase when everything have to be sacrificed. Even on such rare occasions, they should obey the decisions of the leaders.”[225]

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224 Ibid, 11 January 1939.

225 Ibid., 28 January 1947.

It should not be forgotten that there were occasions earlier when the same *Mathrubhumi* had criticized the inertia among the student community and exhorted them for greater participation in the struggle for freedom led by the Congress. As EMS pointed out, student's participation in politics, for the *Mathrubhumi* was allright so far as they were under the control of the Gandhian leadership; but the paper would make a hue and cry whenever students involved in politics under non-Gandhian leadership, especially Communist leadership.

Teachers Movement

The growing class consciousness among various classes of people like the peasants and workers was also felt among the teaching community, especially among the aided school teachers, who were victims of the exploitation of the aided school managers on the one side and of apathy on the part of the Government. The Communists had a major role in organizing the teachers, and the teachers, in turn, played a major role in popularizing the communist ideology in the villages of Malabar.

The precarious conditions, under which they had to work, pushed them on to an agitational path. The nationalist press generally sympathized with the teachers' problems. The *Prabhatham* and later the '*Deshabhimani*, being left organs, were in the forefront in espousing the cause of the teachers' union in their struggle against the school managers and the government. In guiding the teachers' union in its formative period, the *Prabhatham* had a crucial role. Both the *Prabhatham* and the *Deshabhimani* rendered commendable service in ensuring public support for the teachers' strike; popular support for teachers' strike was especially important because parents were not likely to look with favour a strike that could affect the future prospects pf their children.

The ‘Al-Ameen’ also supported the teachers’ cause. O.V.Govindan Nambiar, one of the founding leaders of the teachers’ union, reminisces that it was an article written by him and published in the ‘Al-Ameen’ and the *Mathrubhumi*, which prepared the way for the formation of teachers’ union in Chirakkal taluk.[226]

The early leaders of the teacher’s movement, who were inspired by the communist ideology, made conscious efforts to array the teachers in the wider anti-imperialist struggle in which the class organizations of peasants and workers had began to take an important part. Articles, underlining the importance of the teachers’ participation in the anti-imperialist movement were published by the *Prabhatham*. T.C.N. Nambiar’s “Union Oru Samrajya Viruddhaa Prasthanam” is an example of such an article. The author tried to show the anti-imperialist nature of the teachers’ movement in Malabar.[227] The increasing involvement of the Union in the wider political movement was resented by the rightists who accused the union of moving towards politics and socialism.

The *Mathrubhumi's* approach towards the teachers’ movement calls for a detained analysis; the paper’s attitude in the issue had an element of ambiguity about it, which was, infact, true of its attitude towards class organizations in general. At times the paper disapproved of the teachers organizing themselves on trade union basis, on other occasions it found nothing wrong in the teachers’ union working on trade union lines. The *Mathrubhumi* supported the demands of the teachers as just and urged the school managers and the Government to concede their just demands. At the same time, the nationalist paper did not support the teachers going on strike to

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226 O.V.Govindan Nambiar, “Njan Orkunnu” in ‘Kannur Jilla K.A. P.T Union Onam Vaarshika Souvenir’, Taliparamba,1972.

227 P.R. Nambiar (ed.), “Keralathile Adhyapaka Prasthanam”, Trivandrum, 1982, p.98.

force the issue. The paper thought that the teacher's organization working as a trade union and proceeding on frequent strikes would endanger the future of the students. It reminded the teachers that their profession was a noble one which demanded certain restraints from them in pressing their demands to be conceded.[228]

Mathrubhumi's opposition to the teachers going on an agitational path, had been consistent. It did not consider the pitiable conditions in which the teachers were placed and the extreme exploitation to which they were subjected, as justification for an agitation, especially a strike. It feared that a teachers agitation would put the primary education of the land in utter chaos. "For the teachers to accept the class ideology of the labourers and to engage in strike, is not only dangerous, but will also ruin the nobility and greatness of the teaching profession."[229] While the paper denounced teachers' agitation even as it sympathized with their cause, it failed to suggest an alternative course of action that was effective enough to make the greedy school managers mend their ways or to compel the authorities to intervene effectively.

The managerial system which facilitated the exploitation of the aided school teachers by the managers came in for sharp criticism. *Mathrubhumi* exposed the greed and corruption among the school managers and urged the Government to take over the administration of the aided schools in its own hands and pay the teachers directly.[230]

Even as the *Mathrubhumi* was advising the teachers against going on strike, the *Prabhatham* congratulated the aided school teachers, who got some of their demands accepted by the Government through agitation. The

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228 *Mathrubhumi*, 29 September 1938.

229 Ibid., 2 January 1940.

230 Ibid., 29 September 1938 and 2 January 1940.

Prabhatham also requested the teachers' union to chalk out a programme for the eradication of illiteracy in the rural areas in return for the concessions they got from the Congress Government.[231]

Even though the *Mathrubhumi* consistently took a position against strike being used by the teachers as a means for the redress of their grievances, the paper defended their right of organization. When the Director of Education repealed the recognition of the Malabar Aided Teachers Union in January 1939, following an agitation which included strike, hartal and the boycott of Gurujana Samajam, the paper criticized the official action.[232] *Mathrubhumi* did not mince words in criticizing the authorities, whenever they used repressive measures to put down teachers' agitation.[233] In a leader published on 25 January 1940, the newspaper criticised the Education Department and the Government for their unsympathetic attitude toward the aided school teachers of Malabar who had just ended their agitation. The decision of the Director of Education to seek apology from teachers facing disciplinary action and assurance of good conduct from them in future, *Mathrubhumi* thought, would only help in wounding the self-respect of the teachers.[234]

The *Mathrubhumi*, which had hitherto been opposed to the teachers organizing themselves on trade union basis, changed its stand in July 1944. In an editorial, the paper said that if other sections could have trade unions, teachers too could have their own. It pointed out that teaching, though a sublime art, had become a miserable profession. Teachers' position could be raised only by effecting adequate changes in the service conditions and economic position. The paper also observed that the teachers' organizations

231 *Prabhatham*, 10 October 1938.

232 *Mathrubhumi*, 9 November 1939.

233 Ibid., 2 January 1940.

234 Ibid., 25 January 1940.

that had sprung up in different parts of the country had been able to focus the attention of the public towards their problems.

The *Mathrubhumi*, then categorically stated its view on trade unions thus: "We don't believe that there is some inherent evilness in the trade union system . . . It is a mere tool for organized redress of grievances. Wherever there is oppression and exploitation, the oppressed have depended on the trade union system to protect their rights most effectively. It is clear that the relation between the management and teachers today is based on exploitation."[235]

That this powerful justification of trade union work among teachers did not represent a permanent change of attitude on the part of the *Mathrubhumi* became clear when the same paper strongly objected to a strike call by teachers' union in March 1947. After explaining how the teachers profession was different from other professions, the paper observed that when the teachers indulged in strikes, it was the future generations that would suffer. "Recently, the teachers have lost their orderliness and inner strength very much. . .. Teacher's organizations should not behave like a trade union. In the case of trade unions, the opponents are capitalists or owners who are intelligent and organized whereas it is little children and their uninformed parents who are on the other side of the teachers."[236]

Even when objecting to their strike call, the *Mathrubhumi* continued to argue for the enhancement of their service conditions. The paper also opined that financial constraints should not be a reason for the Government to deny the teachers' demands; if need be, the Government should impose new tax for that purpose, it suggested. Upholding the nobility of the teaching profession, *Mathrubhumi* added: "They should not be seen as being interested only in

235 Ibid., 27 July 1944.

236 Ibid., 12 March 1947.

getting some concessions from the Government; they are the models for our future citizens."[237]

When the elementary teachers of Malabar served notice for a strike on 1 July 1947, the *Mathrubhumi* termed it as most untimely on the eve of the transfer of power. The paper, however, incriminated the Congress Government too for not doing what it could, financial constraints not withstanding. Portraying the teachers as keepers of the key of discipline, *Mathrubhumi* added: "When teachers speak the language of indiscipline and defiance of authority, the future generations under their control will emulate that bad example."[238] *Mathrubhumi* reminded the teachers that it was not the lack of sympathy on the part of the Government, but financial constraints that was preventing the Government from conceding all their demands. The newspaper wanted the Government to be given more time to solve the issue to the satisfaction of teachers.

A close examination of the *Mathrubhumi's* attitudes towards strike, whether by labourers or, by teachers, would reveal that its opposition to strikes and agitation was most powerful whenever there was a Congress Government in power. However, it must be admitted that *Mathrubhumi* had a point in advising restraint on the part of the teachers in resorting to strikes because the nature of their profession demanded that an agitational programme adversely affecting the future of the students should be used very sparingly and as a last resort only.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, it appears that only *Prabhatham* and the *Deshabhimani* were able to pursue a pro-working class attitude consistently. Being the official organs of the Congress Socialist Party and the Communist Party

237 Ibid.

238 Ibid., 29 June 1947.

respectively, it was quite expected of them. The *Mitavadi* and the 'Al-Ameen', though generally showing a pro-poor attitude, essentially had a communitarian approach. Most of the other pre-Gandhian era newspapers like the 'Kerala Patrika', 'Kerala Sanchari', and the 'West coast Spector' represented the interests of the educated middle class.

It is not that easy to determine the class perspective of *Mathrubhumi*. We have seen that the paper had eloquently pleaded the cause of the tenants and labourers, especially upto the mid 30s. But when class organizations were started among these classes with revolutionary potential and the increasing political consciousness among them made it a possibility that the existing dominant classes could lose their leadership of the national movement to them, the *Mathrubhumi*s pro-working class and pro-socialist exhortations gave way to preachings on discipline and unity. This could not have been mere coincidence.

That the Congress basically represented bourgeois interests is now generally accepted. The *Mathrubhumi* was started by prominent Congressmen of Malabar with the declared aim of propagating Congress ideology. And most of the founding directors of the paper were English educated middle class men with a feudal background. As M. Gangadharan noted, "a better way of approaching the *Mathrubhumi* would be considering it as a newspaper industry which reflects the aspirations and limitations of the national consciousness of the bourgeois liberal class (majority of whom Hindu) emerged through English education in the beginning of this (20^{th}) century in Malabar."[239]

Viewed from this perspective, the allegation of its critics that *Mathrubhumi* had been an ideological apparatus in the hands of the bourgeois class to maintain their class interest, is not without some substance in it. Its

[239] M. Gangadharan in "Grantalokam", May 1974, p.18.

penchant for Gandhian ahimsa has been interpreted as an eagerness to keep the statuesque in tact and prevent the society becoming upside down through a violent revolution. Marxist and critical commentators have also argued that the mass media played a strategic role in re-inforcing dominant social norms and values that legitimate the social system.[240] The anti-communist attitude and the apparent blacking out of 'leftist news' by the *Mathrubhumi* have to be looked at with reference to this class perspective.

Mathrubhumi, of course, did uphold the ideal of a limited socialism, which envisaged a social order in which the gap between the haves and have-nots would not be too wide and in which everyone would have all the basic necessities of life including food, cloth and shelter. However, this concept of socialism, based on Gandhian ideals, depended on the voluntary renouncement of wealth by the rich. This was too idealistic to be practical. It is rather safe to presume that *Mathrubhumi's* socialistic pronouncements were not sincere enough; that the paper used this veneer of socialism as a progressive cover to conceal its basically conservative political ideals.

[240] James Curren, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woottecott in Oliver Boyd-Bornett and Peter Braham (ed.): "Media, knowledge and Power", 1989.

CHAPTER IV

PRESS IN MALABAR AND COMMUNALISM

Despite secularism being a basic constituent of the nationalist ideology and strong emphasis being laid on Hindu-Muslim unity, especially under Gandhi's leadership, the nationalist leadership failed to eradicate communalism and prevent the partition of the country on religious basis. Communal ideology in Indian politics had its emergence during the last quarter of the 19th century; but it took its extreme form in the late 1930s, culminating in the partition. However, even the partition could not solve the problem; the scourge of communalism is still haunting the country. A discussion of the causes for the emergence and growth of communal ideology is not intended here; the focus being the part played by newspapers in Malabar in the communal polarization of nationalist politics. Even newspapers dedicated to the nationalist cause were not completely free from the virus of communalism. Malabar was home to a number of newspapers dedicated to serve the interests of specific castes or communities. The communitarian approach of some of these papers naturally led them to take a sectarian view of nationalist politics. Hence the term 'communalism' is being used in this study to denote a sectarian ideology pertaining not only to religious communities but communities based on caste as well.[1]

[1] For a discussion of communalism and its politics, see Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi, 1984), Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925-1990's* (London, 1996), Asghar Ali Engineer, *Communalism and Communal Violence in India* (Delhi, 1981), Achin Vanaik, *Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularization* (New Delhi 1997), Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North-India* (Delhi, 1990), D.R. Goyal, *Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh* (New Delhi, 1979), Pramodkumar (ed.) (i) *Towards*

A Communal Beginning

The first journal in Malayalam, the 'Rajya Samacharam' itself had a communal purpose to serve. Service of Christian community in Malabar was the specific objective of 'Raja Samacharam'. Murkoth Kunhappa wrote that the main inspiration in starting the journal was to provide moral lessons and inspiration to the Christian community, which was an amalgamation of converts from different castes and communities. Having been divorced from their families and castes, to which they were attached till then, these new converts should be provided guidance in the Christian path. This was the mission of 'Rajya Samacharam'.[2] Hindus and Muslims became the subject of severe criticism of the 'Rajya Samacharam'; articles wounding the sentiments of these religionists were not rare.[3]

Even 'Paschimodayam', the content of which contained modern knowledge of a secular character, had a community purpose to serve. Apart from religious matters, it also familiarized readers with the scientific and technological developments in the western world. As Kunhappa said it was because the Basel Mission people, who launched both 'Rajya Samacharam' and 'Paschimodayam', felt that it was necessary to foster the general knowledge of a community, the strong bond of which was in the process of being built up, that they decided to publish a magazine to provide the primary lessons of modern science.[4]

Understanding Communalism (Chandigarh, 1992) (ii) *Polluting Sacred Faith: A Study on Communalism and Violence* (Delhi, 1992), P.N. Rajagopal, *Communal Violence in India* (New Delhi, 1987) and S.B. Freitag, *'Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley, 1989).

2 Puthupally Raghavan, *op. cit.*, p.33.

3 G. Priyadarshan, *Malayala Pathrapravarthanam- Prarambha Swarupam* (Mal.), Trissur, 1982, p.13.

4 Puthuppally Raghavan, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

Community Vs. Nation

Later, other communities emulated the example set by the missionaries and started their own newspapers. *Mitavadi* was the most prominent of the papers started in the name of communities in Malabar. Launched in 1907 in Thalassery with Murkoth Kumaran as its editor, *Mitavadi* rose to prominence as a paper dedicated to the upliftment of the Thiyyas when C. Krishnan acquired the ownership of the paper, and began publishing it from Kozhikode in 1913. Regarding the criticism leveled by certain newspapers about having a newspaper on behalf of the Thiyyas, *Mitavadi*, justified it pointing to the fact that other communities like the Christians, Muslims and Parsis had their own papers.[5]

But, not all papers were critical of the re-launching of *Mitavadi* under the editorship of C. Krishnan. The 'West Coast Spectator' welcomed the resuscitation of the paper thus: "Though it will be devoted primarily to the advancement and consolidation of Thiyya interests, under the editorship of Mr. C.Krishnan, who years ago established his reputation as a Malayalam journalist, we may be certain it will be a desirable addition to the ranks of responsible and instructive vernacular journalism."[6]

On another occasion, welcoming the launching of the 'Nair Samudaya Parishkari' in 1916. *Mitavadi* observed: "So far as papers don't unjustly abuse other communities or used to create competition among communities, these is nothing wrong in the communities running their own papers. Not only that, other papers will not be able to point out the weaknesses and drawbacks of a community as its own papers."[7]

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5 *Mitavadi*, September 1913.

6 Quoted in *Mitavadi*, *Ibid.*

7 *Mitavadi*, August 1916.

To the allegation that a communal (community) paper would only help to increase disunity in society, *Mitavadi* asked: "What impropriety is there when Christians, Muslims and other communities have their own?" The paper proclaimed its firm belief that all castes, all vocations and all organizations should have separate papers. "If our ideas and desires were to come out in the open, newspaper of our own community is needed . . . For, the way one knows one's pain, others cannot be expected to know."[8]

Upholding the principle of not abusing other communities, *Mitavadi's* articles and editorials on other religions like Christianity and Islam focused mainly on their positive side and their means of prosperity, which, the paper wanted the Thiyyas and others to emulate. 'The paper thus stood for the welfare and brotherhood of all communities.'[9]

Mitavadi did not observe such niceties in dealing with the caste Hindus. It frequently published articles criticizing and ridiculing the Hindu culture, including the Puranas and Ethihasas and classical art forms like Kathakali. Mitavadi's penchant to attack Brahmins, Hinduism and the ancient culture of India came in for sharp criticism from the part of nationalist papers like *Mathrubhumi*.

Mitavadi did not support religion and spirituality being given undue importance in ordinary people's life. It was of the opinion that time wasted by debating and arguing the deeper side of religion could best be utilized on improving the habits and character of the people and advising them on these matters. Debates and arguments on religious truth and spirituality being the province of the upper class in general and the priestly class in particular, the 'Thiyya mouthpiece' had no interest in it.

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8 *Mitavadi*, January 1918.

9 G. Priyadarshan, *op. cit.*, p.146.

Though the Thiyya community was always considered a part of Hinduism, its mouthpiece openly upheld the lofty ideals of Buddhism and stressed its superiority over Hinduism.[10] The editor of *Mitavadi*, C. Krishnan and many of his close associates were Thiyyas and Buddhists at the same time. It was as a part of their fight against casteism in Hinduism that they championed a more egalitarian Buddhism. Ezhava leaders like K. Ayyappan even claimed that Ezhavas were originally Buddhists.

Expectedly, *Mitavadi* had a 'communitarian' approach towards social and political issues. When Oyitty Krishnan, belonging to the Thiyya community, was elected as the Chairman of Kozhikode Municipality, the paper said that it was a matter of pride for the Thiyyas.[11] It had a reformative and empowering mission among the Thiyyas and other backward communities.

Mitavadi took special care to praise those administrators and bureaucrats who were especially considerate to the problems faced by backward caste people. For instance, P. Rajagopalachari and M. Krishnan Nair, who had taken some important measures, during their Diwanship of Travancore, to redress the grievances of the backward castes, came in for a lot of appreciation from the part of *Mitavadi*.[12]

Wherever the Thiyyas/Ezhavas were discriminated against, *Mitavadi* protested strongly. When Thiyya students were denied admission to the Zamorin's College, the paper took up the issue and campaigned vigorously for the cause of students belonging to backward castes.[13] In an editorial note, *Mitavadi* highlighted the huge gap between the Brahmins and others in

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10 C. Uthama Kurup *et al., Mathrubhumiyude Charitham* (Mal.), Vol.II, Kozhikode, 1998, p.96.

11 *Mitavadi*, August 1913.

12 *Mitavadi*, May 1914 & June 1914.

13 *Mitavadi*, June 1914.

Hinduism in terms of their position in government service etc. The paper pointed out that K. Srinivasa Iyengar had been appointed to fill the vacancy when Sir. C. Sankaran Nair quit as the High Court Judge; with this all the four judges of the Madras High Court happened to be Brahmins. It also pointed out the fact that the member in the Governor's council and the Government Secretary too were Brahmins.

Mitavadi had played a pioneering role in providing political education to the Thiyyas and instilling in them an awareness of their rights. The paper provided inspiration and guidance in the fight of the backward castes for social justice. It believed that the interests of the depressed classes could be protected with the help of the Government. Referring to the coming visit of the Secretary of State, Montagu, to India, *Mitavadi* urged the Thiyyas to inform him of their grievances and to specify the measures that could be taken by the Government for the redress of those grievances.[14]

The 'West Coast Spectator' extended support to the demand for due representation to Thiyyas in the service and legislatures. Referring to the Government decision to recruit Thiyyas for some regiments, the 'Spectator' observed: "The Collector of Malabar asks us to announce that it has been decided now to recruit Thiyyas for some of the Carnatic Regiments, on the same conditions as Nayars are being enlisted . . . . . The male population in the Thiyya community is over three lakhs where as that in the Nair community is only two lakhs. The Thiyyas should be therefore able to contribute larger numbers to the army than the Nairs. They have also a military tradition though not so conspicuous in history as the Nairs and though the census report gives toddy-drawing as their traditional occupation . . . ."[15]

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14 *Mitavadi*, October 1917.

15 Quoted in *Mitavadi*, November 1916.

That the *Mitavadi* opposed the national movement, both during the pre-Gandhian and Gandhian phases, has already been noted in the 2nd chapter. The paper had its own reasons for this opposition. Criticising the Home Rule Movement, it said: "If Home Rule is to be implemented, lower castes like Thiyyas will have to face more harms from their upper caste compatriots."[16] From their experience, the lower caste people knew that the British could be trusted more than the upper-caste dominated nationalist leadership, so far as their attitude toward the lower castes were concerned. "When the movement for Home Rule gets stronger, we need only think of making preparations to resist communities more powerful than us."[17]

Mitavadi thought that Thiyyas were suffering more from 'Kerala customs' than from the British administration. Comments like these just show how deep the mistrust of backward castes in the nationalist leadership was. This is not to say that *Mitavadi* was satisfied with the Government's response to the demands made by the Thiyyas. *Mitavadi* often complained that though there was not much difference between the Muslims and Thiyyas with respect to their educational condition, the Government was insisting full fee from Thiyya students while only half from Muslim students.[18]

Mitavadi found nothing wrong in the setting up of community organisations to work for the prosperity and well-being of the concerned communities. If such organisations worked in just and proper manner and all communities prospered, that would automatically lead to the prosperity and well-being of the country. Hence such organizations, *Mitavadi* argued, need not be considered as against national interests.[19]

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16 *Mitavadi*, March 1918.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Mitavadi*, November 1917.

19 *Mitavadi*, May 1916.

