

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The strengthening of cultural relations between the people of the Soviet Union and the people of India has resulted in the growth of interest of Soviet and Indian readers in the history of both the peoples as well as in their respective cultures. The circle of Soviet and Indian scholars, who study the different fields of culture of these two countries in their past and present, is growing wider.

The interest of the people of Russia in the life and culture of India originated long ago. The first written account about India and Kerala penetrated into Russia as early as the 15th century. This was Khozhdenie Za tri moria--Journey across three seas--the narration of the impressions gained by Afanasi Nikitin (year of birth unknown; died 1472), a merchant of Tver (now Kalinin) who was the first Russian traveller to India. When in the spring of 1466 he left his native town, he had no intention to earn the fame of discovering a sea route from Russia to India. He left home with the aim of selling goods in the Caucasus region. On his way he was attacked by Tatars. The natural option for him was to return to Russia. However, Nikitin continued his journey crossing the seas till he landed on

the Malabar coast of India in the spring of 1469. He stayed in India for three years and the above work is the result of this sojourn.

Although Afanasi Nikitin's book is limited to the personal impressions of the author, it is of great historical value, as it gives a description of Indian life in general and an exposition of the social differences among Indians at that time. The book also contains the author's impression of Kozhikode in the northern part of Kerala. He writes: ". . . But Calicut is the wharf for the Indian seas. And here originate pepper, ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, tubercrops, adriak; yes, there are many types of culinary and everything is cheap; yes, bondmen and bondwomen are very beautiful, black."<sup>1</sup> Strange as it may seem, it is many centuries after Afanasi wrote about Kerala and India that a revived interest could be noticed in Russia about Kerala.

Only from the 1950s has the interest of Russian Indologists in Malayalam language and literature begun to grow again. This interest was created mainly by the Russian translations of the poems of Vallathol and G. Sankara Kurup and of the short stories of Malayalam writers like Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Kesava Dev, Saraswathi Amma, etc. Vallathol was the first Malayalam writer to be translated into Russian. His verses began to be translated and published in the USSR from 1952. "India Weeps" (1952), "The Song of

the Peasant" (1952), "The Lenin Mausoleum" (1958) and "Seventh November" (1958) are some of the translations of Vallathol's poems that have appeared in the USSR.

A short Malayalam Grammar (Yazik Malayalam) published in Moscow in 1961 by Chandrasekhar, a Malayalee who left Kerala during the late forties and was permanently settled in Moscow till his death in 1984, is the first work on Malayalam language published in Russian. The book was compiled for the purpose of giving the Russian readers a preliminary knowledge about the grammatical structure of Malayalam language. Following this, M. C. Andronov, an Indologist, traced the origin of Malayalam language in his article "Dravidian Languages" in 1965. The author here enumerates various opinions expressed by scholars about the origin of Malayalam and says that Malayalam was separated from Tamil dialect between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1960s many Soviet Indologists began to concentrate on the literary movements in Malayalam. The Russian translations of Malayalam fiction, especially the translations of Thakazhi's novels Chemmeen (Shrimps) and Rantitangazhi (Two Measures) published in 1961, might have served as the main stimulant behind the interest of the Soviet Indologists in Malayalam literature. The brief description included in the Short Literary Encyclopaedia published in Moscow in 1967 seems to be the first record in Russian language about Malayalam literature. The progressive movement in

Malayalam literature is described in it as follows: "The appraisal of anti-imperialistic movements of the 1930s brought Malayalam literature closer to the life of the common people. During these years the contours of progressive and reactionary camps appeared distinct. The specific gravity of prose genres was enhanced. The romantic tendency of prose was supplemented with social criticism. This progress of Malayalam prose is promoted by Thakazhi, Mundasseri, Ponkunnam Varkey, S. K. Pottakatt, P. C. Kuttikrishnan, Lalithambika Antharjanam, etc."<sup>3</sup> The Russian translation of Malayalam Literature, a monographic investigation by K. M. George, has helped to satisfy the curiosity of Russian readers who wanted to know more about Malayalam literature. Soviet Indologists were attracted not only to the progressive movement in Malayalam literature but also to developments in earlier periods. Thus E. B. Rabinovich in Forty Centuries of Indian Literature<sup>4</sup> shows the characteristics of "Bhakti Movement" in Malayalam and analyses the important works of this period. He discusses in detail Cherusseri's Krishnagatha and says that the hero of this poem Krishna personifies the features of the local people of that time.

