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with increased financial input and full-time functioning of the libraries are required for the desired result. What is urgently required is a comprehensive

survey of the public library scenario in the state and adoption of appropriate measures to revitalise their role.

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ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN KERALA

R. Raman Nair*

In Kerala the National Movement evolved from a series of movements. Most of them were geared up by groups of people connected to the library movement. They emerged as local and regional organizations. At the initial stages their activities were not distinguishable from the extension activities of the libraries. Later they developed into quasi-revolutionary organizations with political motives.

With the libraries enabling the emergence and marshalling of peoples' opinion, different classes of people in Kerala exhibited a high degree of political and social consciousness. They were actively involved in mass agitations against royal autocracy, bureaucratic misrule, caste tyranny and alien domination. So no account of national movement in pre 1947 Kerala can be limited to the work of political parties, neglecting other institutions.

People's Movement

The situation that existed in Kerala also necessitated a people's library movement. Creating public opinion and spreading political ideas warranted an educated and informed public. Political workers therefore had to give more emphasis to social education activities. Small reading rooms and libraries were found to be the apt centre for this. Like the tea shops and pan shops in villages, the libraries, reading rooms and recreation clubs also became the centres where villagers shared their news and views. It was in such centres that the first organizations of Kerala were formed, the social and political reform movement and the ideas of national unity and even independence tentatively put forward.

Role of Newspaper

The rural libraries extended their

influence of the regional press. As most of the villagers could not afford a daily at their home, they established small libraries that subscribed the newspapers. In the libraries people used to read newspapers aloud to help illiterate also to know what is happening around. This introduced to the villagers the new forms in which National Movement progressed and influenced the initiation of such movement in Kerala also.

During the Quit India Movement a secret journal called 'Swatantra Bharathi' was regularly published to disseminate news about the events of freedom movement and sustain the morale of the people. The 'Congress Bulletin' was secretly printed and widely circulated in Malabar area everyday. It is through the rural libraries that these publications achieved their objective. The police never succeeded in finding out the sources of their publication and distribution. Their actual circulation was not large. But this could not curtail the extent of their influence, as each paper was read by hundreds of readers at the village libraries. The effectiveness of the press and the growth of its influence among the people to such extent in Kerala, was due to the existence of rural libraries.

Literature

Modern literature in Malayalam also emerged in close association with the national movement. Writing of the leaders of the national movement exercised tremendous influence on the people. They were read and translated into Malayalam. Later younger section of the Congress who dis-approved the moderate policy organized Congress Socialist Party in Kerala. With the active help of the library movement, the Socialists strengthened their mass base and increased their influence. They used

political and literary works, dramas and discussions to educate the public. The novels, poems and essays of the progressive literary movement were circulated through the libraries. Their dramas which discussed the social, political and economic problems and produced with the intention of forming public opinion and attracting and retaining more volunteers for the national movement were staged by the libraries. The Congress and Communist Party workers organised in libraries study circles, evening classes, adult education programmes etc. Enormous quantity of reading materials discussing

the political and social problems, published by the political parties, communal organisations, trade unions, youth associations, women's organisations etc. flowed into them. Libraries also got organised themselves in a democratic way at local, regional and state level and they familiarised the rural population with the democratic form of government. All these created an awareness of their rights among the peasants, workers and lower middle class and infused into them the thought of the need to rise for their rights and shake off the yoke of foreign government.

Role of Public Libraries in the National Movement in Kerala

R. Raman Nair

High degree of participation by all classes of people at various levels was the distinctive feature of National Movement in Kerala. This was made possible by the public libraries that existed throughout the length and breadth of the State. They were established and maintained from the second half of the last century by the people. It has its growth parallel to the movements for political, economic and social reform. The Library movement supported them and at the same time got inspiration from them.

Local Movements

Congress and a few other political parties were the important vehicles that carried on the National Movement in other parts of the country. In Kerala even though their influence was significant they were not the main vehicles. There were other powerful movements that came in a series which are to be considered as part of a lengthy process of the evolution of the National Movement. Most of these were geared up by groups of people connected to the local libraries and literary clubs. These movements emerged as local and regional organizations aiming social and cultural development. At the initial stages their activities were not distinguishable from the extension activities of the libraries and connected cultural groups. Later they developed into or merged into elite based quasi-revolutionary organizations with political motives. These movements applied the techniques perfected through

continuous discussion on how the opposition might best be expressed in the political situation in which the people were. In most places the libraries and people connected to the movement facilitated these discussions and planning.

Forming People's Opinion

With the libraries enabling the emergence and marshaling of peoples' opinion, all classes of people in Kerala exhibited a high degree of political and social consciousness. A study of the classes involved in the National Movement in Kerala is a difficult task due to its special characteristic of cutting across the classes and also due to the involvement of different sections and groups in the movement. All of them showed active commitment to the cause of nationalism. They got themselves actively involved in mass agitations against royal autocracy, bureaucratic misrule, caste tyranny and alien domination. So no account of national movement in pre 1947 Kerala can be limited merely to the growth and work of political parties. Underlying everything was the nature of the Society in which they operated and the institutions like the local libraries and other cultural and literary organizations that blended in with the society and enabled the political organizations to establish their foothold.

The situations that existed in Kerala necessitated a people's library movement for the existence and activities of the political parties that emerged, the social reform movements that became urgent, the communal and religions organizations that came into existence, and the struggle for responsible government in the State.