Mathrubhumi understood the importance of community reform in the progress of the country. If any particular community were to hold on to absurd and out-dated manners and superstitions, that would prevent the progress of the entire country. But ideally, the paper would like community reforms to be undertaken by organizations transcending community limits.[20]

Mathrubhumi strongly disapproved of communal (community) organizations interfering in politics. Referring to a meeting convened by the South Indian Liberal Federation, an organisation of non-Brahmins known for its severe anti-Brahmin attitude, in Kozhikode in August 1925, the nationalist paper explained its view of such organisations thus: "They maintain communal spite and divisions and are harmful to the prosperity and general welfare of the country . . . . What we should hate is not any particular caste or community. Our fight should be against those who maintain bad customs and inequalities, irrespective of whether they are Brahmins or non-Brahmins. It is not through the fight of self-seekers and obscurantists among Brahmins and non-Brahmins, but through the cooperation of large-hearted people among all castes that we will be able to found freedom, by removing bad customs and inequalities."[21]

The approach of *Mathrubhumi* towards community organisations like the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), Nair Service Society (NSS), Yogakshema Sabha etc. depended on the positions they took with respect to the national movement led by the INC. It liked to see the community organisations embracing the wave of nationalism and giving primacy to the nation over the community. Congratulating the SNDP Yogam for passing a resolution expressing sympathy towards Satyagraha struggle, in its annual conference in May 1931, *Mathrubhumi* observed that the resolution

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20 C. Uthama Kurup *et al., op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

21 *Mathrubhumi*, 6th August 1925.

was a reply to certain Thiyya/Ezhava leaders who had been claiming that their community was against satyagraha.[22]

But it did not take long for this appreciation (of the SNDP Yogam) giving way to severe criticism. During the next few years, the SNDP Yogam annual conferences became the platform for abusing satyagraha, which invariably led to its condemnation by the *Mathrubhumi*. The presidential speech of K. Ayyappan (Sahodaran Ayyappan) in the annual conference of 1936 strongly rooting for communal representation, stating that communal representation was the real nationalism, was provocative enough for *Mathrubhumi* to give a reply through a two-and- a half column reader. Ayyappan had claimed: "To bring the real national condition, where all communities get government jobs and positions in legislatures, there is no way other than communal representation."[23]

Criticising Ayyappan's speech in severe terms, *Mathrubhumi* observed: "The new theory he propounds is that communalism is exactly what nationalism is . . . . Nationalism and communalism are mutually contradictory terms."[24] The paper went on to explain that the solution to the problem was not communal representation, but a change in the social structure. It pointed out that under the present system, the interests of 90 percent of the population were not protected; only the interests of capitalists and landlords and the middlemen who were their partisans, were protected. Even if communal representation was implemented fully, there would be no change in the situation because each community had got its share of rich and poor, capitalists and labourers. If a specific number of posts in the government service and legislature was given to them all, could it be said that the needs of

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22 C. Uthamakurup et al., *op.cit.*, pp. 95-96.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 96-98.

that community had been realized?, *Mathrubhumi* asked, and pointed to a structural change in the society as the real remedy.

Advancing a socialist alternative to the communalist vision, *Mathrubhumi* observed : "Community spokesmen are covering the eyes of the poor and the illiterate in a way that they are unable to see who their enemies are. By giving them the wrong impression that other communities are their enemies, these community leaders make the poor people, who should have been opposing capitalism and landlordism, fight each other and there by realize their self-interest . . ."[25]

There could not have been any difference of opinion on the soundness of *Mathrubhumi*'s suggestion of structural change in society as the real remedy; the problem consisted in the fact that a structural change at that time was only a distant dream. Reserving a certain portion of government jobs and legislative positions would have certainly served the cause of social justice compared to the prevalent system, where by the lion's share was being monopolized by the upper castes. Structural change could only be thought of in an independent India. Asking depressed classes to wait till then to get their just rights, which they had been denied for centuries, was most unreasonable.

In a reply to the *Mathrubhumi*, the *Sahodaran* of K. Ayyappan called the former a 'spokesman of communal monopoly'. *Mathrubhumi* demanded to know whether Mahatma Gandhi and Madan Mohan Malaviya were also 'spokesmen of communal monopoly' as they were also against communal representation. It observed that once adult franchise was implemented, as demanded by the nationalists, Nairs and others would not get as much positions as the Thiyyas in Malabar or as the Christians in Travancore.[26]

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25 C. Uthamakurup *et al., op. cit.,* pp. 105-106.

26 *Ibid.*, p.99.

The long and short of *Mathrubhumi*'s argument was that divisions based on caste would only help retain inequalities and that it was divisions based on economic interests that was needed. "The aim of future governments have to be the happiness of the majority; in that future government, caste has no place; rather it should not have a place", the paper averred.[27] The solution *Mathrubhumi* suggested for the eradication of inequalities based on caste and community was a scientific one based on socialist perspective. But the unfortunate fact is that the national movement under Congress leadership, of which *Mathrubhumi* was the main spokesman in Malabar, miserably failed to take practical steps for the realization of the objective.

Mitavadi saw communal representation as a means of realizing the objective of equal opportunity, social justice and communal harmony. It thought that the monopolizing of the positions that all the communities had a right to, by certain powerful communities was the cause of widespread discontent and dissatisfaction in the country. So long as this discontent and dissatisfaction was there, the country would not be able to concentrate all its energies for the freedom struggle.[28]

When *Mathrubhumi* expressed its concern about the vested interests of backward communities appropriating the benefits of reservation, it seemed to have conveniently forgotten the fact that upper castes as a whole constituted a vested interest, appropriating what was due to the lower castes and the depressed classes, who constituted the vast majority of the population.

In an editorial in April 1919, *Mitavadi* voiced its concern over non-representation of Thiyyas in the Madras Legislative Assembly. The paper

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27 *Ibid.*, p.99.

28 G. Priyadarshan, *Kerala pathrapravarthanam- Suvarna Adhyayangal* (Mal.), 1999, pp.152-153.

advised caution to the Thiyyas in using their voting rights. Regarding the Government contention that Thiyyas were closer to the caste Hindus than the Muslims, *Mitavadi* pointed out that caste Hindus were not willing to concede the same. It reminded the Thiyyas that while their voice could not be heard from the Assembly, the voice of the Muslims were audible in proportion to their numbers because they got adequate representation.[29]

In strongly supporting communal representation, *Mitavadi* was representing the voice of the lower caste and the depressed classes, who were hugely under-represented and even non-represented in the legislative and representative bodies. The paper questioned the existing system of election which allowed members of one community to represent another. ". . . The system which allows janmis to represent tenants and caste Hindus to represent non-caste Hindus will be more harmful than allowing, for instance, the representatives of capital to represent labour in England . . . So far as the depressed classes are concerned, the present system of election is an arrangement which cruelly dupes them."[30]

On the other hand, *Mathrubhumi* did not let to an opportunity to stress the primacy of the 'national' over the 'communal'. When a Muslim delegation met the Viceroy in December 1924, he explained to them the special efforts made by the Government for Muslims and promised them that more Government posts would be given to Muslims. The Viceroy also justified the policy of communal representation. Seeing through the game being played by the Government, *Mathrubhumi* commented: "It is by making the communities competing each other that the Government is enhancing its strength . . . . When will we become aware of the fact that the Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis are one in matters relating to the country? Is it

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29 *Mitavadi*, April 1919.

30 *Mitavadi*, 9 June 1930.

that the time has not yet come to know that the country is greater than the community?"[31]

Mathrubhumi was concerned about the growing clamour from the Muslim community, both at the regional as well as at the national level, for special treatment. The paper was apprehensive of such communal demands ultimately leading to the ascendancy of communal politics, especially when a foreign power, eager to exploit divisive tendencies in India to their own advantage, was in power. That *Mathrubhumi*'s fears were not unfounded was proved by the later course of events.

In an open letter to the Thiyyas, published in the *Mitavadi*, O.C. Sreenivasan drew attention to the poor representation of the Thiyya community in the Legislative councils and placed his suggestions to improve the condition. He asked for a separate representative for the Thiyyas in the Madras Legislative Assembly. He advised Thiyyas to use their voting right with discretion, besides resorting to agitation.[32]

Mathrubhumi lamented that, unlike in most of the prominent countries in the world, in India religious pride and communal consciousness rather than patriotism and political consciousness, was on the ascendancy. It viewed the introduction of communal representation in India by the British Government as an attempt to maintain dissension among Indians by strengthening this communal mentality. The paper observed that it had become a rule now to look at the caste and community of candidates rather than their ability when appointments were made to government posts. "Communal representation will help a community only in getting a few positions in the legislative and government jobs; it will not be useful in providing real protection to that community . . . . The real protection of a community is its unity and organized

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31 *Mathrubhumi*, 9 December 1924.

32 *Mitavadi*, May 1919.

strength . . . . . Though the lapses and faults of the Hindu community may be innumerable, the Hindus can be proud of the fact that communal mentality is not one of them."[33]

The nationalist paper, however, noted with sadness that even the Hindu community was now submitting to the pernicious communal mentality. What made *Mathrubhumi* to make such an observation was the tendency among certain sections of the Hindu community to imitate the Muslim community in indulging in politics as a separate community as well as the decision of the Hindu Sabha to work towards implementing that opinion. *Mathrubhumi* warned: "We have enough experiences of the consequences of political work based on special demands of communities, instead of the public welfare of the country."[34] Communalisation of politics was opposed by the *Mathrubhumi* from the beginning.

Referring to the VIII annual conference of the Hindu Mahasabha at Calcutta in April 1925, *Mathrubhumi* expressed satisfaction at the fact that the Sabha had not fallen into the trap of communal representation, by passing a resolution condemning the same.[35]

Mathrubhumi was never tired of reminding the leadership of both the Hindu and Muslim communities the possibility of differences among themselves being exploited by the foreign Government. In March 1927, Sir Sankaran Nair introduced a resolution in the Council of States, requiring the Government not to increase the number of members or powers of the Legislature until Hindus and Muslims consented to give up special representation. *Mathrubhumi*, while admitting the evil consequences of representation based on caste and community, thought that the resolution was

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33 *Mathrubhumi*, 1 January 1925.

34 *Mathrubhumi*, 8 January 1925.

35 *Mathrubhumi*, 16 April 1925.

unwarranted. It observed that it would only embolden the Government to oppose the just rights of Indian people and to aggrandise more despotic powers in it own hands.[36]

In July 1928, Moidu Sahib, President of the Malabar District Board, nominated K. Koman Nair to the Palakkad Taluk Board, whom the Government later nominated to the District Board. The District Board President also nominated a loyalist Muslim to the Ponnani Taluk Board and thereby was able to get Raman, a Thiyya member, elected as the President of the Taluk Board. *Mitavadi*, while condemning the action of the District Board President in nominating a Nair to the Palakkad Taluk Board, found nothing wrong in the nomination of a Muslim in the Ponnani Taluk Board, as it enabled a Thiyya to become the President of the Board.

Mathrubhumi exposed the double standards applied by the *Mitavadi* in examining the use of the nominating power by the District Board President. The nationalist paper alleged that *Mitavadi* had no qualm in welcoming any contemptible procedure, if only it helped a member of the Thiyya community to get a post or position. "It is our firm opinion that one's caste or community should not be a disability as far as public service or any other public arrangement is concerned . . . . But we seriously doubt whether the effective method to ensure this is corruption of power . . . . ",*Mathrubhumi* declared.[37]

The incident brought to focus the difficulty being experienced by a paper dedicated to the service of a community, in upholding a principle or policy, where the interests of the community or even the interests of a member of that community was involved.

Referring to the laziness and weakness seen in the working of the Yogakshema Sabha recently, *Mathrubhumi*, in its issue dated 14th May 1925,

36 *Mathrubhumi*, 19 March 1927.

37 *Mathrubhumi* 19th & 21st July 1928.

opined that the reason for the sad state of affairs was not the absence of able leaders, as viewed by the its current president, but the communal aims and policies of its leaders. The paper reminded, "For any community which desires its prosperity, it will not be possible to forget the things that affect the country as a whole or to distance itself from other communities. Like wise, the mentality that instills mistrust and fear at the hearing of the word "change", will only create laziness and weakness."[38]

Muslim papers were vociferous in their protest against the under representation of Muslims in the public service and the local bodies. The 'Yuvalokam', published from Kozhikode, complained that Muslims of Malabar, who formed one-third of the population of the district, were not at all adequately represented in the public service or on local boards or in municipalities, and that they suffered many disabilities in consequence. It observed: "Of course, the other majority communities will contend that communal considerations should not prevail in the case of public service and that merit alone should be considered. But the minority communities cannot but deem their contention as opportunism. Just because there are more qualified men in the Hindu and Christian communities, Muhammedans should not be deprived of their rights . . . ."[39]

In the All India Christian Conference of 1930, Rev. B.A. Nag, in his presidential address, said that thought his community was a small one, they did not want special constituencies. He also requested the members of his community not to aspire for membership in legislature through nomination. Praising Rev. Nag for his bold stand, *Mathrubhumi* said: "The Hindu-Muslim disputes in many parts of the country are proof of the fact that special constituencies will reduce the harmony between communities. The way to

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38 *Mathrubhumi*, 14th May 1925.

39 *Yuvalokam*, 17 July 1929, NNPR-July to August 1929, TNA, Chennai.

prosper communal harmony is to believe in the righteousness of the people and not to demand for special rights . . ."[40]

Mitavadi stood for separate representatives for separate communities and strongly protested against what it called the policy of 'clubbing together the Brahmin, the Nair, the Thiyya and the Cheruman in one constituency.'[41] The paper alleged that expressions of sympathy for the depressed classes by the Congress and Gandhi were motivated by their desire to increase the number of Congressmen.[42]

Mitavadi maintained that it was love of one's community and not love of one's country that should be developed in India. The paper pointed out that though in other countries the love of country and love of community were the same, in India the situation was different, with any number of castes and communities. "Patriotism is a foreign plant that will not easily take root in India", *Mitavadi* claimed. It also observed: "Words like 'Mathrubhumi', 'desabhaktan' and 'desabandhu' are our attempts to appropriate the ideas of foreigners by translating their ideas into our language. 'Mathrubhumi', 'Pithrubhumi' etc. are imported to our language by understanding them from Englishmen and others."[43]

Mathrubhumi did not accept the doctrine that love of the country and love of the community are mutually antagonistic qualities in a person. The paper explained its vision thus: "A man should think of his family as bigger than him; community is bigger than the family. The country should come before the community. The world community is bigger than all of these. This is the true growth of a human being. Community come within the country;

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40 *Mathrubhumi*, 4 January 1930.

41 *Mitavadi*, 9 June 1930.

42 *Mitavadi*, 6 January 1930.

43 *Ibid.*

service of community is part of patriotism. A country with a number of strong, harmonious and civilized communities will get the qualities of all those communities. A country is a large lake where in merge a number of rivers of different types and sizes. These rivers are the various communities in that country. The size and purity of the lake depends on the size and purity of the rivers."[44]

Mathrubhumi thus forcefully argued that the existence of a number of communities in a country should not mean that patriotism was not needed in that country. It pointed out the existence of a number of races and communities in different countries of the world. Still the people of these countries were known for their patriotism. "The foundation of national pride is the awareness that we are born in a country larger than the community",[45] the paper observed. *Mathrubhumi* also tried to prove the existence of patriotism in India much before the coming of the British, by referring to the works of renowned historian, Radha Kumudha Mukherji.

There were not many newspapers in Kerala at that time which presented such a beautiful vision about nationalism and patriotism. Its views on how love of community should not be an impediment to one's love of the country was very sound. Having said that one should also take note of the social realities of the time before criticising Mitavadi's stand. Being the mouthpiece of a socially and religiously oppressed people, it was natural for it to give primacy to the eradication of caste inequality.

The reformative activities of the Nair Service Society (NSS) got great encouragement and support from *Mathrubhumi*. However, the nationalist paper did not hesitate to criticise the organisation whenever it was felt to be proceeding on sectarian lines. When Mullur Govinda Pillai observed, in his

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44 *Mathrubhumi*, 6 September 1923.

45 *Ibid.*

presidential address at the All Kerala Nair Conference of 1936, that the whole country would prosper if each community was to work for its own prosperity, *Mathrubhumi* retorted: "Community organisations are harmful to both the community and the country."[46] Referring to the resolution passed in the conference, exhorting the 14 lakhs Nairs of Kerala to line up under the flag of the NSS, the paper observed that what was needed was to break community organisations. It also pointed out that small communities would be adversely affected by communal representation because they would not be eligible for any post in the civil service or legislature as per their population proportion.

When the British Government announced the "Communal Award" in August 1932, allowing separate electorates, *Mathrubhumi* published a four-column long leader attacking the announcement in severe terms. The news of the announcement was reported under the heading:

> "British decision on the communal issue-
> To cut India to pieces"[47]

However the Muslim papers enthusiastically supported the Communal Award. Whenever non-Brahmins were appointed to higher posts in the Government, newspapers generally hailed such appointments. When A.T. Pannirselvam was appointed as Home Member, Government of Madras, *Mitavadi* remarked that it had served to show that like the upper caste Hindus and the Muslims, other communities also had a claim to such appointments. The paper welcomed the appointment and considered it as a triumph of the Justice Party.[48] The 'Manorama' also spoke of the appointment with satisfaction.[49] *Al-Ameen*, however, while admitting that Pannirselvam was in

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46 C. Uthama Kurup *et al., op. cit.*, pp.104-05.

47 *Mathrubhumi*, 17 August 1932.

48 NNPR- July to December 1934, TNA, Chennai.

49 *Ibid.*

every way qualified for the post of Home Member thought that his appointment deprived the Muslim community of the place it had in the Cabinet and that there was nothing to show that it would get back that place in the near future. The paper pointed out that no Muslim had been appointed to any of the vacancies on the High Court Bench after Justice Abdur Rahim's retirement. It lamented that when the term of the then acting Governor expired, the Muslims, who constituted a prominent community in the Presidency, would have no place in its administration.[50] From the very beginning, *Al-Ameen* had been a vociferous champion of Muslim interests.

A Thiyya Youth Conference held in Kannur on 3rd June 1936 passed three resolutions which gave *Mathrubhumi* much satisfaction. Of the three resolutions, the first proclaimed support to the Gandhian programme of eradication of untouchability; the second one exhorted the nationalist and modern minded youth of all communities to form a common organisation and the third resolution declared that communal representation, being an obstacle to national progress and human brotherhood, was unnecessary. Welcoming the decision of the Thiyya youth of Kannur, *Mathrubhumi* urged them to take the initiative to convene a meeting of Hindu, Muslim and Christian youths and to form a working committee consisting of the representatives of all the communities and to start working without delay.[51]

When a meeting of the Malabar Thiyya Yogam, held under the presidentship of Kottiyathu Krishhan on 7th June 1936 at Kozhikode, passed a resolution declaring loyalty to the crown and hoisted a Union Jack at the venue of the conference, *Mathrubhumi* alleged that the self-interests of certain leaders were behind the existence of such organisations. The paper also remarked that problems of caste inequities were not specific to the Thiyya

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50 *Ibid.*

51 C. Uthama Kurup, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-01.

community; there were communities below the Thiyyas who were also victims of the caste system. Therefore, in an organisation representing the views of all the communities was more suitable to address the issue.[52]

In a powerful editorial published in October 1936, *Mitavadi* again clarified its views on communal representation. Observing that there could be no national consciousness in a country, with a number of communities of conflicting interests, *Mitavadi* remarked: "The claim certain people make that they would not indulge in any kind of communal or community affairs is a mere trick . . . The Sanatana Hindus are trying to establish a 'Hindu Empire' . . . The secret behind the talk of establishing a "Ram Rajya" by leaders like Gandhi, Malaviya etc. is also the same. There is no surprise if the Muhammedans, Christians, outcastes and the avarnas view this 'Ram Rajya' with fear. This is exactly why the Congress which works for the Swarajya, has become a Hindu organisation. If special protection has to be provided to the Muhammedans and Christians whose power to fight for and wrest their rights are relatively much more, it could be imagined how much more protection is needed for the outcastes and the lower castes, who had been living like the slaves of the caste Hindus. To recognize the principle of communal representation is the best reform for all these ills . . . ."[53]

Referring to Muhammed Ali Jinnah's claim that the strengthening of the Muslim League was essential for patriotism, nationalism and freedom, *Mathrubhumi* pointed out that communal organizations launched in the name of common interests of the country, in course of time had became an obstacle before national interests. The paper also pointed out that leaders of Hindu communal organisations also expressed opinions similar to the one expressed by Jinnah. It rejected their claim that once all the different communities were

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52 *Mathrubhumi*, 8 June 1936.

53 *Mitavadi*, October 1936.

organized separately, it would be much easier to bring them together for a common national purpose. On the other hand, this would only strengthen communal feelings, by incessantly talking and arguing about special rights and privileges of communities; correspondingly, national mentality would come down. And these community leaders would transform themselves into pure communalists, without allowing national consciousness to raise its head, *Mathrubhumi* feared.[54]

The nationalist daily added: "Therefore, the argument that community organisations are needed among backward communities is baseless. Community organizations are not only not needed for the growth of national consciousness but they are also an obstacle before it. . . .The crores and crores of Hindus, Muslims and Christians in India need only be seen as individuals. The duty of nationalist workers is to rear national consciousness among them. When the individuals are connected with communities, their transformation become difficult." The *Mathrubhumi* flatly rejected the claim of Jinnah and others that their efforts to strengthen community organisations were inspired by nationalism. It however, did not treat the efforts of those who were engaged in social and community reform without any political interests, as harmful.[55]

Through this leader, *Mathrubhumi* was able to focus attention on the dangers of politicization of religious communities. Its observations in this regard proved to be prophetic both in the case of Islamic and Hindu organisations.

While most of the Muslim papers resorted to identity politics, playing on the religious instincts and sentiments of the Mappilas, the '*Pulari'*, also run by a Muslim, consistently urged Muslims to think as Indians rather than

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54 *Mathrubhumi,* 18 December 1936.

55 *Ibid.*

as Muslims and play their part in the liberation of the country. When a Chinese friendship group which included a Muslim member, visited India in 1938 and spoke of the active participation of Chinese Muslims in the fight against Japanese aggressors, 'Pulari' utilized the occasion to impress upon Indian Muslims to make their Chinese brothers their role models. The statement made by the Chinese group leader that there were 20000 Muslims in the Chinese army that was fighting the Japanese and the proud declaration by the Muslim member in the friendship group, "Islam has taught us to protect the country we reside in" were quoted in the editorial by the 'Pulari'. It also pointed out the fact that there were only five crores Muslims in China out of a total population of 42 crores where as there were nine crore Muslims in a total of 35 crore people in India. Still, Indian Muslims, thinking themselves as a minority, was always making communal demands, and in their efforts to get those demands accepted, they did not hesitate to take a position that would only increase the slavery of India, the paper lamented.[56]

Mathrubhumi viewed the dragging of religious issues into politics as dangerous. A frequent complaint of the Muslim League leaders was that while in Muslim dominated countries, the minorities were allowed all the protections they needed, in India the leaders of the majority community were doing injustice to the Muslims. *Mathrubhumi* exposed the fallacy of this argument by pointing to the statement of the leader of a visiting Egyptian friendship group that they in Egypt did not think on the basis, of religions, but, from beginning to end, they were Egyptians only. *Mathrubhumi* went on to advise the League leaders to relinquish their policy of "Islam first; the country afterwards."[57]

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[56] *Pulari*, August 1938, book 1, issue 2. Edited by a Gandhian Muslim *Pulari* enthusiastically supported the Gandhian ideals.