In the 1970s, Soviet Indologists turned to the study of contemporary Malayalam fiction. This led to the publication of a collection of Russian translations of Malayalam short stories in 1974.<sup>5</sup> The collection was composed by Indologists, S. G. Rudin and N. Krasnodemskaya. The stories of K. Sukumaran,

Karur Neelakanta Pillai, Kesava Dev, Vaikom Mohammed Bashir, S. K. Pottekatt, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, P. C. Kuttikrishnan, M. T. Vasudevan Nair, etc. are included in this collection. In the preface to this collection A. Dubiansky gives a short survey of the history of Kerala State and of Malayalam literature. He writes: "During the 1930s the genre of short stories gained special popularity among Malayalam readers. The works of Chekhov and Maupassant, and in a later period, the works of Gorky revealed to the writers of Kerala the vast potentiality of this genre."<sup>6</sup> In the same year as the publication of Tholthye Banani--1974-- Rudin and Krasnodemskaya made another attempt to study the different aspects of South Indian short stories. Malayalam literature is characterized in this book as one of the most developed literatures in India. Analysing the short stories of Thakazhi, Kesava Dev and Ponkunnam Varkey, the authors write: "Thakazhi and Dev are progressive writers whose heroes are workers. Their works are democratic and realistic . . . Severe social criticism and sympathy towards the poor and the oppressed who are thrown out of social life are clearly reflected in the works of Thakazhi."<sup>7</sup> The importance of the realistic novels of Thakazhi is also mentioned in this book.

The origin and growth of Malayalam novels are described in a more detailed way by V. A. Makarenko in his study of the novels in Tamil and Malayalam.<sup>8</sup> Here the author summarises the history of Malayalam novel from its birth to the period

of the progressive movement. The progressive turn in Malayalam novels is discussed by the author through the realistic works of Kesava Dev, Vaikkom Mohammed Bashir and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, giving importance to their relationship with actual life problems. In this discussion more stress is given to the novels of Thakazhi. His novels Two Measures and Scavenger's Son are taken for a detailed analysis. The author shows how the birth of a new hero is portrayed by Thakazhi in these novels. He also compares the heroes of Thakazhi with those of Maxim Gorky.<sup>9</sup>

In his article "Indian Literature" Soviet Indologist E. Chelishev analyses the characteristics of the progressive movement in Indian literature during the 1930s. Stressing the possible influence of Gorky on the formation of a new literature in India, the author recalls the turning point in Malayalam literature, and the penetration of socialist ideas into it.<sup>10</sup> The area of Soviet specialization in Malayalam studies and the interest of Russian readers in Malayalam literature are more and more widening. One of the examples is the Russian translation and publication of the collected poems of Vallathol in 1980.<sup>11</sup> The Indologists for their research mainly depend on the English translations of Malayalam works and it may be said that this in many respects limits their studies. This may create difficulties for a proper appreciation of the growth of Malayalam literature. However, it is significant that among the Indian languages and literatures,

Malayalam continues to be one of the best known literatures in Russian.

Parallel to increasing interest evinced by the Russian people and scholars in Malayalam literature there has been a phenomenal increase in the readers, writers and scholars of Kerala in the works of the Russian masters. Malayalee readers began to be acquainted with Russian literature from 1918 onwards, with the translation of Tolstoy's short stories by Paruthikkattil Gopala Pillai. Upto the 1940s only Tolstoy's short stories and Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment were known to Malayalee readers. A wider acquaintance of Keralites with the works of Russian literature begins in the 1940s. In the 1940s and 1950s Malayalees could familiarise themselves with almost all the important authors in Russian literature like Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky, Mayakovsky, Sholokhov and others. In the 1960s and 1970s the works of many Soviet writers also began to be translated into Malayalam. M. Prishvin, N. Titov, A. Arbuzov, V. Panova, U. Bondarev, K. Paustovsky, K. Fedin and G. Markov are some of them. The latest picture of Malayalam translations of the works of foreign authors shows that the translation of Russian authors occupies the first place.