[57] *Mathrubhumi*, 18 March 1939.

When the U.P. (United Provinces) Muslim League conference passed a resolution asking Muslims to buy goods from Muslim merchants only, *Mathrubhumi* expressed its concern that it might lead to an undesirable communal contest. Its anxiety was not unfounded; in December 1940 a Hindu Mahasabha conference held in Madurai passed a resolution asking the Hindu capitalists to give preference to Hindus in the matter of jobs and requesting the Hindus to buy goods from Hindu merchants only. The nationalist daily pointed out that it was a small group of people interested in sharing the few jobs and legislative positions available who were really behind this communal competition. However, it was essential that this competition based on the self-interests of a few elite people, was not allowed to spread to the common people through the wings of fanaticism, *Mathrubhumi* cautioned.[58]

Extending its arguments further, *Mathrubhumi* explained: "As the self-seeking persons interested in posts and position are educated and influencial, they can easily make the people believe that their interests are the community's interests. When they get used to this misunderstanding, they began to think that their own interests are the interests of the community. Thus it does not take much time for this belief to take the form of fanaticism. It is dangerous when a stage is reached where a few leaders can make the community to dance to their tune."[59] As a dedicated paper to the cause of the national movement, *Mathrubhumi* considered it a duty to caution the common people belonging to the Hindu and Muslim communities against the dangerous communal game being played by a self-seeking minority in both the communities.

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58 *Mathrubhumi*, 1 January 1941.

59 *Mathrubhumi*, 6 January 1941.

Mathrubhumi strongly disapproved of K.M. Munshi's starting an Akhand Hindustan movement, after resigning from the Congress. The paper wanted to know what was the need of a new organisation when the Congress and all the people with national consciousness were opposing the partition of India, as Munshi himself had admitted. The most important issue facing the country at the moment, according to *Mathrubhumi*, was the problem of slavery. When all nationalist efforts had to be concentrated on putting an end to this slavery, it was wrong to attract people to other movements. "If all people are to line up under the flag of the Congress, that will not only render the Pakistan movement lifeless but will also help India realize her political objective of Poorna swaraj."[60]

Mathrubhumi did not let go an opportunity to bring home to the leaders of Muslim community of the importance of giving primacy to the country over community. When a group of press persons from Turkey visited India in 1943, *Mathrubhumi* prominently covered their programme. On 30th January 1943 the leading news of the paper was a statement by the head of the Turkish press group: "We are Turks first and Muslims after that- We have no interest in establishing a World Muslim State."[61] Frequent exhortations of *Mathrubhumi* to Muslim leaders in this regard points to the growing concern of the paper at the constantly increasing separatist tendency among a section of the Muslims in India.

Communal (community) organisations were considered by *Mathrubhumi* as obstacles to the progress of the concerned communities. But, in the case of those organizations which took a pro-Congress stand, the paper followed a different policy. Referring to the annual conference of the Chirakkal Taluk Adi Dravida Samajam, *Mathrubhumi* clarified that though it

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60 *Mathrubhumi*, 26 August 1941.

61 *Mathrubhumi*, 30 January 1943.

was against communal organsations in general, in the case of communities like the Harijans, suffering from special disabilities, organisations with limited objectives could be useful. Infact, what prompted the nationalist paper to make a positive comment on the Samajam was its resolution condemning B.R. Ambedkar's attitude towards Hinduism and his opposition to the non-party constitutional committee under Sapru.[62]

In conformity with the Gandhian approach, *Mathrubhumi* was eager to prove that lower castes and depressed classes were very much a part of Hinduism. It reminded the Harijans that through they had every right to feel strong hatred toward caste Hindus, considering the untouchability and other bad rituals and superstition that the latter had forced on them, they should remember that Hinduism was their religion too and that its principles did not do any harm to anybody. It should also be taken into consideration, *Mathrubhumi* reminded, that the case Hindus themselves were coming forward to find a solution to their problems; to abuse religion and its scriptures would only result in unnecessary quarrels.[63]

Whenever Hinduism and its principles came under attack, *Mathrubhumi* was seen fiercely defending them, even as it condemned evil practices like untouchability. It is interesting to note that while the *Mathrubhumi* had been severely critical of Ambedkar's mobilization of depressed classes and his uncompromising fight for the latter's rights, it supported organisations like the Chirakkal Taluk Adi Dravida Samajam; the difference between the two being that Ambedkar took strong anti-Congress, anti-Gandhi and anti-caste Hindu stand which was conspicuously absent in the latter.

Malabar Rebellion

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62 *Mathrubhumi* 13 January 1946.

63 *Ibid.*

The character of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 had been a controversial issue which was hotly debated in the press for a long time. The contemporary press generally viewed it primarily as a communal outbreak, due mainly to the allegedly 'turbulent and fanatic' nature of the Mappilas. *Al-Ameen*, launched in 1924, strongly disputed the contention that the Rebellion was a communal one. Later the left organs, *Prabhatham* and *Deshabhimani*, presented it as a peasant rebellion.

The loyalist *Mitavadi* supported the Government measures against the rebels, characterizing the rebellion as a communal conflagration. Moyarath Sankaran, editor of 'Kerala Kesari', had accused *Mitavadi* and 'Gaja Kesari' of siding with landlords and the Government and portraying the Rebellion as communal riot.[64]

The '*Madras Mail*' published the atrocities of the rebellious Mappilas like brutally dishonouring women, flaying people alive, wholesale slaughter of men, women and children, forcible conversion, burning and looting Hindu and Christian homes, insulting the religious sentiments of non-Muslims etc.[65] Every alleged murder, atrocity and forced conversion was reported in grisly detail, and the inflammatory character of the reports was exceeded only by the letters to the editor. In a report, the 'Mail' said that the Mappilas had entered the famous Trikandiyur Temple, where 'all imaginable sacrilegious acts were done to inflame Hindu fury'. It also said that the 'Moplahs spat and left the Khoran near the sanctum.'[66]

It was not only the Anglo-Indian papers that highlighted the violence of the rebels; the native papers were not far behind in this respect. The

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64 Moyarath Sankaran, *op. cit.*, pp.213-14.

65 Cited in C. Gopalan Nair, *The Moplah Rebellion 1921*, Calicut, p.71.

66 *The Madras Mail*, 31 August 1921.

graphic depiction of a violent incident in the pages of the '*Kerala Patrika*' is just an example:

"Krishnan Nair had rendered much help in arresting the rebels. This rankled in the minds of the Moplahs and he was killed. First his skin was peeled off from his body below the waist. He had to suffer this pain for sometime. Then his two legs were cut off. Ultimately his neck also was removed . . ."[67]

In a series on 'The Moplah Rebellion', the special correspondent of the '*Madras Mail*', referring to such 'innate characteristics of the Mappila as his 'mad fanatical fury, his murderous spirit and his reckless disregard for life', wrote: " I voice the sentiments of a host of victimized Hindus in Malabar when I say that it is their fervent desire, after their terrible experience, that Moplahs as a race should be exterminated from their country." Introducing the series, the correspondent assured the readers that he would present the Mappila 'in his proper perspective.' "I will be charitable and will not paint him blacker than he deserves to be." [68]

Even the liberal 'Hindu' acknowledged the fact that communal atrocities were committed by the rebels. On 7 September 1921, the paper wrote: "It has now been made painfully clear that the Moplahs have been guilty of unthinkable excesses of arson, looting, murder and worse forced conversion of Hindus. They may plead provocation in respect of their attacks on Government property . . . . but they have absolutely no excuse for having laid violent hands on their non-Muslim brethren. . . . .. The mad acts of violence they have been guilty of were incredible in their brutality, but unfortunately, making all allowance for exaggeration, they have been reported

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67 Quoted in C. Gopalan Nair, *op. cit.,* p. 63.

68 *The Madras Mail*, 14 November 1921.

to be true . . . ."[69] 'The Hindu' remarked: "The fact is that the Moplah outbreak is the result of the recrudescence once again of the periodical outburst of Moplah fanaticism of which Ernad was in the past an unfortunate victim . . . ."[70] Thus 'The Hindu' found Mappila fanaticism to be responsible not only for the outbreak of the Rebellion of 1921 but also for the intermittent Mappila riots that took place before.

'Malayala Manorama' represented the Ernad and Valluvanad taluks of South Malabar as "Mappila Taluks", which were centres of the revolts of 'Jonakans" (Mappilas) against Hindu brethren. [71] By quoting the words of some refugees, it tried to represent the Mappilas as a fanatic section who were trying to eliminate Hindus from their roots.[72]

The contemporary press's portrayal of the rebels as fanatics came in for severe criticism later. Moyarath Sankaran wrote: "In reality the rebels did not intend, from beginning to end, to molest the Hindus just because they were Hindus, as the Government and the 'moderate' papers and police, swallowing the Government bulletins entirely, had trumpeted."[73]

Newspapers started during the post-Rebellion period were able to look at the incidents of 1921 with more equanimity. *Mathrubhumi* was very much concerned about the alienation between the Hindus and Muslims in Malabar consequent on the rebellion and was eager to see close co-ordination between the two communities sooner than later.[74] The paper wrote: "Even though the

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69 *The Hindu*, 7 September 1921.

70 *Ibid* .

71 *Malayala Manorama*, 8 September 1921.

72 *Ibid.*, 4 October 1921.

73 Moyarath Sankaran, *op. cit.*, p.161.

74 K.N. Panikkar, in his significant study of the Mappila rebellions, *Against Lord and State*, (OUP, Delhi; 1992) has attested to the long term repercussions of the rebellion of 1921 being the communalization of the Malabar society. "Although the rebellion was not intrinsically communal, its consequences were

Hindus had suffered so many harms from the rebellious Mappilas, it is high time they forgot all those and extend the latter all the help they are capable of, considering atleast the difficulties they had to suffer later. The Hindus should also remember that many Mappilas were punished in the rebellion - related cases on the basis of false plaints filed by some of the Hindus. The families of these Mappilas are struggling even for their food."[75]

In his series on the Malabar Rebellion published in the *Mathrubhumi*, K. Madhavan Nair observed that it was Tippu Sultan who sowed the seeds of the rebellion by playing one community against the other. He remarked that there was complete harmony between Hindus and Muslims of Malabar till the advent of Tippu.[76]

Mathrubhumi wanted the two communities to learn their lessons from the rebellion. Even though the rebellion caused enormous difficulties for the people of Malabar, it could turn out to be a blessing if Hindus and Muslims opened their eyes and tried to find out the harmful germs that destroyed the virtues of their respective communities and made the required efforts to find a solution to them. The paper pointed out that the Hindus and Muslims of the rebellion affected areas has some serious defects. "If fanaticism of the Mappilas had contributed to the Mappila Rebellion, caste madness of the Hindus had contributed to their own misfortune . . . . If the Hindus has as much love and devotion to their temples as the Muslims had for their mosques, so many temples would not have been destroyed . . . . The Hindu alienate thousands of his brethren as inferior . . ." *Mathrubhumi* observed that if friendship between the two communities had to be strong, both of them should be equally strong. The paper thought that the Muslims were weak in education while the Hindus were weak in physical and community matters. It

decidedly so." (p. 190)

75 *Mathrubhumi*, 24 May 1923.

76 *Ibid.*, 15 May 1923.

exhorted both the communities to make efforts to rectify these defects.[77] It is significant that the *Mathrubhumi* too felt that fanaticism of the Mappilas contributed to the rebellion.

That rumour had played an important part as also the proclivity of the Mappilas to believe them, in the outbreak of the Malabar Rebellion was acknowledged by the *Mathrubhumi*.[78] Demanding to set free the Mappila prisoners, languishing in jails for rebellion related crimes, the paper wrote: "Though it was wrong on the part of a people, who were uneducated and willing to believe any nonsense, to believe in the rumours that the army had destroyed the Tirurangadi Mosque and to indulge in riots, it can not be said that they deserve the kind of difficulties and severe punishments that they are now undergoing."[79]

Mathrubhumi was able to view the atrocities committed by the rebels sympathetically; as the result of an emotional reaction of a people, so illiterate and ignorant that they did not know the consequences of what they were doing. It wrote: "If some people, who could not think reasonably for want of education, have committed, in a sudden commotion, violence, forgetting circumstances as well as law and justice, they need not have been put in prison for so long…."[80]

Al-Ameen rejected the widely-held view that the Malabar Rebellion was a communal riot and claimed that Islam never used force against other religionists. An article published in the paper claimed, "The fact that Hindus too, though smaller in numbers, participated in the rebellion and that even

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77 *Ibid.*, 26 May 1923.

78 For a study of the rumour in rebellion, see K. Gopalankutty, "Rumour and Rebellion in South Malabar" in Kesavan Veluthat and P.P. Sudhakaran (ed.), *Advances in History* (Calicut, 2003).

79 *Mathrubhumi,* 8 April 1924.

80 *Ibid.*, 28 October 1931.

many Muslims were killed and molested by the rebels does prove that it was not a Mappila rebellion and fanaticism was not what caused it."[81]

Later, left organs like the *Prabhatham* and the *Deshabhimani* gave a communist interpretation to the Rebellion. In an article published in the *Prabhatham*, 'Surendran' (pseudonym of EMS Nambudiripad) observed that the rebellion, had its origin in peasant discontent and took the form of a political uproar but later assumed communal colour; the rebellion failed because of the inefficiency of the leadership, lack of self-awareness among the rebels and the propaganda onslaught of the bureaucracy.[82]

In connection with the 25 anniversary of the Malabar Rebellion, *Deshabhimani* published a series of articles in 1946, portraying it as a failed peasant rebellion. Chandroth Kunhiraman Nair, in an article, extolled the rebellion leader Wariamkunnath Kunhammed Haji as the leader of the aggrieved Hindu and Muslim peasants, who led the latter against the landlords and British Imperialism. An attempt to preach communal amity was also made.[83] All the articles published by the *Deshabhimani* on the rebellion stressed the point that it was essentially a peasant rebellion against landlordism and imperialism, and not a communal riot as was widely believed at that time.

For many years after the Malabar Rebellion, any activity in the name of Khilafat was viewed with suspicion. The 'Manorama', *Mitavadi* and the West Coast Reformer' grew nervous at the proposed Khilafat Conference to be held at Kozhikode in April 1925. Apprehensive of communal trouble, these papers advised the Government to ban the proposed meet. The Government was never short of support from such papers, known for their

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81 *Al-Ameen*, 4 September 1928.

82 *Prabhatham*, 30 May 1938.

83 *Deshabhimani*, 25 August 1946.

opposition to the national movement under Gandhi, whenever it had to handle organisations with an anti-government attitude. The alleged responsibility of the Khilafat committees in the rebellion of 1921 came handy for these papers to highlight the potential dangers of a Khilafat conference. But *Mathrubhumi*, not only supported the conference but also vehemently criticized these papers for goading the foreign Government to make use of its despotic powers.[84]

Liberal papers like the *West Coast Spectator* and the *West Coast* Reformer and loyalist papers like Mitavadi also opposed the proposed visit of Maulana Muhammed Ali to Malabar to participate in the Khilafat conference, as they feared it would heighten communal tension, and requested the Government to prevent his coming to Malabar. The 'Reformer' claimed that except for a few "extremist" papers (meaning *Mathrubhumi*, *Al-Ameen* etc.), public opinion was generally in favour of prohibiting the Khilafat conference.[85]

Mathrubhumi and *Al-Ameen* criticized these "moderate" papers for prompting the Government to pass oppressive laws and to implement the same. *Mathrubhumi* observed: "To welcome a gentleman like Maulana Muhammed Ali will be considered as a great honour by the people not only in every part of India but also in every country of the world." The paper also claimed that the aim of the Khilafat committee was the reformation of Muslim community. "If Muslim leaders cannot come to Malabar to work for the regeneration of their community, will the *Mitavadi*, the 'Reformer', and the bureaucrats, whom these papers adore, do it?"[86], *Mathrubhumi* demanded to know. The nationalist paper rejected the claim of the liberal papers that they represented the majority opinion of the people.

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84 *Mathrubhumi,* 28 February 1925.

85 NNPR-1925, TNA, Chennai.

86 *Mathrubhumi.*, 7 March 1925.

Congress and League

The Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League, being the most powerful as well as rival political organizations during the major part of the freedom struggle, attracted strong reactions form the press. Most of the nationalist newspapers were pro-Congress in their political views, of which the most prominent in Malabar was the *Mathrubhumi* Press support to the Muslim League in Malabar came mainly from its own organ, the *Chandrika.* Left organs, *Prabhatham* and *Deshabhimani*, were neither blindly pro-Congress nor blindly anti-League.

While *Mathubhumi* considered the Congress as the legitimate national political organization representing the people of India, *Chandrika* in line with the Muslim League position, treated it as a communal organization of the Hindus. As a corollary to this argument, the League organ considered it to be a heresy for a Muslim to join the Congress. The pro-Congress *Mathrubhumi* was characterized by *Chandrika as a* 'Congress-caste Hindu paper'.

Any attempt, even an indirect one, to question the secular character of the Congress were always resisted by the *Mathrubhumi*. When the Viceroy announced his decision in 1946 with respect to the Interim Government he did not fully accommodate the demands of either the Congress or the League. However, the Viceroy's decision not to include a nationalist Muslim in the new Executive Council was certainly a victory for the League. Fully aware of the implications of that decision on the secular character of the Congress, *Mathrubhmi* reacted sharply, "What is the meaning of it? Is it not that Mr. Jinnah's argument that the Muslim League is the only institution that has the eligibility to represent Indian Muslims, is honoured? It also involves an indirect attempt to treat the Congress as an Hindu institution".[87]

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87 *Mathrubhumi*, 18 June 1946.

Mathrubhumi agreed with Jawaharlal Nehru in his opinion that there were only two parties in India viz., the Congress and the Government and observed that the Muslim League was only a communal organization which could not be considered as a political party, though it might have political aims.[88] To deny a political outfit like the Muslim League, a highly popular and influential organization, though restricted among the Muslims, the status of a political party just because it had a communal agenda, did not make much sense.

It is interesting to know that while the Muslim League considered the Congress as a Hindu organization, the Hindu Mahasabha did not accept the same, but claimed itself to be the representative of the Hindus. When Congress engaged in consultations with the League to find a solution to the communal problem, Hindu Sabha objected to it and claimed that they were better qualified, being the representatives of the Hindus, to talk to the Muslim League, who represented the Muslims, to arrive at a compromise on the communal problem.

Mathrubhumi clarified for the Congress that the latter was trying to arrive at an agreement with the League not as a representative of the Hindus. "The Congress has never acted as the representative of a particular community; neither will it act like one in the future. As a political organization rooted in spotless nationalism, Congress has the responsibility to provide adequate security to the minorities and their special interests. That is why the Congress is taking interest in protecting the just interests of the Muslim community.[89] *Mathrubhumi* expressed surprise at the temerity of the communalists, known for spreading communal poison in the country, to abuse Congress efforts as contrary to nationalism.

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88 *Mathrubhumi*, 7 January 1937.

89 *Mathrubhumi*, 9 January 1938.

Muslim League leaders including Jinnah frequently played on the fears of the Muslim community of their fate under a Hindu majority in an independent India. The Muslim League Council's decision in August 1938 that a Constituent Assembly elected by the people was not acceptable to them, was exactly for this reason. Criticising the League Council's decision, *Prabhatam* questioned the rationale of expressing no-confidence in a Constituent Assembly elected by the people of India. "Indians are not ready to give the power of determining Indian constitution to Britain . . . . Is the League claiming that, if not the British capitalists, Muslim League should have that power? ……"[90]

League Council had also passed a resolution protesting against the talks that was rumoured to be taking place between certain Congress leaders and British diplomats. *Prabhatham* pointed out that the League's opposition was not against the talks as such, but in the fact that talks was being carried on, avoiding the League.[91] However, the Communists, who were the prominent group among the leftists of the late 30's in Malabar, later supported Muslim League's demand for self-determination, which was in effect a negation of their earlier position in this respect.

Starting from its inception in 1942, *Deshabhimani* had been a rotary of Congress-League unity. The Communist organ knew that the British were exploiting the disunity among Indians, especially that between the Congress and the League, to prolong their imperialist regime in India. Its view was that only a united front could save India from all troubles and dangers. The paper observed that it was the duty of every national party to utilize all available tools in order to save the country.[92]

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90 *Prabhatham*, 8 August 1938.

91 Ibid.

92 *Deshabhimani*, 20 June 1943.

Religion and Education

Communalism of education was a controversial issue hotly debated in the press. The question of separate schools for Muslims and religious instruction to Muslim students at public expense especially created much political heat in Malabar. The debate in the nationalist press on the issue had the effect of strengthening the communal polarization among the nationalist ranks which was a legacy of the Malabar Rebellion.

Referring to the establishment of sectarian universities in India, '*Kerala Patrika*' in its issue dated 2nd December 1911, said that an institution of the kind would not be an imperative necessity, if provision could be made in the existing institutions for imparting religious instructions. The paper pointed out that the proposed institution could not expect to have any greater liberty in matters of education than existing ones enjoy. The 'Patrika' warned that if such things were to come to pass, they would eventually bring more evil in the country.[93]

The predominant view among administrators and bureaucrats that Muslim fanaticism was the root cause of the Rebellion of 1921 led the Government to have a rethink on the desirability of having separate schools for Hindu and Muslim students. In 1922 the Government appointed a committee to report on the desirability of amalgamating Hindu and Mappila elementary schools in Malabar. The press in general supported the idea of common schools.

The *Manorama* expressed its opinion that separate schools would only intensify the cleavage between the two communities and observed that Deodhar and others who were working for rehabilitation of Mappilas were of the opinion that this system should be changed and that majority of Hindus

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93 Report on English and Vernacular Newspapers - 1912, TNA, Chennai.

and Muslims would favour this idea.[94] In line with its opposition to communal segregation in the educational field, '*Kerala Patrika*' too favoured mixed schools for Mappilas and Hindus.[95]

Taking opposite sides in this debate, *Mathrubhumi* and *Al-Ameen*, two pro-Congress papers, engaged themselves in heated exchanges, justifying their respective positions. The *Mathrubhumi- Al-Ameen* debate had political significance in the light of the alleged communal character of the emerging Congress factionalism.

When the committee appointed by the Government decided in favour of continuing with the prevailing system of separate schools for Mappilas and recommended to appoint qualified persons to instruct Mappila students in religious matters, *Mathrubhumi* chose to disagree. The paper favoured common schools which, it thought, would help to bring together Hindus and Muslims, would help them understand each other better and to mutually understand the customs and other matters particular to each communities. *Mathrubhumi* did not accept the argument that Mappila students would not come to schools if religious education was not provided there and that this would not be feasible in a school with Hindu students. It suggested that separate classes could be arranged in common schools to provide religious education to both Muslim and Hindu students. Apart from this, the biographies and ideals of founders of prominent religions could be taught to all students.[96]

In this case, *Mathrubhumi*'s argument would appear to be in line with a nationalist, integrative approach. In a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, insularist tendencies in communities could adversely impact on

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94 *Manorama*, 21 July 1922, NNPR-1922, TNA, Chennai.

95 *Kerala Patrika*, 12 August 1922, NNPR-1922, TNA, Chennai.

96 *Mathrubhumi*, 10 April 1923.

national integration. Common schools rather than separate schools, would be more ideal to foster the spirit of integration among students.

Mathrubhumi feared that separate schools would only help deepen the communal divide in the country. The paper wrote: ". . . Is it the awareness 'we are separate, we are separate' that needs to be ingrained in the minds of children? Is that our aim? . . . . Separate schools will lead towards the goal of eternal Hindu-Muslim divide . . . Let the children in India learn, sitting shoulder to shoulder, in the same class and in the same school, with the pride of being Indians."[97]

Mathrubhumi also argued that imparting religious education at public expense to a particular section of society was against the principle of justice. It warned the Government that if Christianity, Hinduism and other religions were to demand religious education to their students also, it would have to accept the demand; that would incur huge expenditure, which would be harmful to public education. The paper pointed out that while lakhs of people were without even elementary education, it was unjust to make arrangements for the religious education of a section alone. It advised the Muslim community to mobilize the fund from among the community itself, if they were so particular about teaching Quran to their students.[98]

Al-Ameen, however, saw *Mathrubhumi*'s criticism as proof of its enmity towards Islam. Denying *Al-Ameen*'s charge, *Mathrubhumi* made it clear that what it criticized was the Government's deviation from an impartial position in religious matters. The paper reminded *Al-Ameen* that the latter to did not object to Sir Abdur Rahim Committee's recommendation to the

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97 *Ibid.,* 7 August 1931.

98 *Ibid.*, 12 October 1933.

Government of India to disband the Priests Department maintained by the latter to cater to the needs of the Christian soldiers in the Indian army.[99]

Al-Ameen also alleged that *Mathrubhumi* was preaching rationalism, by criticizing religious education. Justifying religious education to Muslim students in schools run on public funds, the 'Nationalist Muslim' paper pointed to the inclusion of the histories of Hindu idols like Rama, Sita and Krishna in the school text books.[100] In reply to this *Mathrubhumi* pointed out that the histories of Prophet Muhammed, Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha were also part of the school curriculum. The histories of such great souls did not provide any religious education; they did not praise any particular religion, *Mathrubhumi* explained. "It will be useful if *Al-Ameen* understands the difference between religion and morality. Knowing the histories of the prophets of different religions inculcates moral values in students; increases tolerance in them. It does not produce affection towards any particular religion."[101]

Mathrubhumi put another relevant question to the *Al-Ameen*. If other religionists were to demand similar concessions, could the Government argue that they did not have as much devotion to their religions as the Muslims had towards Islam? To stress its impartiality in religious matters, *Mathrubhumi* also said that if a Hindu leader were to demand the teaching of Sruthis and Smrithis in schools, it would oppose the same. "Such opposition has nothing to do with the acceptability or unaccessibility of the religious philosophy concerned, but it is based on the principle that the Government should not directly involve in religious matters",[102] *Mathrubhumi* explained its policy.

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99 *Ibid.*, 17 October 1933.

100 *Al-Ameen*, 15 October 1933.

101 *Mathrubhumi*, 17 October 1933.

102 Ibid.

Regarding *Mathrubhumi*'s complaint about spending public money on imparting religious education to students belonging to a particular community, *Al-Ameen* wondered whether *Mathrubhumi* did not see anything wrong in spending the fund of a public institution like the Indian National Congress for the purpose of uplifting the depressed classes.[103] *Mathrubhumi* replied that the money that was being spent for the upliftment of depressed classes had been specifically collected for the purpose and did not form part of the Congress fund.

From the debate on the issue of separate school and religious education, it is clear that *Mathrubhumi*'s concept of secularism did not provide for the Government's direct involvement in religious matters; the paper argued that religion should be a private affair. Government should not be seen to be partial towards a particular religion, especially in a multi-religious country like India; that would only add to communal disharmony and rivalry. *Mathrubhumi*'s stand, in this case, appeared to be more rational and progressive. In its eagerness to secure special consideration for the Muslims of Malabar, *Al-Ameen* seemed to have sidelined principles of secularism, which was very important in a communally sensitive society. May be, in its fight with the orthodox and conservative section in the Muslim community in Malabar, *Al-Ameen* and its editor Muhammed Abdurahiman was trying to be more royal than the king in the protection of Muslim interests.

Al-Ameen criticized in severe terms the decision of the Malabar District Board headed by K. Kelappan to appoint teachers in Mappila schools under Government control, on merit irrespective of their religion. The paper demanded that Muslim teachers should be appointed in Mappila schools. It gave wide coverage to reports relating to protest against the decision of the

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[103] *Al-Ameen*, 15 October 1933.

District Board, apart from publishing editorials and articles condemning the Board decision.[104]

Meanwhile *Mathrubhumi* continued to campaign against what it called "communal schools". In an editorial note on 2nd June 1938, the paper remarked: "If separate schools for boys, girls, Hindus, Mappilas and Adi-Dravidas are done away with and all are admitted to all schools, that will be much useful in fostering friendship among the people of all communities in future."[105] The paper also observed that most of what was going on in India in the name of religious instruction and religious observance was only a reflection of intolerance and blind faith.[106] That *Mathrubhumi* had serious objection to what was being imparted to the students in the name of religious instruction is clear from this observation.

As mentioned earlier, the issue of separate schools had its impact on the internal politics of the KPCC. The leftists in the Congress, who had already secured control of the KPCC, supported the Muslim demand and passed a resolution in August 1938 in favour of separate schools for Muslim students on the ground that separate schools would help protect the culture and religion of Muslims. Rejecting the KPCC argument, *Mathrubhumi*, which firmly supported the Gandhian fiction in the Kerala Congress, alleged that separate schools would, instead, instill communal thought and competition in young minds.[107]

EMS Namboodiripad, the KPCC Secretary, replied to the *Mathrubhumi* through an article which was published by the paper. He clarified that the KPCC resolution was in tune with the Congress Working

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104 C. Uthama Kurup *et al., op. cit.,* p.279.

105 *Mathrubhumi*, 2 June 1938.

106 *Ibid.,* 8 July 1938.

107 *Ibid.*, 12 August 1938.

Committee decision, ratified by the Haripura Congress, that in all matters affecting minority communities, the Congress would work with the co-operation and goodwill of these communities. *Mathrubhumi*, however, did not agree with EMS in interpreting the Haripura resolution as a consent for starting separate schools. If the KPCC interpretation was to be accepted, then it would not be possible to make Hindi compulsory, or to implement temple entry or even to exhibit national flag in public; because, *Mathrubhumi* argued, there were certain minorities who were against these.[108]

Mathrubhumi was against any concession being allowed in the name of minority if that would adversely impact on the supreme aim of freedom and national unity. "If educational institutions are conducted on communal basis, nationalism will never be able to grow in this country. No countryman with nationalist ideals has ever accepted an educational scheme that puts young students into the grip of communalist thought."[109]

It was really very strange that the Socialists should argue so strongly for schools on communal basis. A reasonable conclusion is that it could have been part of a strategy to extend their influence among the Muslim community. It is important to remember, in this context, that the Congress Socialists (most of whom later turned Communist) and the right wing in the Congress were engaged, during this period, in an intense struggle to outwit the other and emerge as the dominant political force in the state.

'Pulari' supported the decision of the Malabar District Board to do away with 'communal schools'. It was also in support of the Board's decision to start mixed schools in place of girls' schools as well as to admit students of the depressed classes in common schools instead of special schools.[110]

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108 *Mathrubhumi*, 14 August 1938.

109 *Ibid.*

110 *Pulari*, September 1938, Book one, Issue 3.

Meanwhile the Left-dominated KPCC asked the Malabar District Board, which was headed by the rightwing leader K. Kelappan, to repeal its decision to abandon separate schools for Muslim students. *Prabhatham* expectedly supported the KPCC decision. In an article, 'Surendran' (EMS) pointed out that the Congress Working Committee resolution (passed at its Calcutta meeting in October 1937) had declared that the Congress policy was to protect the interests of the minorities, to improve their condition and to help them to participate fully in the political, economic and cultural life of the country. The resolution also stressed the importance of providing the freedom and opportunity to every individual and section to grow according to its ability and needs. ' Surendran' argued: "When the Congress declared its policy to protect 'Indian culture', it was not talking of reviving the ancient Aryan culture, but a fusion of the Hindu, Islamic and Christian cultures. If this fact is understood, there will be no confusion about the KPCC decision."[111]

While the author of the article was right in pointing out the importance of providing every individual and section in the society with the freedom and opportunity to grow, he failed to take note of the negative fallout of allowing schools on communal basis and thereby denying the young generation the opportunity and freedom to intermingle with students from other communities and cultural groups.

Conversion

The issue of conversion had always been a highly sensitive one in India and had often led to communal tension and riots. Newspapers representing the interests of depressed classes as well as proselytizing religions strongly defended the right of conversion and demanded that there should be absolute freedom in respect of conversion, where as newspapers representing upper caste Hindu interests were generally critical of

111 *Prabhatham*, 29 August 1938.

proselytization and conversion. Even among nationalist newspapers, there were both supporters and critics of preselytization and conversion.

During the course of the Vaikom Satyagraha, a few Thiyyas, who had joined the Arya Samajam, were allowed by the police to enter the temple. Citing this incident, *Mitavadi* observed that conversion was the best possible way for the depressed classes to gain all the human rights they had been denied for long, including freedom to travel. Strongly disapproving Mitavadi's new, *Mathrubhumi* said: "We are not convinced that conversion is the means of a person's real liberation."[112] *Mathrubhumi*, in its issue dated 13th June 1925, published an article entitled "Conversion", in which the author, K.Kelappan denounced conversion in strong language.[113]

Mathrubhumi's view was that there was no need for a Hindu or a Muslim or a Christian to convert himself. The paper reasoned: 'There is no difference between the important principles of all religions; so far as flaws are concerned, they have afflicted all religions. Hence, a person who sincerely desires to worship God by remaining a noble believer in religion and by leading a lofty life, can accomplish the same without abandoning his or her own religion."[114] *Mathrubhumi* also pointed out that those who tried, without abandoning their religion, to remove the faults that had affected their religion, would be rendering a great service to their brethren.[115]

Even when reasoning against conversion, *Mathrubhumi* acknowledged the concept of freedom of religion and one's right to convert as well as the right to advise others to convert. "Those who sincerely believe that a particular religion is better than another for the spiritual progress of man, they

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112 *Mathrubhumi*, 15 May 1924.

113 *Ibid.*, 13 June 1925.

114 *Ibid.*, 20 August 1925.

115 *Ibid.*

should have the freedom to accept that religion as well as to make others to accept that religion, provided their efforts in that direction is just and peaceful."[116]

Though the efforts of those who tried to convert people pointing to benefits other than spiritual were of a different category, *Mathrubhumi* felt that they could not be faulted unless they resorted to untruth and compulsion. The paper proclaimed: "Therefore, if many among the Hindus are depending on other religions, desiring freedom of travel, wealth and other material benefits, Hindus have no right to abuse them or those who advise them to do so."[117]

Not withstanding its acceptance in principle an individual's right to accept a religion of his choice, *Mathrubhumi* continued to voice its concern over conversions from the lower castes. In a report on the tendency among Ezhavas of Palakkad taluk to convert to Islam and Christianity, the correspondent warned: "If the Hindus do not wake up and work actively, things will go out of control."[118] *Mathrubhumi*, in an editorial on the subject, incriminated the high caste people for observing untouchability and thereby indirectly contributing to conversion.[119]

On 24th March 1928, *Mathrubhumi* published a note written by K. Kelappan as the Secretary of Adi Keraloddharana Sangham, in which he alleged that Christian missionaries were vigorously converting Pulayas into Christianity through their school and other temptations in Pazhayangadi.[120]

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116 *Ibid.*

117 *Ibid.*

118 *Mathrubhumi* 29 August 1925.

119 *Ibid.*

120 *Mathrubhumi*, 24 March 1928.

When Gandhiji in an interview given to a journalist, blamed the activities of certain Christian missionaries for treating service of the poor and afflicted as a means of conversion, *Mathrubhumi* supported him.[121] Like Gandhiji, *Mathrubhumi* wanted the depressed classes to wait till a change of heart occurred on the part of the upper castes rather than convert to Islam and Christianity. *Mitavadi* was justified in questioning the sincerity of Gandhi and the Congress in their expression of sympathy for depressed classes. Why should they wait till such time as a change of heart really took place, which in any case was very unlikely to materialize in the foreseeable future, going by the opposition to Gandhiji's pleadings from the part of the conservative section of caste Hindus.

Mahatma Gandhi's eldest son Harilal's conversion to Islam in May 1936 and his visit to Malabar in September that year again focused media attention on the issue of conversion. A section of Muslims accused *Mathrubhumi* of being indifferent to this 'momentous incident'. When Sheikh Abdulla Gandhi (the new name of Harilal Gandhi) was accorded a reception in Ponnani in September 1936 under the auspices of a Muslim organisation, a resolution was passed protesting against this indifferent attitude of *Mathrubhumi* and exhorting the Muslims to boycott the paper.[122]

Responding to the criticism, the nationalist paper explained its opinion on conversion thus: "Religion is a private affair. Nobody has a right to either happiness or unhappiness over the conversion of a person except himself or herself."[123] *Mathrubhumi* also pointed out that Harilal's conversion was induced by certain material considerations and therefore it could only treat such conversions with indifference. Moreover, the paper added, "In this case we see that, for no reason, a community is rejoicing and another community is

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121 *Ibid.*, 3 May 1931.

122 C. Uthamakurup, et al., *op. cit.,* pp. 82-85

123 *Ibid*.

feeling aggrieved. A national paper can only take an indifferent attitude in a matter which cause joy to one community and sorrow to another community."[124]

Referring to a pamphlet exhorting Congressmen to participate in welcoming Abdulla Gandhi and asking all the people who believe in Hindu-Muslim unity to feel happy about the conversion of the son of the 'world adoring Mahatmaji', *Mathrubhumi* said that though Harilal was the son of Mahatmaji, he had not earned the respect of the people through service to the country or service to the community and did not have any other dignified quality. "Such a person cannot become the object of honour of the people or even of the community just because he had accepted Islam."[125]

Mathrubhumi likened conversion to suicide, if it was resorted to as an attempt to remove the weaknesses of a community, meaning thereby that rather than resorting to escapism like conversion one should involve in the efforts to reform one's own community. The paper also felt that there were certain good things about the conversions that was taking place at that time. "On the one hand the conversion of those who don't have strong faith in religious matters will help to reduce the 'intolerance of Islam', on the other hand it will also help to open the eyes of the superstitious Sanatanis."[126] It is rather obvious from this comment that in *Mathrubhumi's* view, Islam was lacking in tolerance.

Of the many telegrams that Gandhi got on the conversion of his eldest son, one wished that, like his son, Gandhi would also embrace Islam, 'the noblest faith in world'. *Mathrubhumi* just could not bear what it termed this 'haughtiness'. The paper wondered, "Can religious blindness do more than

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124 *Ibid.*

125 *Ibid.,* p. 87.

126 *Ibid.*, pp.86-87.

this? We have not been able to understand the righteousness of an enterprise to enrole people into religion. Towards those who opine that 'my religion is the true religion', we feel the same sympathy that one feel towards a guilty child." [127]*Mathrubhumi* went on to ridicule the blind faith that a final Prophet had been sent by God for all time to come, for all countries and for all kinds of people, and demanding a person like Mahatmaji, having no hatred towards any religion or religionists and seeing goodness in all religions, to accept that faith.

Mathrubhumi's emotional reaction to the criticisms leveled by Islamic enthusiasts does indicate that the conversion of the son of its idol, Mahatma Gandhi, came as a rude shock to the paper. *Mathrubhumi*, known for its restraint even when attacking the most wicked, should not have allowed itself to be provoked by the over-reaction of a section of Muslims to the conversion of Harilal Gandhi. That the paper, in this case, discarded its restrained tone was indicated by its reference to the 'intolerance of Islam', 'blind faith in the last Prophet' etc.

Mathrubhumi strongly disapproved of the theory of proselytizing religions that a particular religion was needed for the salvation of the whole world. The paper stated. "It is one of the blind faiths of the world that there will be time when the whole world will embrace the ideals of any particular religion."[128]

An interesting view was expressed by *Mathrubhumi* with respect to conversion- that those who opposed conversion from Hinduism were not conservatives in the religion, who were more concerned with maintaining the caste system and its attendant evils; conversion was being opposed by those Hindus, known for their national consciousness and kindness to others. And

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127 *Ibid.* p.88.

128 *Mathrubhumi*, 7 January 1937.

their reason for opposing conversion, according to *Mathrubhumi*, had nothing to do with religion as such; this opposition stemmed from the belief that the Indian Christian community and Muslim community was wanting in national consciousness and hence conversion to these communities was a loss to the national movement.[129]

Though nationalist leaders like K.Kelappan were highly critical of conversion, the major opponents of conversion from Hinduism were the likes of Arya Samajists, whose Shuddi Movement was productive of communal tension in many parts of the country. How far they could be considered progressive nationalists is debatable. *Mathrubhumi*'s equating nationalism with the majority community also raises questions regarding its commitment to secularism. It reminds the Hindu rightwing position that Hinduism alone could be the foundation of Indian nationalism. The fact that the majority of Indian Muslims and Christians were anti-Congress could not in itself be considered as sufficient ground to equate Indian nationalism with Hinduism. It seems reasonable to assume that *Mathrubhumi* was giving a nationalist veneer to the anti-conversion efforts in which it had evinced keen interest from the beginning.

Mathrubhumi was also skeptical about the propriety of allowing the freedom to propagate religion. "If religious propaganda is undertaken as a religious act without any thought of reward, it is allright; the problem arise when this freedom is misutilised to make enticements to enlist members to one's own community."[130] Propagation of religion had always been a controversial issue in India and was alleged to have provoked many communal riots. In this context, *Mathrubhumi*'s suggestion for a serious

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129 *Ibid.,* 17 March 1937.

130 *Ibid.*

rethinking on whether the right to propagate religion was to be continued, seems to be in order.

While *Mathrubhumi* discouraged conversion, *Al-Ameen* enthusiastically supported the same; Islam being a major beneficiary of conversion. The public image of *Al-Ameen* as a 'Muslim paper' and *Mathrubhumi* as a 'Nair paper' fits well with their respective position on conversion. 'Al- Ameen' vehemently criticized the 'Shuddhi' Movement of the Arya Samajists whereas *Mathrubhumi* remarked that if converted Hindus wanted to return to their old faith, they should be free to do so.

Al-Ameen, in its issue dated 23rd July 1936, published a request made by certain Muslim divines pleading to Muslim brethren to contribute generously to a fund being raised for the Ma-Unathul Islam Society, Ponnani, which was the premier institution in Kerala to receive new believers from other religions to Islam as well as to initiate them on Islamic precepts and practices. The statement claimed that around 20000 other religionists had embraced Islam so far through the Society and that more than 150 new believers reached the Society daily.[131]

A report published by *Al-Ameen* on a conversion meeting at Mavelikkarra held in July 1936 is an instance of its insensitive handling of communally sensitive issues, in its enthusiasm for Islamic proselytarianism. The report said that eleven Ezhavas had converted to Islam at a meeting held under the chairmanship of Arifa Basheer. The speeches made, at the meeting, as reported by the *Al-Ameen*, proclaimed the superiority of Islam over all other religions and called upon the backward castes and the depressed classes of Hinduism to embrace Islam and thus escape from caste inequalities.[132] The claim that Islam was the only religion that stood for human progress and

131 *Al-Ameen*, 23 July 1936.

132 *Ibid.*, 28 July 1936.

brotherhood and equality was reflective of their derisive attitude toward other religions. The open invitation to the Ezhavas and the depressed classes to convert to Islam had the potential of fomenting communal trouble. That the readership of *Al-Ameen* mainly consisted of the Malabar Mappilas, placed a special responsibility on the paper to observe restraint in dealing with sensitive communal issues.

Hindu Mahasabha and Hindu Communalism

The Mahasabha, the earliest of the Hindu communal organizations, contributed not a little to the communal tension and riots in the country in the first half of the 20th century. With the establishment of a branch of the Hindu Sabha in Kerala in 1925, the ideology and work of the organisation came to be hotly debated in the press.

As far as *Mathrubhumi*'s attitude towards the Hindu Sabha was concerned, two phases are discernible; during the 1920's the nationalist newspaper was seen to be favourably disposed towards the work of the Sabha, which it characterized as reformative, but starting from the 1930's the awareness, some how, dawned on *Mathrubhumi* that the Hindu organisation had a communal agenda that could spell disaster for the country.

Mathrubhumi either failed to detect or feigned ignorance of the underlying communalist ideology of the Sabha during the first phase. It saw the Sabha as essentially a Hindu reformist organization. The paper wished that the Hindu Mahasabha would be able to rid the Hindu society of its flaws. "To think of the means of improving a community does not mean preparing it to oppose other communities. There is no doubt that the Hindu Sabha would be able to contribute a lot in reducing communal rivalry and in improving friendship among members of various communities".[133] Considering the

[133] *Mathrubhumi*, 11 August 1923.

Sabha's majoritarian agenda and the fear it evoked among the minority communities and the resultant communal tension in many parts of the country, it is indeed baffling that *Mathrubhumi* could make such an optimistic statement on it.

It is also significant to note that some of the leading personalities closely associated with the *Mathrubhumi* during this period in various capacities like K. Madhavan Nair, Kurur Neelakantan Nambudiripad and K. Kelappan were also co-operating with the Hindu Mahasabha in Malabar.

Mathrubhumi justified the establishment of a branch of the Hindu Mahasabha in Malabar on the ground that it would help the Hindu community to raise itself from the pitiable condition into which it had fallen. The paper made it clear that it was not in favour of all the rules or principles of the Sabha. Still it supported the establishment of a branch in Malabar because it felt that the Hindus in Kerala did not have either the strength or the enthusiasm to form a separate organization for undertaking the reformation of the Hindu community.

What made *Mathrubhumi* think that Hindus in Kerala, who had produced such great reformers like Sree Narayana Guru and Chattampi Swamikal, did not have the strength or enthusiasm to form a separate organization to undertake the reformation of Hindu community, is not clear. That it was the pitiable condition of the caste-ridden Hindu community which made many from the lower castes to resort to conversion is beyond doubt. But finding a solution to it by strengthening the Hindu Mahasabha was what raised eyebrows. For a nationalist newspaper, claiming to have a progressive outlook in social and religious matters, it was inconceivable to justify a fundamentalist organization like the Hindu Mahasabha.