Critical studies of the works of Russian authors by Malayalam writers began to appear from the middle of the 1930s. The first Malayalam critic who turned to Russian literature was A. Balakrishna Pillai (1889-1960). His article published

in 1935 can be considered the earliest account of Russian literature written in Malayalam language.<sup>12</sup> Showing some examples from the works of Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Balakrishna Pillai proves that realistic depiction of life is the most characteristic peculiarity of Russian literature.

In 1936 Malayalam critic Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai (1900-1971) wrote two articles about Russian literature: the first article was devoted to the works of Tolstoy and the second to the Russian novel. Comparing Russian novels with English novels, the author affirms that Russian novels differed in their sincerity and their sympathy for the poor. He writes: "Russian novels not only satisfy the readers, but also purify them. They also popularise the importance of man."<sup>13</sup> Analysing the novels of Tolstoy, Kuttipuzha says that Russian writers analyse human life in a new way exposing the secrets of mind.

Many such critical studies have been published in Malayalam since then in which their authors try to explain the importance of Russian literature, showing how they differ from other European literatures. Joseph Mundasseri, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, M. K. Kumaran, Pavanan, K. Surendran, N. Krishna Pillai, P. K. Balakrishnan, G. N. Panicker, M. Leelavathy, K. P. Saratchandran and others repeatedly wrote about Russian literature in general, and about particular authors and their works. When the first books about Russian literature appeared

in Malayalam, they could present only a vague idea about the subject. Gradually the situation changed. The criticisms and translations that have appeared in Malayalam in recent years have helped the Malayalee readers to have a better understanding of Russian literature.

The nature of the mutual contacts between Russian and Malayalam literatures bears witness to the growing interest of the people of Russia and of Kerala to know each other better. They are informed about the latest developments in each other's literature. From this mutual contact Malayalam literature has greatly benefited. It has been deeply influenced by the new trends in Russian literature, especially critical realism and socialist realism.

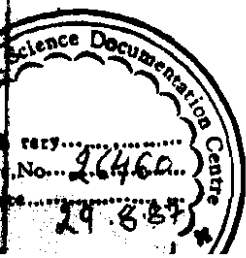
One of the tasks of modern literary criticism is to trace how certain ideas or literary principles come into contact with others, to compare the works of later writers with the earlier ones, and to find out their possible influence under different national conditions. The increasing international contact and interliterary connections make comparative studies of literatures more relevant to the modern man who is seeking a centre in a world of wider horizons. Without comparison it is difficult to understand the stages of development even within the limits of a single national literature. Isolated studies of works, authors, literary schools, trends etc. often cannot give comprehensive and expected results.

Malayalam literature has always shown its willingness to borrow and assimilate the best traditions with which it comes into contact. Malayalam in its earlier phases came under the influence of Sanskrit and English literatures. The mahakavyas were the result of Sanskrit influence just as the novel came to be conceived after the English pattern. The novel in Malayalam gets a fresh vitality after the 1930s, when the new generation of writers found new horizons in the West. These writers got introduced to the best fiction in French, Russian and German languages. They were attracted by the new trends and experiments in these literatures. During the period since 1930 most of the important works in Russian literature were widely known in Kerala. Among the Russian writers, Gorky was more popular with the reading public and writers in Kerala because it was in his works that they could find a real answer to the contemporary socio-political problems.