Mathrubhumi's fondness for the Sabha was again on display when it criticized a government order prohibiting government servants from joining the Sabha. The paper observed: "The Government does not seems to like to see the Hindu Community as a harmonious and vigorous community, by removing the flaws causing its decay";[134] there by underlying once more that the Hindu Mahasabha was the legitimate and premier organization of the Hindus committed to work for the reformation of the community and ignoring its political agenda.

The leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha got favourable treatment and good coverage from the part of *Mathrubhumi* during the 1920's. When Malaviya violated the order of the Calcutta Magistrate in August 1926 not to enter the city, *Mathrubhumi* hailed it in an editorial note entitled, "Malavyaji ki Jai".[135]

The Hindu conference at Thirunavaya organized by the Hindu Mahasabha in May 1929 created a political controversy in Malabar in which the press, especially the *Mathrubhumi* and the *Al-Ameen* took a leading part. *Mathbrubhumi* took the stand that if the Kerala branch of the Hindu Sabha would restrict itself to the reformation of Hindu Society, without poking its nose into political matters, as was often the case in North India, it could be beneficial to the Hindu community here. In an editorial published a few weeks before the Conference, *Mathrubhumi* opined that the Hindus should actively participate and make the Conference a great success, if it could be ensured that it would not be bound by the ideals and decisions of the all-India Hindu Mahasabha.[136] This suggestion to exempt a conference from the ideals and decisions of the organizer was indeed a curious one; it just showed how

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134 *Mathrubhumi,* 29 August 1925.

135 *Mathrubhumi,* 10 August 1926.

136 Ibid., 6 April 1929.

eager was *Mathrubhumi* to see the successful conclusion of the Conference, notwithstanding the communal ideology that the Hindu Sabha represented.

Al-Ameen, on the otherhand, viewed the Hindu Mahasabha as an out-and-out communal outfit; any kind of association with such an organization by Congressmen was unacceptable to it. Referring to *Mathrubhumi's* justifying the Sabha on account of its reformatory activities in the Hindu society, *Al-Ameen* questioned the relevance of a separate Hindu organization when the Indian National Congress itself had eradication of untouchability as an item in its agenda. It criticized those Congressmen[137] who were prepared to associate themselves with the Hindu Sabha in the name of reforming Hindu society.[138]

Mathrubhumi fiercely defended the right of the Hindus to have an organization of their own to work for the reformation of their community. Referring to *Al-Ameen's* questioning the relevance of a separate organization when the Congress itself was working for the eradication of untouchability, *Mathrubhumi* pointed out that untouchability was not the only flaw from which the Hindu community was suffering. Even if untouchability was the only flaw, the community had every right to make their own efforts to rectify that flaw; others could only insist that this right should be made use of in a just manner.[139]

Referring to the work of the Hindu Mahasabha, Arya Samaj and the Shuddhi movement, *Al-Ameen* made a serious allegation that their aim was to convert the 7 crores of Indian Muslims to Hindus or to expel them from the

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137 Prominent Congress leaders of Malabar like K. Madhavan Nair, K. Kelappan and Kurur Neelakantan Nambudiripad, all of them closely associated with the *Mathrubhumi*, were actively involved in the organization of the Thirunavaya Conference.

138 *Al-Ameen*, 30 April 1929.

139 *Mathrubhumi*, 2 May 1929.

country and to establish a 'Hinduraj'. 'The nationalist Muslim' paper went on to say, "Not only that, they also wanted to see the Aryan flag flutter on top of the holy 'Kaabha'; Aryan religion should spread throughout the world; the Muslims should be destroyed from the world scene-these are their aims".[140] It also quoted from the speeches of certain Arya Samajists who had allegedly exhorted to oust the Muslims forcibly from the country, as evidences of these aims.

Notwithstanding the communal outburst of some leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj, it is surprising that a newspaper, professing to be a nationalist one, could use such a highly inflammable language on such a communally sensitive issue. *Al-Ameen* had shown on many occasions that on matters relating to religion and community, it was incapable of taking an objective and impartial stand; it viewed everything from an essentially Islamic perspective. The imaginary scene of a flag fluttering on top of the 'Kaaba' could have easily incited another rebellion in Malabar; this time a wholly communal one.

Responding to *Al-Ameen's* allegations against the Hindu organizations that they were aiming the establishment of a 'Hinduraj' by driving away the Muslims, *Mathrubhumi* said these were baseless allegations. "Though we don't agree with some of the aims of the Hindu Mahasabha in North India, it can be boldly said that they don't include hoisting Aryan flag on top of 'Kaaba' etc. Even *Ameen* will not be able to prove that the aims of the Arya Samaj and Shuddhi movement include them".[141]

Though *Mathrubhumi's* anxiety on *Al-Ameen's* writings on the issue was quite justified, its own record on communal issue was not exactly above the board, as was evident from its mild approach to the Hindu Mahasabha.

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140 *Al-Ameen*, 30 April 1929.

141 *Mathrubhumi*, 2 May 1929.

Giving credibility to such an organization in the name of religious reform and helping it to get a foothold in Malabar, cast a shadow on its commitment to secular ideals. However, *Mathrubhumi* at least did not try to heighten communal tension by inciting religious emotions, as did the *Al-Ameen*.

Mathrubhumi also pointed out that because a few Arya Samajists expressed views offending the Muslims, it was unjust to blame the whole reformatory efforts of the Hindus; that would be akin to blaming the Muslims as a whole for the murder of Swami Shraddhananda and Rajapal by members of that community.[142]

Referring to the controversy over the Thirunavaya conference, *Manorama* said that all religions had become corrupted. But this seemingly innocuous observation had the *Al-Ameen* up in arms. "Our religion is not corrupted; it still shines in the world in its pristine purity",[143] proudly declared the paper. *Mathrubhumi* too joined the issue and said that if by religion was meant the moral principles underlying its philosophy, they were more or less common to all religions, and there was little scope for change in basic moral principles with the passage of time. But in the case of customs and rituals, Islam had also become corrupted. That was why Kamal Pasha and Amanullah had to make changes in this respect: *Mathrubhumi* also pointed out that the Muslim Aikya Sangham[144] was necessitated to make similar changes-though in a very moderate way - in Kerala too. The reluctance on the part of *Al-Ameen* to accept this fact did reflect a mentality that was prompting it to view the just reform efforts of other religionists

142 Both Swami Shraddhananda, a prominent leader of the Arya Samaj and Shuddhi movement in North India and Rajapal, an Arya Samaj activist from Lahore who wrote an allegedly abusive pamphlet on prophet Muhammed entitled, "Rangilarasul" were murdered by enraged Muslims.

143 *Al-Ameen*, 7 May 1929.

144 Muslim Aikya Sangham was a Muslim reformatory organization launched in 1922 that later merged into the Kerala Muslim Majlis, of which Muhammed Abdurahiman, editor of *Al-Ameen*, was a prominent spokesman.

unsympathetically and with mistrust. The paper warned against this mentality, the eradication of which was necessary for communal harmony.[145]

The resolution on the Shuddhi movement[146] passed by the Thirunavaya conference also came in for sharp criticism from the *Al-Ameen*. Congress leaders like K. Madhavan Nair were especially taken to task for supporting the resolution.[147] Madhavan Nair, on his part, justified his action stating that no Hindu could have opposed the resolution, as it only requested the Hindus to welcome those of their converted brothers and sisters desirous of returning to their old faith. He also reminded *Al-Ameen* that it had earlier stated that 'those who believed in the sacredness of Hinduism had as much claim to enlist people into their religions as the Muslims had to enlist people from other religions into Islam'.[148]

The controversy with respect to the Thirunavaya conference, with *Mathrubhumi* and *Al-Ameen* representing opposite sides, helped only to sharpen the communal divisions in the post-rebellion Malabar politics in general and Congress politics in particular. Muhammed Abdurahiman and his 'Nationalist Muslim' followers supported by the *Al-Ameen* began to distance more and more from the official leadership of the Congress, which was closely related to *Mathrubhumi*.

As has been mentioned earlier, *Mathrubhumi's* attitude towards the Hindu Mahasabha, which was generally appreciative during the 1920's, became more and more critical by the 1930's. The Sabha leaders had often

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145 *Mathrubhumi*, 9 May 1929.

146 The resolution on Shuddhi movement reads thus: "This conference requests all Hindus and Hindu Sabhas in Kerala to welcome those brothers and sisters who had earlier converted to other religions, but are now desiring to return back to the Hindu religion".

147 *Al-Ameen*, 13 May 1929.

148 *Al-Ameen*, 24 March 1929.

claimed that their only aim was to protect the Hindu community from the dangers that Muslim communalism posed. Referring to this, *Mathrubhumi* said that even if it was conceded that Muslims had more fanaticism and communal attitude, fanaticism could not be destroyed by fanaticism or communalism by communalism. The paper urged the Sabha that the Hindu, being the majority community, should never adopt a policy of destroying poison with poison. "Religion and the communal system based on it breeds alienation rather than closeness, downfall rather than greatness".[149]

When Jawaharlal Nehru instructed the president of the Bihar Congress Committee, in September 1937, that Congressmen were not free to join Hindu Mahasabha, *Mathrubhumi* supported him and observed that Congress members should never become members of communal institutions.[150] This was the same *Mathrubhumi* which, in 1929, fiercely defended the participation of Congress leaders like K. Madhavan Nair in the Thirunavaya Hindu Conference organized by the Hindu Mahasabha.

Mathrubhumi made another somersault when it remarked that if the theory that Congress was a Hindu organization had got even an iota of credibility, it was because leaders like Pandit Malaviya became members of the Congress and the Hindu Sabha simultaneously and held leadership positions in both organizations.[151] While what *Mathrubhumi* stated now was a fact, what was curious about the observation was that the paper not only did not criticize Malaviya for his communal politics until then, but it even admired the Hindu rightist leader too much. It feigned ignorance of Malaviya's communal learnings until Nehru openly took a stand against it.

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149 *Mathrubhumi*, 19 November 1933.

150 Ibid, 11 September 1937.

151 Ibid.

By the late 1930's *Mathrubhumi*'s disapproval of majority communalism began to be expressed in more concrete terms. Reacting to the speech of the president of Hindu Mahasabha that nationalism and Hindutwa were same and both needed to be encouraged, *Mathrubhumi* said that his was an attempt to hide from public view the fact that communal organizations were an impediment to the growth and development of nationalism. The paper exhorted: "It is the duty of every Indian to defeat the efforts of such communal forces with all the force at his command".[152] *Mathrubhumi* characterized the Hindu Sabha as an organization that could examine political issues only through communal eyes.[153]

Prominent left organs in Malabar, *Prabhatham* and *Deshabhimani* were consistent in their opposition to the Hindu Mahasabha and its communal agenda. *Prabhatham* pointed out that the Hindu Sabha and the Muslim League, who claimed to represent the two prominent communities in India and actually represented conflicting interests, were one in opposing the Congress. The paper, however, felt relieved that progressive forces in many parts of the country were supporting the Congress.[154]

Thus, generally speaking the Hindu Mahasabha did not get much support from the major newspapers of Malabar, except for the support its so-called reformatory work got from the *Mathrubhumi* in the 1920's.

Mathrubhumi - ***Al-Ameen*** **Rivalry and the Communal Polarization in the Nationalist Politics of Malabar**

Reference has already been made about the communal fall out of the Malabar Rebellion and how it gave rise to a Hindu-Muslim polarization in the Congress in Malabar, which, unfortunately, got a fillip with the emergence of

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152 *Mathrubhumi*, 29 June 1938.

153 Ibid, 24 September 1940.

154 *Prabhatham*, 9 January 1939.

two prominent 'nationalist' newspapers launched by Congressmen viz, *Mathrubhumi* and *Al-Ameen*. As has been noted earlier, *Al-Ameen* was launched as a 'nationalist-Muslim' paper while *Mathrubhumi* was conceived as a 'pure' nationalist paper. Gradually, however, in public perception and more or less in practice, these papers began to represent two groups in the Malabar Congress, with an alleged communal dimension to it - *Mathrubhumi* representing the rightwing faction dominated by the caste Hindus, especially the Nairs and the *Al-Ameen* representing the nationalist Muslims faction led by Muhammed Abdurahiman, who also edited the latter.

The Nair-Muslim divide in the Congress and the role of *Mathrubhumi* and *Al-Ameen* as flagbearers of these factions came into the open frequently during political controversies. Heated exchanges between the two papers in connection with the Thirunavaya Hindu Conference, and on the issues of conversion and religious education have already been mentioned. Election to the chairmanship of Kozhikode Municipal Council in 1931 provided another opportunity for the two pro-Congress papers to take opposite sides in the Congress fractionalism. While *Al-Ameen* went allout in the campaign to get Muhammed Abdurahiman elected as the first Muslim chairman of Kozhikode Municipal Council, *Mathrubhumi* opposed any communal consideration in the election to the chairmanship. For sometime, the two papers became a battleground for the two factions to air their respective views and to attack the rival group.

The public image of *Al-Ameen* as a 'Muslim paper' standing for the sectarian demands of the Muslims, even as it vigorously campaigned for nationalist demands, was a fallout of the communitarian agenda it so passionately upheld. Whether the rehabilitation of the Mappilas hit hard by the Rebellion or the educational backwardness of the Mappilas or inadequate Muslim representation in legislatures and Government service, *Al-Ameen*

fought with missionary zeal for the community's interests. Its spirited espousal of the policy of separate schools for Muslim students and religious instruction to them at public expense has been noted earlier.

Al-Ameen was guilty of dragging of religion into politics - not always for sectarian purposes but also for strengthening the national movement in its fight against the foreign government. The paper abundantly used quotations from the Quran and Hadiths to drive home to the Muslims that it was blasphemy for the followers of the Prophet to live under the foreign government, the rule of which was characterized as unIslamic. A classic example of the use of religious faith to instill patriotism was provided by the leader titled 'Jihad-ul-Akbar' published by *Al-Ameen* on 6 July 1930, about which reference has been made earlier in Chapter II. However, irrespective of whether religion was used for strengthening nationalist forces or in support of sectarian demands, the inevitable consequence of this approach was to communalise politics.

When Gandhi launched the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, the nationalist Muslims of Malabar under the leadership of Muhammed Abdurahiman was initially hesitant to participate in it. *Al-Ameen* justified it and criticized Gandhi for not consulting the Muslims before launching the movement. The paper wrote on 29 April 1930, "If Mr. Gandhi had acted with a little foresight in this matter, there would have been no need for repression and physical force. Mr. Gandhi lose nothing if he had waited the result of the Round Table Conference, and if it was proved to be a mere farce, he could, in consultation with the Muslims and with their co-operation, have started the necessary activities. But now that the campaign of Civil Disobedience has been launched without consulting the all-India Muslim organizations and Muslims in general, India is doomed to bondage. It is a fancy of Hindus that India

could be liberated by their efforts alone. We are glad that the Muhammedans as a community have not joined the present movement".[155]

It looks pretty clear from the above statement that *Al-Ameen* took the Indian National Congress for a Hindu organization and Gandhi for a Hindu leader. The enthusiasm that the paper showed later in supporting the CDM does not take away from the communitarian perspective it suffered from. From whatever remains of the back issues of *Al-Ameen* as also the extracts of *Al-Ameen* leaders available in the NNPR and other records, the inference is inevitable that the nationalist Muslim paper was unable to view issues from a perspective other than the 'Muslim'.

Another disturbing fact about *Al-Ameen* was that it allowed its columns to be used to discredit other religions. In a multi-religious society, that could only have vitiated an already fragile communal atmosphere, as it then existed in Malabar. The article titled 'Equality and Brotherhood' written by E.K. Moulavi and published by *Al-Ameen* in its issue dated 28 August 1928 belongs to this category. The author attempted to prove that Islam was the only religion that stood for equality and brotherhood and in the process tried to belittle other religions. While it would not have been a big issue for such an article to be published by a religions journal, it definitely should not have adorned the pages of a nationalist paper.

Appeal to the religious instincts of the Muslims and abundant use of Islamic symbols[156] for natinalist purposes did ofcourse inspire many Mappilas to take part in nationalist struggles like the Simon Commission Boycott and the CDM. It is also a fact that this had contributed to the strengthening of the

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155 *Al-Ameen*, 29 April 1930 (NNPR-1930, TNA, Chennai).

156 Though the Hindu communalist and even some rightist Congress leaders were equally guilty of political use of religious symbols, of the major newspapers published from Malabar, *Al-Ameen* was the major culprit in this respect.

community identity of the Mappilas. In this context, the observation made by P.A. Syed Muhammed, in his "Kerala Muslim Charithram", that '*Al-Ameen*, established to encourage a spirit of nationalism and community upliftment, had the effect of stimulating Mappila awareness of their own heritage and need' is significant.[157] The observation points to the dual role played by the paper on the one hand it tried to bring the Muslims to the mainstream of nationalist politics and on the other it strengthened the community identity of the Mappilas by appealing to their religious sentiments. But it was the role of *Al-Ameen* as an upholder of Islamic faith and identity which proved to be more consequential in the longrun. Evenwhile the paper took a nationalist position in political matters, its puritanical approach in matters relating to Islamic faith stimulated community awareness among the Mappilas, which in turn must have indirectly helped to drive them into the fold of Muslim organizations like the Muslim League rather than secular organizations like the Congress or the Socialists in the longrun. *Al-Ameen*'s frequent allegations of the Kerala Congress being under the control of Nairs couldnot have helped to attract Muslims to the Congress either.

Al-Ameen was often found to be insensitive in reporting incidents of communally sensitive nature, which was quite unbecoming of a nationalist newspaper. *Al-Ameen's* tendency to stir up communal feeling and hatred over various local issues had been noted by officials.[158]

The report under the title, "Tom-Tom infront of the Naduvattom Mosque, Preparations of the Hindus', published by *Al-Ameen* on 26 March 1936 is an instance.[159] It informed the readers that it was known that a festival

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157 P.A. Syed Muhammed, *Kerala Muslim Charithram* (Mal.), Thrissur, 1961, p. 168.

158 Confidential letter No. D1. 9072/36 dt. 22/9/36 from the D.M. to the Secretary Home Dept., Govt. of Madras, RAK.

159 For a discussion of the politics of playing of music before shrines and the consequent communal riots in Malabar, see Dilip M. Menon, "Becoming 'Hindu'

would take place on 3rd April and for this purpose Hindus from several places were being invited to take a procession with 'tom-tom' and music infront of the Naduvattom Mosque.[160] On the same issue *Al-Ameen* published another report on 5 April which said that the festival of the Hindus at Naduvattom had started and that attempt of the Thiyyas to go in procession with 'tom-tom' by the side of the Mosque was foiled by the effective intervention of the police. The report added that the Mappilas who had gathered at the place were reassured by the Circle Inspector that the procession would not go by the side of the Mosque and hearing this most of them left the place immediately; but some Hindus, armed with sticks, knives, etc. remained there.[161]

The reference in the first report about the Hindus being invited from several places to take out the procession was found to be false on official enquiry.[162] Infact, the report in the *Al-Ameen* led to a large Muslim gathering being collected at the place. The information as to armed Hindus being gathered, in the second report, was also found to be factually incorrect.[163]

Al-Ameen of the 7th May 1936 reported as follows: "The marriage procession proposed to go before the Kovurparamba Mosque with music passed without music on account of the presence of the police officers. That night at about 11 PM a Thiyya came to the bazaar, insulted all the persons present there and stabbed a Muslim youth on his chin. As the Muslims were peace-lovers, there was no trouble".[164] The report was exaggerated and

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and 'Muslim' identity and conflict in Malabar, 1900-1936" (Working Paper No. 255, January 1994, Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum).

160 *Al-Ameen*, 26 March 1936.

161 Ibid, 5 April 1936.

162 Public Dept. G.O.No. 1842, dated 16 November 1936 (RAK)

163 Ibid.

164 *Al-Ameen*, 7 May 1936.

misleading. The Dist. Supdt. of Police reported that there was infact no communal element about this small affray at all.[165]

A report published by *Al-Ameen* on 23rd July 1936 stated that nine Thiyyas had been charged by the Kuthuparamba Police for having attacked a Muslim shop keeper in Thattari Bazar, Anjarakandi, with swords and sticks and for having robbed him of his money. The report added that the spite between the Thiyyas and the Muslims was increasing daily and that the Muslims had become terribly frightened.[166] A few days later, the paper reported that the Thiyyas of the area were collecting money and finding out means to trouble the Muslims.[167]

These reports appeared at a time when there was absolutely no disturbance or sign of communal ill-feeling in that area. There was a criminal case over this assault but the fact that to two Hindus appeared as witnesses on behalf of the Mappila teashop keeper was sufficient proof that there was no communal element in the case. There was also nothing to suggest a communal organization of an aggressive kind on the part of the Thiyyas against the Mappilas, as alleged by the *Al-Ameen.*[168]

Officials had cited a telegram sent from the office of *Al-Ameen* in September 1936 as proof of its communal perspective. The wire was addressed to Adbulla Gandhi[169] (who had been convicted by a criminal court in Madras), *Khilafat* daily (Bombay) and Zakariamaniar Anjuman, Tablighe Islam (Bombay). The telegram was in these words: "Wire press statements

165 Letter from D.M. to Home Secretary, op.cit.

166 *Al-Ameen*, 23 July 1936.

167 *Ibid*., 28 July 1936.

168 Letter from District Magistrate to Home Secretary, *op. cit.*

169 Reference has already been made earlier (pp. 300-303) about Harilal Gandhi's conversion to Islam and the enthusiastic receptions organized for him in Malabar. It may be recalled that *Al-Ameen* was also in the fore-front in this celebration of Harilal's conversion.

Abdulla Gandhi's reported conviction. Communal strife expecting".[170] It could be reasonably presumed that the object of asking for details of the case was to publish articles of an aggressive nature. The concluding words, "communal strife expecting" gave a completely false idea of the reception of this news in Malabar.

Such instances can only lead to the inference that *Al-Ameen's* love of community, had incapacitated it from looking at things objectively. It could also have been that Muhammed Abdurahiman, immersed as he was in an effort to win the confidence of the Mappilas, hoped to draw the deeply religious Mappilas to the nationalist Muslim group under his leadership by pandering to their religious sentiments.

'Nationalist Muslims' widely believed that the significant contribution that *Al-Ameen* was rendering to the cause of the national movement was not getting due recognition from the part of KPCC leadership primarily because it was a Muslim paper. C.T. Alikoya, president of Idiyengara Jameth, Kozhikode, in a letter to Moulana Abdul Kalam Azad, complained of the shabby treatment by the KPCC leadership towards the *Al-Ameen*. "The Moplah organ, *Al-Ameen*, edited by Muhammed Abdurahiman, is a well-known newspaper on the west coast. From the very beginning the paper was and even today a nationalist paper allround. Its publication was stopped during the CDM because of the working of the notorious press ordinance, for its Congress activities. Even the highly praised Congress paper of Kerala (the reference is to *Mathrubhumi*) did not dare to do Congress propaganda at that time openly. But when the history of the Kerala Congress was published during the Golden Jubilee celebration, nothing was mentioned about *Al-Ameen* because *Al-Ameen* is a Muslim organ".[171]

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[170] Public Department. G.O. No. 1842 dated 16 November 1936, RAK.

[171] Letter from the president of Idiyegara Jameth to Abdul Kalam Azad dated 10 September 1937, AICC Papers, NMML, New Delhi.

Vidwan T.K. Raman Menon, a member of the editorial board of *Al-Ameen*, had testified to the fact that the Hindus did not respect *Al-Ameen* as a 'Congress paper'. He had also observed that *Al-Ameen* paid special attention to contradict the editorials of *Mathrubhumi* as well as to misinterpret *Mathrubhumi*'s ideals.[172] Of Abdurahiman's love of community, Raman Menon had this to say: "I have not seen anybody else who has loved his community so much".[173] It was exactly this boundless love for his community, it seems, that prompted him and his paper to make demands in the name of the Mappilas that did not always had a positive impact in an already polarized society.

Though accused of being a communal paper by many, what is interesting is that a significant section of its enemies consisted of Muslims themselves. Certain cunning people masquerading as Moulavis even warned the "true believers" that buying and reading *Al-Ameen* was blasphemy.[174] *Al-Ameen*'s fight was always for the poor and the downtrodden among the Mappilas. No wonder the wealthy section of the community, who were hand in glove with the conservatives in the community, turned enemies of the paper.

If *Al-Ameen* was often guilty of dragging religion into politics, the major allegation against *Mathrubhumi* was its 'Nair bias'; infact the paper was characterized as a 'Nair paper' by its enemies. From the very beginning *Mathrubhumi*'s director board was dominated by Nairs; its successive editors were also from the Nair community. *Mathrubhumi*'s stand in respect of certain issues also seemed to suggest a pro-Nair bias in its policy. Its strong

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172 S.K. Pottekkat et al., *Muhammed Abdurahiman - A Political Biography* (Mal.), Kozhikode, 1978, pp. 145-46.

173 Ibid., p. 146.

174 Ibid., pp. 148-49.

support to the rightwing of the KPCC, which was dominated by the Nairs, had often been cited as proof of this policy.

When the Congress Ministry was formed in Madras under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari, Kongat Raman Menon was included as the representative of Malabar, overlooking a highly deserving Muhammed Abdurahiman. *Mathrubhumi* expressed satisfaction in the list of ministers and said that Raman Menon was a highly capable man.[175] For *Al-Ameen*, it was yet another instance of the 'Nair bias' of the Congress leadership.

In a letter to the AICC General Secretary written on 17 May 1937, Abdurahiman warned that the KPCC and the AICC were helping the Leaguites in their objective of mobilizing the Mappilas under their banner by allowing the KPCC to be a 'Nayar organization'. A month earlier he had written a letter to Gandhi in which he charged that the Congress in Malabar was an 'absolute Nayar organization' which helped fully the 'Nayar cause and nothing else'. Abdurahiman demanded 17 seats to Muslims out of 52 Congress candidates, proportionate to the population of Muslims in the district, in the District Board election.[176]

Mathrubhumi's treatment of two great Malayalam poets, Kumaran Azam and Vallathol Narayana Menon, also raised doubts about its claims of unbiased approach. Kumaran Asan, considered by many to be the greatest Malayalam poet ever, did not get enough coverage in the *Mathrubhumi*. He was a renowned social reformer too, being a close disciple of Sri Narayana Guru. Even the tragic death of the poet in a boat mishap was reported in a small one-column news; a small editorial note was also published. This was in sharp contrast to the great coverage that Vallathol, another great

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175 *Mathrubhumi,* 18 July 1937.

176 Letter dated 18 April 1937 from Muhammed Abdurahiman to Gandhi, AICC Papers, (NMML, New Delhi).

Malayalam poet of the modern era and a contemporary of Asan, got in the columns of the paper. Apart from publishing most of his nationalist poems, *Mathrubhumi* also allotted a lot of its space to his speeches. Whether the caste factor[177] played any role in this contrasting treatment of two great contemporary poets by the paper is, ofcourse, debatable. Born and brought up in a princely state, Kumaran Asan tended to prioritise caste disabilities and the fight against these to political struggles, whereas Vallathol was a 'national' poet who saw social reform as a part of the national movement.

Mathrubhumi vehemently denied of having shown any communal or community bias in discharging its journalistic and nationalist duties. The paper claimed that it had not made any mistake in upholding those who were working selflessly for the welfare of the country - whatever be their community - as a model for the people. Nair did it shy away from criticizing those who did the opposite. The fact that persons belonging to various communities were subjected to its praise or criticism was cited as proof of its claim.[178] "We have always believed that no one has any eligibility to abuse a community so long as there is atleast one person in it who is modern and broadminded", *Mathrubhumi* declared.[179]

Notwithstanding the allegation of 'Nair bias' that *Mathrubhumi* had to enounter, it wished to see the Mappilas discard their political apathy and take an active interest in public affairs. In the elections to the local boards held in 1925, Muslim representatives were in a majority in the Ernad Taluk Board for the first time. Characterising the event as unprecedented, *Mathrubhumi* said that they believed this was a sign of the fact that the Mappilas had discarded

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177 Kumaran Asan belonged to the backward Ezhava caste whereas Vallathol belonged to the Nair caste with which *Mathrubhumi* was identified by many of its critics.

178 *Mathrubhumi*, 6 July 1929.

179 *Mathrubhumi*, 9 July 1929.

the laziness they had been exhibiting with respect to public affairs. Claiming itself to be not in the habit of looking at the members of a board or legislative assembly or other administrative institutions through a communal perspective, the paper said what it was looking for was the people who were prepared to express public opinions forcefully and courageously and willing to work for implementing it, no matter what caste, community or religion they represented. "We believe that the majority in the Ernad Taluk Board will not be a mere Mappila majority, but a majority of the kind mentioned above, and that their help will be available in the efforts to liberate the local self-government of Malabar from a few self-seekers and autocrats."[180]

Mathrubhumi's observation assumes significance in the light of the fact that the Nairs were the major losers when Muslims secured majority in the Board. Often ridiculed as a *Nair paper* by critics, *Mathrubhumi* however did not express any rancour; instead the paper viewed the Muslim majority as a positive development. It wanted the Muslim community to come out of their shell and take an active interest in public affairs. That the *Mathrubhmi* and the Congress were dominated by the Nairs during the period need not necessarily have been the result of the play of a caste caucus. Taking into account the social reality of the time, it was natural for the Nairs, with their social position and education, it to take an active interest in public affairs.

It is also important to note that *Mathrubhumi* did not hesitate to criticize Nair organizations whenever they took an anti-Congress and anti-nationalist stance. For instance, the paper deplored the presidential speech of K.T. Kumara Pillai at the Nair Conference in May 1938, in which he criticized the struggle for responsible government led by Travancore State Congress.[181]

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180 *Mathrubhumi*, 1 December, 1925.

181 *Mathrubhumi*, 15 May 1938.

Mathrubhumi' was a staunch critic of the communalist mentality among a section of Muslims. From the very beginning it opposed all kinds of communal demands. In a discussion in the Madras Legislative Assembly in March 1925 a Muslim member of the Assembly, Moidu expressed the view that the best way to maintain peace in the rebellion hit taluks of Malabar would be to appoint a Muslim as the Deputy Superintendent of Police. Criticising the Muslim member, *Mathrubhumi* pointed out the meaninglessness of his argument by reminding the atrocious role played by the notorious police officer, Aamu Sahib, during the Rebellion of 1921. "If we try to understand the reality, it will be clear that the reason for these calamities is not the community or caste of any superintendent, but the fact that the legislature or the people don't have the power to seek explanation from that official."[182] The growing demand by a section of the Mappilas for special consideration generally did not find much favour with the *Mathrubhumi*.

The *Rangilarasul* case of 1927 had caused much communal tension in various parts of the country, including Malabar. The controversial issue arose when Rajapal, an Arya Samajist from Lahore, published an allegedly abusive pamphlet on Prophet Mohammed. The issue reached the court where Justice Duleep Singh of the Lohore High Court ruled that the author of the controversial pamphlet could not be punished under the existing law. The newspaper, *Muslim Outlook* published an article blaming the judge for passing such a verdict. The article was found to be a contempt of the court and the publisher and printer of the *Muslim Outlook* were duly punished. The incident caused much heart-burn among the Muslims; not only was the abusing of the Prophet went unpunished; what was worse, the publisher and printer of a Muslim publication was punished for criticising the judge.

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182 *Mathrubhumi*, 31 March, 1925.

Mathrubhumi's stand in the issue was a reasonable one, befitting its status as a nationalist newspaper, eager to avoid any communal clash over it. While it acknowledged the ire of the Muslim community as genuine and justifiable, it feared that extremist elements in the community could exploit the situation. The paper wrote: "The Muslims have reason to complain when the abuser of the Prophet, the subject of boundless devotion and reverence of the Muslims, escapes from punishment while the pressmen get severe punishment for criticizing it . . . However, the incident has given facility to some people to realize their undesirable intensions."[183]

In a report about the protest meeting, convened in Kozhikode by the Kerala Muslim Yuvajana Sangham on the *Rangilarasal* issue, *Mathrubhumi* said that the Muslim leaders who spoke on the occasion expressed strong anti-Hindu sentiments, especially against the Arya Samajam and the Shuddhi movement.[184]

In a significant editorial *Mathrubhumi* remarked, "We are of the opinion that freedom of criticism is essential for the progress of mankind. The public should have the freedom to criticize any opinion and action that affects or could affect the people. Even founders of religion and religious prophets cannot be exempted from this . . . Nevertheless, they should have at least the protection that even ordinary people have from unjust and abusive criticisms such as that made by the *Rangilarasul* defendant. Our humble opinion is that the present law is sufficient to provide such a protection . . ."[185]

Mathrubhumi criticized those leaders, who not being satisfied by the present law, were demanding the resignation of the judge who had given the verdict in the case and trying to make an entire community the offender as

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183 *Mathrubhumi*, 9 July 1927.

184 Ibid., 12 July 1927.

185 Ibid.

that would increase communal rivalry. *Mathrubhumi* felt especially offensive the demand that Justice Duleep Singh and the Chief Justice should resign and that in their positions Muslims or Europeans should be appointed. The paper warned that this would obstruct the political progress of the country by making European presence in this country unavoidable and by encouraging the Government to use its despite powers.[186] *Mathrubhumi's* main concern was that the British Government would be able to exploit the situation arising from a communal rivalry between the major communities of India.

Mathrubhumi's eagerness to avoid a communal conflagration on the issue was also evident when it reminded the Hindus of its duty to condemn publications like the *Rangilarasul* and to exhibit their dissatisfaction against the authors of such publication. Without naming the Arya Samaj, the paper added. "If the offenders happen to belong to an organization, the members of that organization have a special liability to express their dissatisfaction in a more practical manner."[187]

On the whole it could be safely said that *Mathrubhumi's* stand in *Rangilarausul* issue was guided by a desire to maintain communal amity and to find a peaceful solution to the problem. It did not support the extremist groups on either side.

Later, *Mathrubhumi* viewed the murder of Rajapal, the author of *Rangilarasul* by a Muslim youth in April 1929 as an attempt to inflame communal rivalry in the country, which had been on the wane. The paper reminded all those who loved their religion, community and country that it was their duty not to allow this to happen. Its advice to the Hindu leaders was to treat the incident as the unintelligent act of an individual and not charge the

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186 Ibid.

187 *Mathrubhumi*, 14 July 1927.

Muslim community with responsibility for it.[188] Quite appropriately *Mathrubhumi* tried to cool tempers on either side in the *Rangilarsual* issue. Being a nationalist newspaper wedded to Gandhian ideals, it was well aware of the importance of maintaining communal harmony at any cost, if the freedom struggle had to progress toward it logical conclusion.

Mathrubhumi was much concerned about the Muslim League politics of mobilizing Muslims on the basis of communal ideology. It wished to see more and more Muslims embracing the secular ideology of the Congress. When a reasonable number of Muslims took part in the Salt Satyagraha in Malabar owing mainly to the initiative taken by the nationalist Muslims under the leadership of Muhammed Abdurahiman, *Mathrubhumi* viewed it specially encouraging as it came in the background of the community's disenchantment with the nationalist leadership following the Malabar Rebellion. The paper denied the theory that Indian Muslims were enemies of the country's independence as claimed by some critics, pointing to the imprisonment of 12000 Muslims for participating in the CDM as well as innumerable meetings convened by the 'Nationalist Muslims' in many parts of the country in support of the national movement under Gandhi. *Mathrubhumi* supported the view that the constitution should provide for adequate protective clauses for the minorities.[189]

However, *Mathrubhumi* was wary of the alleged 'sectarian approach' sometimes adopted by the 'Nationalist Muslims'. When Muhammed Abdurahiman temporarily relinquished the presidentship of the KPCC in 1939, after intervention by the central leadership over the infamous 'secret circular' issue,[190] the nationalist Muslims convened a meeting in Kozhikode to

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188 Ibid., 11th April 1929.

189 *Mathrubhumi,* 23 & 25 August 1931.

190 Arguments for and against the secret circular can be found in S.K. Pottekkat et al., *op.cit.*, and C.K. Moosath, *Kelappan Enna Mahamanushyan* (Mal.)

deliberate on the political development. *Mathrubhumi* viewed it highly undesirable that a 'communal meeting' should be convened on an issue (Abdurahiman's relinquishment of the presidentship) that concerned every Congressman. "If such communal divisions are to take place in the Congress, its future can be frightening. The Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others belonging to the Congress need to examine public issues without any communal bias",[191] *Mathrubhumi* exhorted.

It would appear that the main reason for the *Mathrubhumi* - *Al-Ameen* rivalry was the difference in their approach toward the community vis-à-vis nationality issue; while *Mathrubhumi* assigned supremacy to the nation over everything else, to *Al-Ameen*, community and religious faith were equally, if not more, important as national freedom.

Welcoming the launching of *Al-Ameen* in 1924, *Mathrubhumi* observed: "Though the Muslims of Kerala have a number of papers of their own, it is highly doubtful whether these papers have been able to contribute to the growth of noble qualities like brotherhood beyond religion, real national consciousness and spirit of independence. We believe that *Al-Ameen* will help to make the winning of freedom more easier by fostering these noble virtues among the Muslims of Kerala. We pray to God that *Al-Ameen* may live long serving the country and the community".[192]

When *Al-Ameen* was launched, *Mathrubhumi* was, thus, hoping that the 'Nationalist Muslim' paper would place the nation above the community and that its service of the community would be complementary to the nationalist cause. *Mathrubhumi*'s concept of nationalism obviously envisaged loyalty and devotion to one's nation over and above one's loyalty to other

(Kottayam, 1982).

191 *Mathrubhumi*, 28 April 1939.

192 *Mathrubhumi*, 14 October 1924.

groups including religious community. But it found later, to its dismay, that *Al-Ameen* was often unable to see things from a national perspective, in its enthusiasm to fight for the interests of the Muslim community. This fundamental difference in their approach towards community vis-à-vis nationality issue, coupled with their supporting of opposing factions in the Congress led to these 'Congress papers' holding divergent views on a number of major political issues and involving in heated exchanges.

The question of primacy of the nation is not discussed here. G. Aloysius has done a detailed analysis of the issue in his *Nationalism Without a Nation in India* (New Delhi, 1997).

The Left and Communalism

Appreciating the realistic attitude of the leftists towards communalists, Bipan Chandra remarked: "The only serious effort to understand the broader social, economic and political dimensions, character and causation of communalism and to organize an ideological and political campaign based on this understanding was made by Jawaharlal Nehru and the Left during 1933-37 …".[193] As far as Malabar was concerned they, however, seems to have compromised on this stand on few occasions. The Left support to the Muslim demand for separate schools is a case in point.

Prabhatham, the Congress Socialist organ justified the leftist support to certain communal demands of Muslims through an article written by 'Surendran' (EMS Nambudiripad). Quoting Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Surendran' argued that there were two sections among communalists/communitarians; one section, basing themselves on the social and cultural base of feudalism, was eager to protect the political and economic interests of Imperialism while the other section, because of the propaganda of the former, was under the

[193] Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, New Delhi; 1984, pp. 149-50.

misconception that their community and culture was in danger. The latter, though demanding separate schools and study of Quran in schools, should not be seen as communalists. The author was of the opinion that their demands should be seen only as a result of the want of political education.[194]

The article also reminded the opinion of Jawaharlal Nehru that communalism of the majority community might look similar to nationalism than minority communalism. Surendran alleged, "A large part of nationalism that we see around is majority communalism".[195] He made light of the issue of communalism by saying that what mattered was not whether one was 'communalist' or 'nationalist', but whether one helped to carry forward the nationalist struggle.

'Surendran' also rejected the allegation that the Socialists in Kerala were promoting Muslim communalists and claimed that nationalism was spreading among Muslim masses owing to the propaganda and organisational work of the Socialists. "The Muslims may not have accepted common schools; they may not have love for *Vandemataram* . . . . . But today they have began to line against the Federation;[196] they have began to organise against war . . . . It can be said without any doubt that this situation has come about as a result of the propaganda of the Socialists and other Congressmen who work with them", he claimed.[197]

The article then went on to explain why the Socialists were able to produce such positive impact on the Muslims. It was not by tickling the religious sentiments of the Muslims, but by ignoring religion and concentrating on worldly matters like poverty, unemployment, low wages,

194 *Prabhatham*, 5 September 1938.

195 *Ibid.*

196 The reference to Federation is about the proposal made in the Government of India Act of 1935.

197 *Prabhatham*, 19 September 1938.

inability of the peasants to give rent, bureaucratic corruption etc. "These grievances have no religious or caste difference; both the poor Muslims and poor Hindus do care for this propaganda . . . . Peasants and workers' organisations grow . . . . ."[198] 'Surendran' listed the positive impact of the Leftist propaganda, with due respect to the religious sentiments of the Muslims. The author was infact reiterating the classical leftist position here – that of emphasizing class and mobilisation on its basis, ignoring religious or caste differences. Certain prominent socialist thinkers in India like Ram Manohar Lohia had challenged this position and opined that ignoring caste differences in Indian social conditions would be unrealistic.

The article claimed that the Socialists were able to foster nationalist attitude among the Muslims by their creative work – by dissolving their communalist doctrine before the real issue of poverty, by convincing them that it was not Muslim interests, but the interests of the poor majority that was important. "Even if the school policy of the District Board[199] is implemented within 10 years, the nationalist attitude that it will create will be much less compared to the nationalist attitude created by this Muslim mass contact programme of the Leftists".[200]

However, the claim of the Leftists that they were able to 'dissolve the communalist doctrine' of the Muslims before 'the real issue of poverty' proved to be premature in the end. That this strategy of concentrating on the political and economic aspects, neglecting the social and religious and even acceding to communal demands, failed in the long run was proved by the steady growth

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198 Ibid.

199 Malabar District Board had decided to do away with the system of separate schools for communities and to implement, within a period of ten years, the policy of common schools for all communities. The decision was opposed by a large section of Muslims, who also got the support of the Leftists.

200 *Prabhatham*, op. cit.

in the influence of the Muslim League in the political sphere and of the orthodox and conservative Muslim clergy in the social and religious sphere.

Apart from its claim that the Leftists were able to attract more Muslims to the Congress fold, *Prabhatham* also alleged that the right wing Congressmen were reluctant to work among the Muslims.[201]

In line with the policy of the Communist Party of India, its official organ in Kerala, *Deshabhimani*, supported the principle of self-determination,[202] thereby indirectly favouring the demand for Pakistan. The paper considered self-determination to be an important principle of democracy.[203] "It is the completion of Indian democracy, a continuance of the traditions of the Congress itself".[204] It was of the opinion that conceding the principle of self-determination was the only means of a Congress-League unity, which was a must for securing a National Government.

The Communist Party was not averse to cooperating with communalist organisations in times of emergency. E.M.S., in an article published by the *Deshabhimani* in July 1943 said that in view of the very serious situation in the country owing to severe famine conditions, the Congress should be

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201 *Prabhatham*, 10 April 1939.

202 Right to self-determination had been accepted by the Marxian concept of nationalism. Lenin was the first to elaborate on Marxian concept of self-determination in 'The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination' (*Collected Works*, Vol. 22). However, it must be noted that neither Lenin nor Stalin did consider religion a component of nationality. Infact, it was the CPI under the leadership of P.C. Joshi which gave such an interpretation to the Marxian concept of self-determination. The CPI later abandoned this line.

203 For an analysis of the CPI's approach to the question of nationality and to the Pakistan Movement, see Bhagwan Josh, *Communist Movement in Punjab* (Delhi, 1979, pp. 168-198) and Sri Prkash, "CPI and the Pakistan Movement" in 'Bipan Chandra (ed.) *The Indian Left-Critical Appraisals* (New Delhi, 1983, pp. 215-258).

204 *Deshabhimani*, 21 March 1943.

prepared to join hands with other organisations including the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha.[205]

The Communist Party's policy of supporting the idea of self-determination to communities was severely criticised by the *Mathrubhumi*. Accusing the Communists of making friends with the communalists, *Mathrubhumi* also alleged that their real motive in supporting the principle of self-determination was to facilitate the formation of small autonomous states in the vicinity of the Soviet Union so that they could be made part of the Soviet Union later; thus Pakistan would ultimately become another Soviet.[206] It is significant that *Mathrubhumi* expressed this apprehension of a possible Soviet expansion to India through Pakistan, when the Soviet Union was busy in installing communist regimes in East European countries.

Reference has been made earlier to the controversial article, "The Call and the Warning of 1921", published by the *Deshabhimani* on 20th August 1946 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Malabar Rebellion. Critics, including *Mathrubhumi*, alleged that the article was intended to incite communal violence. As pointed out by M.S. Devadas, editor of *Deshabhimani*, in his letter to the Madras Prime Minister, Rajagopalachari, apart from applauding the 'heroism displayed during the Rebellion', it contained 'a clear warning to the Muslims and Hindus of 1946 to avoid the communal pitfalls into which the Rebellion was led astray at a later stage by Imperialists and their toadies'.[207]

The editor of *Deshabhimani* claimed: "Far from inciting the people to communal riots, it raised the warning finger against such fratricidal war. Even in the case which was instituted by the police against Comrade E.M.S.