During the 1930s political and social thinking in Kerala gained a new dimension. The people fought for a classless and casteless society. The new generation of writers like Kesava Dev, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, etc. were quite alive to this question. Their works written during this period testify to this fact. K. M. George characterizes this period in Malayalam literature thus: "There was a proletarian emphasis in the new fiction; the common man became the hero. The life at the lower levels was considered not only a fit subject for creative writing but most relevant in the changing world where the

working class came into focus. Any subject was good enough for fiction."<sup>14</sup> The proletarian stress in the new Malayalam fiction as shown by K. M. George, was definitely the result of the influence of new ideas and examples found in the works of Gorky and this deserves a detailed analysis. A comparative study of the Malayalam novels written between 1930 and 1960 and the works of Gorky will reveal the similarities and analogies in these works and help to assess the influence of Gorky's theory of art and examples on the Malayalam novel. This may be exemplified by certain works of the Malayalam novelists Kesava Dev (1905-1983), Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (b. 1912), Cherukadu Govinda Pisharati (1915-1976) and Ponjikkara Raphy (b. 1924). All these writers in one way or another have been influenced by the literary ideas of Maxim Gorky. This partially explains the similarity between his works and theirs.

But the similarities and analogies between the works of Gorky and the Malayalam novelists can best be understood by analysing the socio-political conditions in Russia during the period of Gorky and in Kerala during the 1930s, which are reflected in their works respectively. In spite of the historical differences between them one can find certain common characteristics which naturally account for the parallelisms in the creative works produced under their influence. The Malayalam novelists whose works are chosen for comparison were familiar with the works of Gorky and some of them have acknowledged



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that they have been influenced by Gorky. Gorky's works were widely known in Kerala through their Malayalam translations and critical studies during the period between 1930 and 1960.

The influence of Gorky's ideas and examples may be traced out in respect of the social reality depicted, the characters portrayed, the historical past analysed and the humanist ideals promoted. The social criticism found in the Malayalam novels can be compared with that in the works of Gorky. It is seen that Malayalam novelists, like Gorky himself, portray the life of the down-trodden not just as victims of the social conditions but as rebels who attempt to improve their present life. The portrayal of industrial workers and peasants as revolutionaries with class consciousness and as active humanists is sincerely attempted by Malayalam novelists. The women characters presented not in conventional roles, but as rebels and revolutionaries have particularly attracted Malayalam novelists. The spontaneous or conscious struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors is another common concern of these writers. Malayalam novelists have also portrayed the degradation of the elite and the rise of the poor which have been a reality during their time.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Afanasi Nikitin, Khozhdenie Za tri moria (1466-1472) (Moscow: vast. lit. 1972), p. 21. (Trans.) (When the translation is made by the present writer it will be indicated by this word in the note.)

<sup>2</sup> M. C. Andronov, "Dravidskie Yaziki," Yaziki Narodov Afriki i Azi, Ed. Serduchenko (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Kratkaya Literaturnaya Entsiklopedia (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), IV, 539. (Trans.)

<sup>4</sup> E. C. Rabinovich, Sorok vekov indiskoi literatury (Forty Centuries of Indian Literature) (Moscow: Nauka, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> N. Krasnodemskaya, S. G. Rudin, Sholthye banani (Leningrad: Khudoshestvinnaya literatura, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 10. (Trans.)

<sup>7</sup> S. G. Rudin, Povesti Pisatelei Yushnoi Indi (Moscow: Nauka, 1974), p. 8. (Trans.)

<sup>8</sup> A. C. Sukhachev, Ed., Problemi Indeeskogo Romana (Moscow: Nauka, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>10</sup> See E. Chelishev, "Literatura Indii," Literatura Vostoka V Noveishie Vremya (Moscow: Nauka, 1957), p. 299.

<sup>11</sup> Vallathol Narayana Menon, Geem Uthrinnoi Zariyei (A Hymn to the Dawn) (Moscow: Nauka, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> A. Balakrishna Pillai, Navalokam (Trivandrum: Kamalalaya, 1935).

<sup>13</sup> Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai, Sahiteeyam (Alwaye: R.K.S., 1936), p. 48. (Trans.)

<sup>14</sup> K. M. George, Western Influence on Malayalam Language and Literature (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1972), p. 104.