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205 *Ibid*., 11 July 1943.

206 *Mathrubhumi*, 15 November 1945.

207 *Ibid.*

Nambudiripad, Chairman of our Editorial Board, on the issue of this very same manifesto, the prosecution finally had to admit that there was no communal incitement in the manifesto but only incitement against the British".[208]

The *Deshabhimani* editor was right in his claim that the article in question did not contain any material intended to incite the communal feelings of the Mappilas against any other community. On the other hand, the article stressed the importance of all communities joining together in the fight against imperialism. The following excerpts from the article will make the point clear: "Today, as in 1921, we are confronted with the danger of one community fighting another and eventually both the communities becoming loyal to the Empire, instead of our directing a united struggle against imperialist domination conjointly by all sections of the people . . . We appeal to the Leaguers to realise the danger of preparing for a jihad against the Congress and Hindus, as the League is doing today . . . . The Party (CPI) also appeals to the left wings in the Congress, those organised bodies known as CSP, Forward Block etc. and the left wings yet unorganised in the League to learn the lessons of 1921. We made a request to them to realise that a mass struggle under leaders who are either moderate or anti-revolutionary is bound to fail, that a struggle affecting a particular community ultimately leads to communal riots and causes damage to the country, and that the anti-revolutionary attitude of leaders and the communal nature of the struggle serve the interests of Imperialism . . . ."[209]

Deshabhimani was often accused by critics of indulging in false propaganda. It published, in its issue dated 8 September 1946, an article by

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208 Letter dated 18 December 1946 from M.S. Devadas to C. Rajagopalachari, Prime Minister of Madras, Public department G.O. 692 dated, 4 March 1947 (RAK).

209 *Deshabhimani*, 20 August 1946.

A.K. Gopalan, well-known Communist leader in which he alleged that the Sub Inspector of Police, Koyilandy was creating Hindu-Muslim tension by telling each party that the other was preparing for an attack on it. He also made the serious allegation that the Congress leaders were involved in a conspiracy to crush the Muslims with the help of the white soldiers and police and putting the blame on the Communists. He cited the editorial published by *Mathrubhumi* on 20 August 1946, accusing the Communists of exciting the Mappilas for an uprising, as proof of such a conspiracy. A.K. Gopalan also accused the League leaders of exciting the Mappilas against the Congress and of trying to compromise with the Imperialists.[210]

The conspiracy theory of A.K. Gopalan was found to be baseless by officials and political opponents, who accused the Communists of indulging in false propaganda. The District Magistrate cited the article, in his letter to the Chief Secretary, to show that the Communists were "trying to set up the Moplas in Malabar against the Congressmen or Hindus in general".[211] It is also to be noted that no other paper is seen to have reported about any such conspiracy to foment communal trouble in the area. Anyway, it is very difficult to check the veracity of this alleged conspiracy, as the author had based his allegations on rumours spreading among the locals.

In its issue dated 11th October 1946, *Deshabhimani* published a report under the caption, "Shaving fight", stating that the Ponnani Taluk Muslim League had directed the Muslims to have their heads clean shaven for the purposes of easy identification in the fight against the Hindus. The correspondent reported that the shaving campaign was going on in full swing and that disciplinary action was likely against those who did not abide by this direction and that he was watching what counter measures the KPCC were

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210 *Ibid*., 8 September 1946.

211 Letter No. D5/2532/M/46 dated 11-9-46 from Dt. Magistrate to the Chief Secretary, Govt. of Madras (RAK).

devising.[212] As for the truthfulness of this report, there is no other way but to take the words of the reporter at its face value.

Allegations of communal incitement by *Deshabhimani* also came from the bureaucracy and the police. The Deputy Superintendent of Police, in his letter to the District Magistrate, wrote: "…Apart from these objectionable publications, the editorial staff consisting of irresponsible Communists, are an association by themselves, always engaged in inciting political, communal and labour disturbances in the name of the Malabar Communist party. They have been trying to create bad blood between the Congress and the Muslim League and between the Hindus and Moplahs. The attempt to provoke a rebellion among the Moplahs was intended to be a double-edged weapon in this behalf …".[213]

Minority Issue and the Two Nation Theory

The issue of minorities had always been a controversial one in Indian politics right from the beginning of the national movement. With the foundation of the Indian Natinal Congress as the organized form of Indian national aspirations, questions were raised as to its representative character. The reluctance on the part of the Muslims, the largest minority in the country, to actively associate themselves with Congress, was a major challenge the organization faced. The pro-Congress papers, eager to uphold the Congress as the premier and legitimate national organization of India, tried to highlight the participation of Muslims in Congress activities.

Kerala Patrika, for instance, pointing to certain instances of Muslim participation in Congress work, observed in December 1887 that the allegation that Muhammedans were taking no part in the movements of the

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212 *Deshabhimani*, 11 October 1946.

213 Letter dated 13/11/46 from Dy. Supdt. of Police, Malabar to the District Magistrate, RAK.

Congress was totally false.[214] Again *Kerala Patrika*, referring to the Congress session of 1906, noticed with pleasure the absence of any conflict of opinion among the Congress leaders, such as was anticipated in certain quarters owing to the presence of an unusually large number of Muhammedan delegates. "The presence of so many Muhammedan delegates has entirely disproved the statement of some of the enemies of Indian progress that the Muhammedans do not co-operate in a movement which is calculated to benefit the Hindus and Muhammedans alike", the paper observed.[215]

Mathrubhumi questioned the rational of treating any community in India as either majority or minority. Terming the minority doctrine of the Muslim League as unrealistic, the nationalist paper supported Jawaharlal Nehru's opinion that a 7-crore strong community could not be considered as a minority. It pointed out that the Muslims were spread throughout India and that in certain states they were in majority; the minority issue in such states was different from what it was in other states. "In such a case there is no reason to believe that the Hindus will ever torture Muslims in India. The apprehensions of other communities in India are also out of place because India does not have an organized Hindu majority …. Hence, there is no meaning in talking about a religious or communal majority or minority in India. It is only a tool to conceal the self-interests and reactionary attitude of certain people …".[216]

That the Hindus were not a monolithic community like the Muslims or Christians was a relevant point; the Hindus had never been a homogenous group having a common entity. The difference between the various caste groups among the Hindus like the Brahmins, the non-Brahmins and the outcastes were so vast that it was very unlikely that all these groups would

214 *Kerala Patrika*, 24 December 1887, NNPR - 1887, TNA, Chennai.

215 *Kerala Patrika*, 5 January 1907, NNPR - 1907, TNA, Chennai.

216 *Mathrubhumi*, 27 October 1939.

have united to fight other communities like the Muslims or Christians. The fact that there were frequent communal riots, which were generally characterized as Hindu-Muslim riots, did not mean that all the communities within the Hindus had been involved in these riots.

Mathrubhumi expressed great disappointment and resentment at the squabbles among the Indian representatives at the Round Table Conference over the communal question. Referring to the failure of the Minority Committee, constituted to facilitate the discussion in the Conference, to arrive at a compromise to the communal problem, the paper suggested: "Though it is unbearable for us to let others even touch India's internal affairs, we feel that it is more respectable to leave this problem to the League of Nations for taking a decision on this than allow these representatives (Indian representative in the Round Table Conference), not elected by Indians, to quarrel over it in London".[217] Though *Mathrubhumi* did not incriminate any specific community for the failure of the Minority Conference, *Al-Ameen* alleged that *Mathrubhumi* indicated the Muslims to be responsible for the failure of the Conference.[218] The allegation was a reflection of the suspicion with which *Mathrubhumi* was viewed by *Al-Ameen*, especially with respect to communal matters.

Mathrubhumi's suggestion to refer the communal question to the League of Nations showed its eagerness to see the problem amicably settled. The paper also pointed out that Britain would also be bound by the decision of the League, as she was also a member of the organization.

Chandrika, the Muslims League organ, was of the view that the lack of large heartedness on the part of the majority community towards the minorities was the major hindrance before a united front against the British.

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217 *Mathrubhumi*, 9 October 1931.

218 *Al-Ameen*, 15 October 1931.

Writing on the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 where by Egypt got her freedom, the paper observed: "If in their efforts to win India's freedom, the majority communities in India should, like the Muslims in Egypt, be prepared to show their largeheartedness and to ensure the minority communities in India that their rights and interests will be safeguarded and thus to win the confidence and cooperation of all communities in India, it will not take a long time for India to win her freedom".[219]

When suggestions were made by some Congress leaders to form specific Muslim committees to bring Muslims closer to the Congress, *Mathrubhumi* disagreed with it and opined that it would be more desirable to form common committees to bring all sections of people closer to the Congress.[220] The paper consistently opposed such community-specific approach as it rightly feared that such a sectarian approach would adversely impact on secular foundations of the Congress.

Mathrubhumi strongly supported the Congress policy with respect to the minorities. It remarked: "The Congress, which is accused of being a Hindu organization by Mr. Jinnah, but as yielding to Muslims by Bhai Paramanand, is an institution striving to protect the interests of the country, ignoring the rights of communities".[221] *Mathrubhumi* declared that all the reasonable rights of minorities were protected by the resolution on fundamental rights, accepted by the Congress Working Committee. The working committee proclaimed it to be the duty of the Congress to protect the interests of minorities and to provide all opportunities for their social and economic development. Every person could have the religious faith of his choice; their language and culture would be well-protected by the state. What more could the minorities ask for?, *Mathrubhumi* asked. The paper also

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219 *Chandrika*, 17 August 1936, NNPR - July to August 1936, TNA, Chennai.

220 *Mathrubhumi*, 22 June 1937.

221 *Ibid*., 31 October 1937.

pointed out that the Congress had also assured that it would not make any change in the existing concessions that the minorities enjoyed, without reaching an agreement with them on it.[222]

When the Mountbatten Plan was announced, *Mathrubhumi* expressed its doubt whether the new plan would be able to solve the minority problem. In a prophetic editorial, the nationalist daily said: "Minority problem grew bigger to become the two-nation theory …. It has to be seen whether India's partition will also solve the minority problem or not. But one thing is clear; if the atmosphere and policy that created the two-nation theory is to continue, minority problem is never going to be solved".[223]

Mathrubhumi did not think that the obstinacy of the minority alone was responsible for the creation of two-nation theory. It said that the Hindu majority also had a prominent role in it. The major fault, as seen by the *Mathrubhumi*, was the lack of interest shown by Congressmen in the eradication of untouchability and the promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity, two prominent items in the Gandhian constructive programme.[224]

Once the partition plan was accepted by the Congress and League, *Mathrubhumi* was concerned about the protection of minorities in both India and Pakistan. The paper thought that only the friendship of the majority could provide enough protection to the minorities. And that inturn would depend on the strength and conduct of the minorities. *Mathrubhumi* cited the example of the Parsis in India; though they were one of the smallest minorities in India, the Parsis got respect everywhere. It exhorted the minorities in India and Pakistan to follow the example of Parsis.[225]

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222 Ibid.

223 *Mathrubhumi*, 20 June 1947.

224 Ibid.

225 *Mathrubhumi*, 20 June 1947.

As India moved closer to freedom and partition, communal conflagration of an unprecedented scale plunged India into turmoil and concern about the fate of minorities in both the countries grew stronger. Gandhi's announcement in August 1947 that he would spent the rest of his life in Pakistan came as a 'bolt from the blue'. But it did not surprise the *Mathrubhumi*, which thought that Gandhi's decision was quite rational in the circumstances. The paper brushed aside the allegation that the decision proved that Gandhi was more interested in the protection of the non-Muslim minorities of Pakistan than that of the Muslim minority of India. His presence in India was not needed to compel them to show justice to the minorities. But the condition of minorities in Pakistan was different. *Mathrubhumi* claimed, "If it is possible for anybody to remove their fear, to convince them that they will get protection in Pakistan and to create an atmosphere of friendship and harmony by bringing together the two communities, it is only Gandhiji".[226]

Earlier, in April 1946, *Mathrubhumi* had foreseen the state of things to come, if partition was to be accepted. Contesting the claim of Jinnah that friendship between Hindus and Muslims would be realized once partition was allowed, the paper had forewarned: "… On the otherhand it will only make the minority problem more difficult. The Hindus in Pakistan becoming the surety for the good conduct of the Hindustan Government; likewise the Muslims in India becoming the surety for the good conduct of the Pakistan Government. Such an atmosphere will help only to retain permanent civil war in India".[227] That was exactly what happened at the time of partition.

It was with the demand for Pakistan, raised by the Muslim League under the leadership of Muhammed Ali Jinnah that the communal atmosphere of the country reached feverish pitch, leading ultimately to the partition. The

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226 *Mathrubhumi*, 10 August 1947.

227 *Ibid*., 11 April 1946.

nationalist press campaigned vigorously against the two-nation theory and explained how calamitous a partition would be for the country as a whole and for the Muslims in particular.

Referring to the two-nation theory, *Mathrubhumi* said: "World history has proved that it is not possible to form a nation on the basis of religious unity. If Mr. Jinnati's theory is right, there would have been only one country in Europe. Even the Muslim world would not have been divided into so many countries and fighting with each other at times. Therefore, those who are tryig to create an independent Muslim nation in India are just day-dreaming…[228] Obviously, *Mathrubhumi* viewed the Pakistan demand of the League as only an unrealizable fancy at this juncture. The paper was also able to prove the irrationality of the two-nation theory, drawing on the historical experiences of other countries.

In an article published in the *Mathrubhumi*, K. Kelappan expressed surprise at the policy of the Communists in supporting the Pakistan demand. Kelappan observed that it was sad that the Communists should strengthen superstitions even after it had been proved from experience that communal attitude and blind religious fath were obstacles in the way of strengthening workers' movement and communist movement.[229]

Deshabhimani of course, high lighted the communist line of upholding the principle of self-determination. Pointing to certain positive signals from the part of the Mulsim League in favour of Congress-League unity against the British if the right to self-determination was granted, *Deshabhimani* in its issued dated 4th April 1943, urged all the parties concerned to accept the fact that the problem of self-determination could no longer be brushed aside.[230]

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228 *Mathrubhumi*, 27 March 1940.

229 *Ibid.*, 27 May 1942.

230 *Deshabhimani*, 4 April 1943.

In a statement made in July 1943 Liaqat Ali Khan, Secretary of the Muslim League, praised the propaganda infavour of Pakistan, made by the Communist Party. *Deshabhimani* welcomed the statement, but also added that the League should come forward to agitate for the release of Congress leaders and also work for the formation of the National Government on the basis of the right of self determination.[231]

Chandrika being the organ of the Muslim League in Kerala, was a strong votary of the two-nation theory and campaigned vigorously for the realization of the objective, the creation of Pakistan. In a leading article, the paper justified the Direct Action Day (16 August 1946) planned by the League to force issue of Pakistan.[232] *Chandrika* was released on 2 September 1946, the day on which the Interim Government under Jawaharlal Nehru assumed office without League representatives, black borders carrying an editorial with the caption, *September 2*; the day was characterized as a dark day in the history of India.

Mathrubhumi highlighted the practical issues involved, if Jinnati's demand for partition was accepted. In the case of the Muslims of Madras state, for instance, either they would have to live here as Indian citizens - in that case they could not become Pakistani citizens - or they would have to live here as foreigners. The third option would be to emigrate to Pakistan. The paper pointed out that most of the Muslims in the area who were rooting for Pakistan were unaware of these practical difficulties.[233]

Even after partition became a reality *Mathrubhumi* continued to cherish the ideal of a united India. It hoped that Congress would be able to

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231 *Ibid.*, 18 July 1943.

232 D.O. No. P4-16, St. George Fort dated 21 September 1946, (TNA, Chennai).

233 *Mathrubhumi*, 5 April 1946.

unite India and Pakistan again by removing mistrust and revenge from the hearts of the people.[234]

Conclusion

Thus it can be seen that the communalist stream in Malayalam journalism started from the first journal itself. However, newspapers and journals started by the missionaries and other religious bodies at least had the advantage of forewarning the readers of its communal orientation. Potentially more dangerous to nationalist politics was the veiled communal propaganda carried on by the 'secular press'.

Generally speaking, nationalist press in Malabar carried on a sustained campaign against communalist politics. Newspapers dedicated to the cause of the national movement cautioned against the dangers of the virus of communalism spreading in the body politic of nationalist India. The message that extermination of communalist philosophy was a prerequisite for the growth of nationalist forces in the country was conveyed. It must, however, be added that there was occasions when even avowed nationalist newspapers too deviated from the secular path. *Al-Ameen*'s blatant communitarian journalism and *Mathrubhumi*'s occasional soft approach towards right wing Hindu politics were instances of such deviation. Even the Leftist press did not have a clean record in this respect.

234 *Ibid.*, 5 August 1947.

CONCLUSION

I

The invention and development of printing with movable type brought about one of the most radical transformation in the conditions of intellectual life in the history of mankind.[1] Its effects were felt in every department of human activity. Apart from its critical role in the emergence and growth of nationalism in the modern period,[2] the printing press has also been a liberalising and democratising agent. Its emancipatory potential has no parallel in human history. It revolutionised the production and dissemination of knowledge, which was the monopoly of an elite minority in society.

The arrival of print and its wide use had the effect of increasing the literacy of the general public. Literacy led to the popularity of newspapers and the popularity of newspapers, in turn, has gone a long way in motivating illiterate people to learn the alphabet. It is not a mere coincidence that both the printing press and the modern system of education were introduced in Kerala by the same people, the western missionaries. The steady growth of modern education produced an ever-increasing readership for the emerging press in Malabar. The Kerala Renaissance which transformed the socio-cultural life of the Malayalees during the second half of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century also owed a great deal to the printing press.

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1 Myron P. Gilmore, "The World of Humanism, 1453-1517" in W. Langer (ed.), *The Rise of Modern Europe*, New York, 1952, p. 186.

2 See Benedict Anderson's pioneering work on the role of print capitalism in the emergence of nationalist communities, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and spread of Nationalism*, London, 1996 (reprint).

A significant factor in the spread of literacy was the mushrooming of 'vayanasalas' or reading rooms in the remotest villages of Malabar, especially during the 1930s and 40s. Village reading rooms provided the public with access to reading material and a sociality that facilitated the dissemination of news and ideas.[3] Leading newspapers were read out to illiterate people of the rural areas and thus the 'vayanasalas' played an important role in politicising the rural people. By 1937, the network of vayanasalas was significant enough to merit a Malabar Vayanasala Conference that was held in Kozhikode.[4] Even work places functioned as reading rooms. For instance, at the beedi-rolling centres of North Malabar, *Deshabhimani*, the Communist Party organ, would be read out to the labourers. In a group of beedi-rollers, one of the literate among them would be delegated, by rotation, the responsibility of reading the newspaper aloud while the rest of them continued with their task of rolling beedis. The reader would be provided with his wages as would be normally if he were to be rolling beedis.

As for the democratising dimension of the press, the increasingly important role of public opinion in political decision-making assumes greater significance. No discussion on public opinion can now ignore concepts like 'public sphere' and 'civil society'. Jurgen Habermas introduced the concept of 'public sphere' as a sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion.[5] 'Civil Society'

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[3] Selvyn Jussy, "A Constitutive and Distributive Economy of Discourse - Left Movement in Kerala and the Commencement of a Literary Moment" in Social Scientist, Vol. 33, Nov - Dec 2005.

[4] Prakas Karat, "The Peasant Movement in Malabar, 1934-1940", Social Scientist, Vol. 5, 1976.

[5] See Jurgen Habermass,

(i) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1989, and

(ii) 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, 1992.

exists outside the state and refers to a realm of autonomous associations and groups, formed by individuals in their individual capacity as private citizens.[6] Located between the state and civil society, between public authority and the people, public sphere became a space that nurtured critical opinion. It is quite clear that the public sphere is conceived as a realm of social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed and in which access is guaranteed to all citizens. For such a public opinion to be formed, it is imperative that citizens should have the freedom to express themselves in an unrestrictive fashion. This kind of communication requires specific means and it is the media that provides the chief means of communication for public sphere; for the nationalist period, which is the focus of the present study, media consisted mainly of the press.

For Habermas, the public sphere is a dialogic space of rational debate. It is a consensual space where consensus is arrived at through reasoned argument.[7] Was the public sphere as it emerged the colonial Malabar such a consensual space? Was it a space peopled by rational autonomous individuals exercising their critical judgement?

Something bordering on public sphere did emerge in Malabar by the closing decades of the 19th century. However, the same cannot be conceptualised as a homogenous, consensual, unitary space. It was deeply segmented. The reason for the painful inequality in the public sphere of Malabar could be traced to a variety of factors: structural unevenness in society for one. The marginalized did not get adequate voice in the

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6 Neera Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society: Exploration in Political Theory*, New Delhi, 1995, p.8.

7 Neeladri Bhattacharya, "Notes Towards a Conception of the Colonial Public", in Rajeev Bhargava & Helmut Reifeld (eds), *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 1138.

construction of what counted as 'reasonable' or indeed what constituted as appropriate and legitimate knowledge in the public domain of deliberation.[8]

Owing to the division of Malabar society into so many watertight compartments, into so many castes and communities, there was no uniform public opinion flowing through all these classes; each community had their own newspapers and their own points of view and therefore sought to create a public opinion of their own. During the pre-Gandhian era when nationalist politics was still confined to an elite section, whatever public opinion was there was represented by a small minority, which included some big landowners, some government officials and certain community leaders. The vast majority, most of whom cultivators, were least interested in political developments and consequently did not take part in the social discourses carried on through the press.

Chengulath Kunhirama Menon, considered to be the father of political journalism in Malayalam, rightly claimed that when he ventured on his mission in 1884 by launching 'Kerala Patrika', there was hardly anything that could be called public opinion in Malabar. The opinions were formulated by a local worthy or an officer and the people of the area used to echo and re-echo the same.[9] The colonial rulers were also well aware of the fact that public opinion existed only among the professional classes including government servants, the landed aristocracy and their immediate dependants and the learned.[10]

It also needs to be pointed out that the public sphere in Malabar, or for that matter anywhere in British India, could have worked only within the limit

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8 Neera Chandoke, "Exploring the Mythology of the Public Sphere' in Rajeev Bhargava & Helmut Reifeld (eds.), op. cit., p. 337.

9 Puthupally Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram*, Trissur, 2001, p. 76.

10 Theodore Morrison, *Imperial Rule in India*, 1899, p. 68.

set by the all-powerful colonial government. The semi-hegemonic political system that the British maintained here did provide some leeway for democratic social discourse, but not to the extent where the civil society could hope to have any kind of democratic control of state activities.

It is equally important to remember that the 18th century-Europe, where public sphere, for the first time, came into existence, was entirely different from the 19th century-colonial India. The sweeping changes that overtook Europe by the cumulative effect of the Renaissance, Reformation, great scientific inventions and discoveries, Industrial Revolution, Enlightenment and more importantly the rise of a powerful middle class of bourgeoisie had made the emergence and strengthening of a vibrant public sphere possible. Significant though the changes that India experienced under the British, they were not at all as revolutionary as those in Europe; the Indian bourgeoisie class was still in its embryonic stage and was wholly dependant on the government for its survival. For the creation and survival of a dynamic public sphere and civil society, the existence of a genuine democratic political complex is essential, which was a far cry as far as colonial Malabar was concerned.

Even during the age of renaissance, social discourse was to a large extent, limit to specific communities. The existence of separate newspapers for different communities created a social distance at the level of discourse. The public sphere, during this period, did not represent the society as a whole; rather there were a number of public spheres with community/caste orientation.

A weak and segmented public sphere which marked the civil society of the pre-Gandhian era experienced significant changes under the impact of the Gandhian movement. Gandhian politics positively impacted the representative character of the social discourse in the media and thereby the

public sphere. This was a significant step in the democratisation of the public sphere in Malabar. The emergence of newspapers like *Mathrubhumi*, *Al-Ameen*, *Prabhatham* and *Deshabhimani* strengthened the public sphere and the democratisation process in Malabar. *Prabhatham* and *Deshabhimani*, in particular, brought hitherto marginalized sections into the mainstream of social discourse.

Still the gulf between the outlook of the elite and ordinary people was very wide in Malabar, as elsewhere in India. Nevertheless, a unity of purpose informed the public sphere during the Gandhian nationalist era. This was because of the existence of a kind of covenant.[11] The elite held out a promise, one of a desired future for the ordinary people. It is another matter that the nationalist leadership eventually failed to redeem their pledge. But at the time the promise was made, the people had faith in it. It was because of this convenent that the elite and the marginalized sections were able to work together, inspite of serious differences. Newspapers provided the space for differing opinions and viewpoints on several issues - agrarian legislation and social reform - to name a few. It can be safely said that something akin to civil society, however restricted in range and limited in scope, functioned quite well in Malabar during the Gandhian era.

II

Of the great role played by the press in popularising the national movement, there can be little doubt. Those who uphold the primacy of the spoken word over the written word - that of the speeches of nationalist leaders over the articles and editorials of nationalist press - seem to forget the fact that public meetings, where inspiring speeches were delivered by political leaders of stature, could not be held every day and in every nook and corner of this

[11] Javeed Alam, "A Look at Theory: Civil Society and Democracy and Public Sphere in India", In Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld (eds.), op. cit., p. 358.

vast country. It was here that the nationalist press played the crucial role of a transmitter of the message of the nationalist leaders. Papers often carried the full text of speeches made by popular leaders like K. Kelappan, Muhammed Abdurahiman, A.K. Gopalan, P. Krishna Pillai, etc. There can be no doubt that the nationalist press was able to draw innumerable people into the vortex of nationalist politics by their inspiring and bold journalism.

Political journalism in Malabar started with the launching of 'Kerala Patrika' in 1884 by Chegulath Kunhirama Menon. The first phase of political journalism in Malabar, which lasted till the Malabar Rebellion, was marked by the dominance of the Liberal Nationalist ideology. Most of the mainstream newspapers of this period, reflecting the reigning political ideology, supported the 'moderate' Congress and opposed political extremism. They did not demand immediate swaraj; their demand was limited to constitutional and administrative reforms like more Indian representation in legislatures and more powers to legislatures, Indianisation of the civil service, separation of judiciary from the executive etc. Such demands also reflected the liberal bourgeois interests that the national movement under the 'moderate' Congress represented. The Liberal Nationalist press sincerely believed that the country was not yet prepared for self-rule; it felt that Indians needed many more years of guidance under the British in democratic governance. It had immense faith in the British sense of justice and had great respect for British democratic traditions, which it wanted the Indians to imbibe and put into practice in India. Champions of India's British connections, these papers pointed to the great benefits the country derived from British rule.

Though the papers of Liberal Nationalist hue did not visualise freedom in the near future, freedom as the ultimate goal of the national movement was very much accepted by them. On the contrary, there were papers like *Mitavadi* which, preferred British rule to an Indian government led by the

Congress, which was characterised as a Bratinin organisation. Pointing out the progress made by the backward castes under British rule, *Mitavadi* warned the people that a Congress regime would be a return back to the age of unbridled caste oppression. No wonder, the press representing lower castes and untouchables was fiercely loyal to the British.

In hindsight, it would seem amazing that a foreign government was able to command loyalty from the majority of mainstream newspapers during the pre-Gandhian era. While it is a fact that Indian nationalism was yet to come off age, the semi-hegemonic and semi-authoritarian character of British colonial rule, which, even when resorting to force, was based on the rule of law, might also have been a factor in commending such loyalty from the press. As Bipan Chandra has pointed out, 'the British Government was not based just on force; it relied very heavily for the acquiescence of the Indian people in their rule'.[12] It must also be remembered that the British rule was definitely an advancement over the previous regimes in many parts of India, extremist nationalist rhetoric not withstanding.

However, the 'moderate press' of the pre-Gandhian era was bound to give way to an 'extremist' variety, once Gandhi unleashed his non-violent revolution on Indian political scene. This new genre of political journalism, an intensely nationalist one, was more bold, more confident and more sure of its nationalist convictions than the Liberal Nationalist press. The loyalty of the new press was not to the British Government, but to the Indian National Movement, which become a mass movement under Gandhi, clamouring for swaraj. The nationalist press of the Gandhian era was able to convey the message of freedom to every nook and corner and to prepare the people for the momentous struggle against the foreign government.

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[12] Bipan Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 506-507.

Unfortunately for Malabar, the violent Rebellion of 1921 proved to be a severe jolt to the progress of nationalist politics. While the rest of the country was witnessing a nationalist upsurge under the leadership of Gandhi, parts of South Malabar were drowned in a bloodbath. The traumatic incidents of 1921 and the repression which followed paralysed the political life of the district for quite some time. It was in these circumstances when Congress work and nationalist politics had come to a standstill, that prominent Congress leaders decided to launch *Mathrubhumi* to help propagate the Congress ideals and nationalist ideology.

With the launching of *Mathrubhumi* in March 1923 started the Gandhian phase in the political journalism of Malabar. This period also represented the most active phase (and a golden period) in nationalist journalism in Malabar. With the emergence of this intensely nationalist press which reflected the revolutionary transformation of Indian politics triggered by the Gandhian programme, the liberal press of the pre-Gandhian era with its moderate political line, became obsolete. The nationalist press, inspired by the Gandhian ideology, surged ahead, leaving the liberal newspapers for behind in circulation and influence.

The most prominent of the newspapers of the Gandhian phase were *Mathrubhumi*, *Al-Ameen* and *Kerala Kesari*. Of these, *Mathrubhumi* was closely identified with the Congress and its ideology from the very beginning. It has already been mentioned that *Mathrubhumi* was founded by the prominent Congress leaders of Malabar for propagating the Congress ideology. The office of the KPCC was housed in the *Mathrubhumi* building for a long period. Almost all the Congress leaders of Malabar visited the *Mathrubhumi* office regularly during this period. A visit to *Mathrubhumi* office was usually a part of the itinerary of national leaders on their visit to Malabar; Gandhi himself had graced *Mathrubhumi* with a visit in January

1934. A national tricolour (Congress flag) always fluttered over the *Mathrubhumi* building. When the police tried to remove the flag during the course of the Civil Disobedience Movement, *Mathrubhumi* employees heroically resisted and defeated that attempt. Illustrious editors and managers of the papers like K.P. Kesava Menon, K. Madhavan Nair, K. Kelappan, P. Ramunni Menon and K.A. Damodara Menon simultaneously held prominent positions in the KPCC. It was not for nothing that *Mathrubhumi* was considered at that time as a 'Congress paper'.

Mathrubhumi was also in the forefront in campaigning for the Gandhian programme. The paper functioned as the mouth piece of the Congress during Gandhian agitational programmes like the Salt Satyagraha. More important was its campaign infavour of the Gandhian constructive work, especially the promotion of Khadi and the campaign against untouchability. The newspaper's spirited campaign for the Vaikom and Guruvayur Satyagrahas had been instrumental in enlisting wide popular support for the temple entry movement. Considering how consistently it propagated the Gandhian programme and how resolutely it fought the onslaught on Gandhian ideals by forces within and outside the Congress, *Mathrubhumi* could be considered as the flag bearer of Gandhian nationalism in Malabar.

Though often called the 'Congress paper', *Mathrubhumi* was not always a blind supporter of the Congress and its leadership. Especially in its early years, when the paper was imbued with a high sense of idealism *Mathrubhumi* was capable of impartial judgement and criticism of a high order. The controversy relating to the renewal of enrolment by K. Madhavan Nair and U. Gopala Menon can be cited as an example in this respect. Through an editorial, strong criticism was directed against the two Congress leaders for the contents of the affidavits submitted by them in the Madras

High Court, inorder to regain their 'Sannad' and there by established a healthy tradition of timely criticism even against its own directors.[13]

Al-Ameen, edited by the indomitable Muhammed Adburahiman, the 'Nationalist-Muslim' leader had done tremendous work to foster the spirit of nationalism, especially among the young generation of Mappilas. However the good work this respect was, to an extent, undone by the communitarian agenda it upheld. Its nationalist preachings were always clothed in Islamic idioms. *Al-Ameen*, consequently, came to be considered by many as a 'Muslim paper' rather than as a nationalist paper. The 'Nationalist-Muslim' paper did not have much fascination for Gandhian ideology. Notwithstanding its communitarian approach, *Al-Ameen* never deviated from the mission of fighting for the freedom of the country. Its brand of journalism was bold and outspoken; its language direct and razar-sharp. The paper paid the price for its outspoken criticism of the British Government and sacrificed itself at the alter of the freedom struggle. It put into practice the dictum that 'it is a sin and cowardice to keep mum when the situation demands protest'.

Though *Kerala Kesari* had only a short span of life, its service to the nationalist cause was, by no means, small. The paper was especially known for its pro-poor and pro-tenant attitude. A highly popular nationalist paper, *Kerala Kesari's* circulation had even surpassed that of *Mathrubhumi* for some time. From the very beginning, its editor, Moyarath Sankaran had seen to it that there would be no compromise on *Kerala Kesari's* commitment to the nationalist ideology. When the *Kerala Kesari* company was hard pressed to sell its shares, there was a golden opportunity to sell shares worth Rs. 500, if only Moyarath had consented to help Ramayyar of the Justice Party instead of

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[13] Madhavan Nair was a founder-director and manager of the *Mathrubhumi*, when criticism was directed against him by the paper for expressing regret for having taken part in the Non-Cooperation Movement, in the affidavit filed in the court.

K. Madhavan Nair of the Congress in the election to the Legislative Assembly in 1924. But he decided that ideology rather than financial stability was more important to *Kerala Kesari*.[14] It was this commitment to nationalist ideology that enabled the paper to write a glorious chapter in the history of nationalist journalism in Malabar.

Yuvabharatham, published from Palakkad, *Deenabandhu* from Nileswaram, *Sakti* and *Pulari* from Kannur were some of the other nationalist papers of the period. Their intensely nationalistic articles, editorials and poems helped not a little in propagating the message of freedom and in popularising the Gandhian constructive work.

The Gandhian nationalist press reigned supreme in Malabar till the mid 1930's, by which time an even more radical press with a new orientation towards leftist politics came into existence. The leftist press in Malabar can be said to have emerged in 1934 with *Prabhatham*, the official organ of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party. The rise of the leftist press represented the last phase in the evolution of press in Malabar during the nationalist era. The leftist campaign was spearheaded first by *Prabhatham* in the 30's and then by *Deshabhimani* in the 40's. While the focus of the rightwing nationalist press was the struggle for political freedom, the leftist press was equally, if not more, concerned with the class struggle against landlordism and capitalism, which had entered a militant phase by the late 30's in Malabar. It was mainly on this point that the rightwing and the leftwing of the nationalist press disagreed; the right wing press wanted all energies to be concentrated on winning political freedom from the foreign power by forming a united front of the people including peasants, labourers, capitalists and landlords.

Another point of disagreement between the two wings of the nationalist press was over the principle of ahimsa; while the pro-Gandhi right-

[14] Moyarath Sankaran, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-49.

wing press insisted that ahimsa was integral to Satyagraha and hence inviolable, the leftist press, though preferring non-violent means for the freedom struggle, argued that if the use of violence happened to be the easiest way to realise their objectives, the Indian people should not surrender their freedom of choice in the name of the ideology of non-violence.

It was with the rise of a socialist group within the Congress that mobilisation of the oppressed and marginalized people was taken up as a serious mission. The dissemination of socialist ideas by the leftist press played a leading role in the rise and growth of class organisations in Malabar. The pioneering work done by *Prabhatham* in spreading Socialist ideology a long way in infusing class consciousness among the working class people of Malabar. After the demise of *Prabhatham* in 1939, the trade union movement and the peasant movement in Malabar was without an effective propaganda machinery for a few years. But with the launching of *Deshabhimani* in 1942 leftist propaganda took on a more aggressive posture. *Deshabhimani's*, vigorous propaganda was a major factor in ensuring popular support for the militant class struggle led by the Communist-controlled Karshaka Sangham in North Malabar. The Karshaka Sangham-led militant struggle, in turn, was largely instrumental in making North Malabar a Communist bastion.

An analysis of the how the press in Malabar responded to class organisations and the struggle to end the economic exploitation of the working class, will clearly point to the fact that only *Prabhatham* and Deshabhimani, among the mainstream newspapers published from Malabar, were able to pursue a consistently pro-working class attitude. Being the official organs of left political groups, the pro-working class attitude of these papers was, ofcourse, in the order of things. *Kerala Kesari's* pro-poor sympathy was also very distinct; but this was not informed by a scientific analysis of the social structure. *Mitavadi* and *Al-Ameen* were also known for

their pro-poor attitude; however they approached the problem of poverty from a communitarian perspective rather than a scientific and rational one. Prominent newspapers of the pre-Gandhian era like *Kerala Patrika*, *Kerala Sanchari* and *West Coast Spectator* represented the interests of the educated middle class, which was true of the nationalist leadership of the period as well.

'Maturbhumi', initially, was seen to be highly supportive of working class interests. The nationalist paper showed great enthusiasm in the growth of trade union movement in 1920's and stressed the importance of the organized power of the working class. It also supported all the major labour strikes that took place in India during this period. However, *Mathrubhumi*'s enthusiasm for the growing trade union movement began to wane by the mid-30's; by the later 30's the paper became increasingly critical of the trade union movement as well as the peasant movement.

That this change in the attitude of *Mathrubhumi* towards working class movement coincided with the spread of Socialist ideology and class consciousness among the working class people and the passing of the leadership of the trade union and peasant movements into the hands of the leftists could not have been accidental. Upholding the ideals of ahimsa and class harmony, nationalist newspapers, owing allegiance to Gandhian ideology, like *Mathrubhumi* disapproved of the concept of class war, which was a basic tenet of the trade union movement under Communists leadership. They also accused the Communists of dragging the labourers into "unnecessary strikes".

If the spread of the ideology of socialism/communism led to he awakening of millions of oppressed people and their increased participation in nationalist politics, the impact of the growth of communalism on the national movement had been cataclysmic. Inspite of the fact that secularism was one

of the basic constituents of the nationalist ideology, the body politic of India could not be insulated against the cancerous growth of communalism. Consequently the country paid a heavy price - partition of the country, unprecedented communal violence and the sacrifice of the life of the Father of the Nation. Still communal politics continued to flourish and even now, after six decades of independence, the nation is still grappling with the issue.

The role of the press in this sordid saga had not been all that glorious. Often newspapers became a tool in the handles of wily politicians; the propoganda value of the press was made full use of by communalists. Even reputed newspapers with impressive records of nationalists service sometimes succumbed to the virus of communalism.

From the very beginning, Malayalam jouralism took a thinly disguised communal form; some of the missionary journals were blatantly communal. It did not take long for other communities to follow in the footsteps of the Christian missionaries. Newspapers representing specific communities placed the community over the nation. It was with the rise of political journalism in the 1880's that the press in Malabar began to be freed from the grip of communitarian journalism. However, a sustained campaign against communalism had to wait till the Gandhian era, which saw the emergence of newspapers dedicated to the cause of the national movement and the Gandhian ideals.

Reflecting the Gandhian emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity, the nationalist press during this period undertook vigorous propaganda against the scourge of communalism. The message was driven home that the extermination of communal forces was a pre-requisite for the growth and success of Indian nationalism. The leaders of different communities, especially Hindu and Muslim communities, were frequently reminded that their mutual difference could be exploited by the British. The communal

representation introduced by the British was seen by the nationalist press as a British ploy to divide the Indian people on communal lines. It also took a strong stand against the community /communal organisations indulging in politics. The nationalist newspapers always stressed the importance of placing the nation over the community.

Unfortunately for the nation, however, even the nationalist papers themselves, though actively engaged in propaganda against communalism, were sometimes contaminated by the communal poison. There were enough instances of renowned nationalist newspapers compromising on their secular position. *Mathrubhumi*'s soft approach towards Hindu communalism was visible on many occasions; its defending of the Hindu Mahasabha in the 1920's on the ground that it had a reformatory role in Hindu society, its steadfast loyality to the Hindu right-wing leadership of the Congress as well as the encouragement and coverage provided to Hindu right-wing leaders like Malaviya, and it strong anti-conversion stand can be cited as proof of such an attitude.

Al-Ameen known as a 'nationalist-Muslim' newspaper, was more guilty in this respect. The communitarian agenda it upheld coupled with its tirade against the Gandhian leadership of the KPCC, castigating it as a 'Nair gang' helped only to vitiate an already fragile communal atmosphere in Malabar. The blatantly communal approach of *Chandrika*, repsenting the Muslim League and the casteist approach of papers like *Mitavadi* representing the interests of a specific communities, had the benefit of forewarning the readers of their partisan approach. This cannot be said of the nationalist papers, secularism being one of their cherished ideals.

Even the leftists press which had a comprehensive and scientific approach to the problem of communalism, did not have an unblemished record in this respect. The leading leftists papers of Malabar, viz.,

Prabhatham and *Deshabhimani*, being Party organs, had to support the party policy, which on few occasions had compromised on the issue of secularism. The Congress Socialist Party's support to the policy of separate schools for Muslims and the Communist Party's indirect support to the demand for Pakistan on the basis of the principle of self-determination, were instances of such compromising positions taken by the left.

However, considering the immense contribution made by the press during the nationalist era, such blemishes were negligible. Writing about the role of the Indian press during the freedom struggle, K. Rama Rao, a veteran journalist, commented: "Inspite of the innumerable limitations imposed on it by repressive laws, hostile officialdom, poor finances, lack of sufficient technical skill and trained manpower, the performance of the Indian press has been of a high standard".[15] The observation is as much true of the nationalist press in Malabar.

It is undeniable that the press played its own role in transforming the national movement led by the Indian National Congress from being the preserve of a few elite leaders, whose politics was confined to passing a few resolutions at annual conferences, to a mass movement with a powerful agitational programme. Equally important was the highly successful campaign that the press carried on in favour of social reform as well as tenancy reform in Malabar. Still more significant was the powerful ideological campaign of the leftist press which went a long way in the leftist outlook getting a strong foothold in the area. The cumulative effect of all these changes was to make Malabar socially the most progressive region in the Madras Presidency. The press must be given its due in making Kerala the most advanced state in India, attracting world-wide attention for its social and human development indices, which are on par with the best in the world.

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15 K. Rama Rao, *The Pen as my Sword*, Bombay, 1965, p. 285.

Journalism has become an attractive profession today and journalists are generally a well-paid lot. If journalists of the nationalist era were considered enemies of those in power, most of the journalists today enjoy the benefits of proximity to power. Those were times when people were attracted to political journalism by a spirit of selfless service to the nationalist cause and nothing else. Most of the journalists had to be content with a salary barely sufficient to make both ends meet. The salary of K.P. Kesava Menon as the editor of *Mathrubhumi* was only Rs. 150 and that of K. Madhavan Nair as manager of the same paper, Rs. 125. Even the meagre salary could not be paid regularly to the journalists.

Today, living in an age where press has become an industry thriving on crass commercialism, the mere thought of the nationalist journalism makes us filled with pride and gratitude for the great men who wielded their pen, braving the might of the British Imperialism, for the cause of the nation's freedom. If today India can boast of having the most dynamic Fourth Estate in the Third World, the credit must surely go to the journalist heroes of the nationalist era.

But it is doubtful whether their service to the nation has been adequately acknowledged. While the journalistic contribution of stalwarts like a K.P. Kesava Menon or a Muhammed Abdurahiman or an EMS Namboodiripad may have been widely acknowledged, the story of the sacrifice of countless others engaged in the field of political journalism remains untold and unsung. And much of that story will never be told. The pages containing the brave journalism of those journalists have been lost, probably for ever. To that extent the present study is incomplete. If by any chance newspaper issues of the period that are still untraceable, can be retrieved, that will be a huge boost for further study and might throw fresh light on the journalism of the period. Though the prospect looks bleak, we

would rather be optimistic that a new treasure house of primary source in the form of newspaper issues of the period will be found. For the present, let us remember with pride and gratitude the journalist heroes of the nationalist era and be inspired by their ideals.

GLOSSARY

Amsom	-	Village, Part of a Taluk
Desasm	-	Territorial division or locality
Diwan	-	Chief Minister of erstwhile princely state
Guru	-	Religious preceptor
Harijan	-	The name which literally means 'Man of God' originally used by Gandhi to denote the Scheduled Castes or Depressed classes in Hindu Society
Janmam	-	An absolute proprietary right which is hereditary also
Janmi	-	The holder of janmam; landlord
Janmi sabha	-	Organisation of Janmis
Jatha	-	Procession
Kanam	-	A system of land tenure under which the tenant holds land by paying a fixed sum to the Janmi for a specified period, and having the dual characteristics of lease and mortgage.
Karshaka Sangham	-	Kisan sangh, Peasant organisation.
Kudiyan	-	Tenant
Madrassa	-	Islamic religious school for younger children
Mangalya Sutra	-	'Tali', an ornament worn by Hindu women at the time of marriage until widowhood
Maulavi	-	A Muslim priest
Melcharth	-	The eviction of a tenant infavour of a new one
Misra Bhojanam	-	Inter-dining
Mulla	-	Religious teacher
Musaliyar	-	A Muslim preacher or priest
Nadu	-	A territorial division or region

Para	-	A grain measure holding 10 'Edangazhis'
Pattam	-	Rent
Pattayam	-	Document given to land owners specifying the details of their property
Taluk	-	Sub-Division of a District
Tangal	-	Muslim Priest claiming descent from Prophet.

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