Creating public opinion and spreading political ideas warranted an educated and informed public. Political workers therefore have to give more emphasis to social education activities. It necessitated the establishment in villages, some institutions for the community's education and information. Small reading rooms and libraries were found to be the centers that could be established and maintained by village communities with their own contributions and without any outside support.

Gatherings for Daily News

It was the anxiousness of people to get daily news in the days of national movement that resulted in the speedy establishment of thousands of village libraries in a very short period in Kerala. The peasants and workers cannot afford a daily newspaper at their home. So at every house where persons connected to national movement or social activists lived, as well as at village teashops and pan shops where a newspaper was subscribed, people assembled to get news or read newspapers and other publications. These gatherings were influenced by the idea of establishing reading rooms and gradually established small libraries. Educated youth came forward to voluntarily look after them. The first one of such libraries to get organized in a scientific manner was Sugunaposhini Library (1880) at Trivandrum.

The political and social activists found these libraries to be apt bases from where they can spread their reform movements. In 1931 the first association of these libraries was formed. The famous Kerala Granthasala Sangham followed it. Sangams' contribution to training the Kerala's rural people in democratic form of Government and in creating political and social consciousness was unique.

Like the teashops and pan shops in villages, the libraries, reading rooms and recreation clubs also became the centers that villagers could approach for information and advice without any psychological barriers. There they shared their news and views. It was in such centers that the first political organizations of Kerala were formed, the social and political reform movements and the ideas of national unity and even independence tentatively put forward.

Reform Movements

The influence of western education along with the awareness created by the discussions and debates at village libraries and reading rooms initiated most of the agitations and reform movements in Kerala. The exclusion of natives

from higher grades in government service was severely criticized at the discussions in the libraries by youth within the state possessing high academic qualifications. This resulted in the constitutional agitation, which began with the presentation of Malayali and Ezhava Memorials in the last decade of nineteenth century. They marked the emergence of new educated middle class as a force to be reckoned with in the public life of Kerala. The vigorous public, campaigning which followed the submission of the memorials was also done through the village libraries, reading rooms and groups formed at such centers. Such agitations of the educated people for getting share in administration awakened the middle class of Kerala to a sense of their inherent rights.

The western educated and progressive minded younger generation resisted outdated customs, traditions and family organization. They engaged themselves in many social reform activities forming groups, for which libraries served as bases. In the early decades of the twentieth century the English educated persons belonging to upper classes, like K.P. Kesava Menon, K. Kelappan, M.P. Narayana Menon, G. Sankaran Nair, K. Madhavan Nair and many others became nationalists. Most of them left their profession and jobs during non-co-operation movement. They joined the national movement mainly because of their commitment to the motherland and the upliftment of their countrymen. Their aspiration was not to establish their control over the lower sections or to gain any professional placement or promotion or participation in civil service and entry in the councils. Most of them came from rural backgrounds or from countryside. They inspired the people in their village and neighboring ones. Their writings were discussed in every village library and reading room.

The rural libraries extended the influence of the press and together they supported the progress and success of national movement. In early period the Malayalam press was also concerned with social and religious affairs. Later politics assumed greater importance. Curiosity of the masses for the information and daily news caused by the eventual days of the freedom

struggle further developed the spirit of library movement. In 1903 Indian National Congress held a large public meeting at Calicut. In 1916 a branch of Home Rule Movement was formed in Malabar. The fourth political conference convened at Payyannoor in 1928 attracted a large gathering from different walks of life. It served as a prelude to the political program of Civil Disobedience or Salt Satyagraha at Payyannoor. The various processions that marched to Payyannoor consisted of all sections of people. Most of these processions started from village libraries and reading rooms where the local involvement was planned and organized. Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-33 stirred the Kerala Society. In the forties besides Quit India Movement the agitation for self-government in the princely states of Kerala gathered momentum.

Libraries and Political Organizations

In 1934 after the formation of congress socialist party, there were organized effort to mobilize the peasants, workers and schoolteachers in rural areas for which rural libraries served as the, activity center. The agrarian crisis of thirties the colonial land system, which helped imposing on peasantry the greedy demands of blind landlords and acute starvation of many peasant families resulted in the birth of All Malabar Karshakasangam. At the initial stages its activities were organized around rural libraries. People read and discussed tenancy systems existing in other places. They demanded comprehensive tenancy legislation for Malabar and Kasaragod.

The Congress Socialists who based their works in rural libraries at the initial stages widened the scope of national movement incorporating different classes and sections through their class organizations and converted them into anti-colonial, anti-feudal and anti-caste or organizations. These aspects working together articulated national movement in rural areas.

The life and conditions of workers in industries owned by indigenous and foreign capitalists in Kerala were also miserable. Congress socialists

organized study classes and discussions for the workers using the facilities of libraries that existed in the rural areas and village towns near the factories. The Congress Socialists organized these workers into trade unions and this also strengthened the anti imperialist movement in Kerala.

Extending the Reach of Newspapers

The newspaper Malayala Manorama came into existence in 1890 followed by numerous other dailies and periodicals. Between 1899 and 1910 Swadeshabhimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai edited the papers: 'Darpanam', 'Kerala Panchika', 'Malayali', and 'Swadeshabhimani'. Copies of these newspapers reached every village library. The articles that he wrote under some pseudonyms were highly critical of the administration. He came to be hailed everywhere as a stout champion of popular liberties. In 1910 he was deported from the State and his paper and the press were confiscated to the Government. The secret meetings organized in at various places of Travancore area defined the highhanded action of government. But there were no public protests. In 1923 Sri. K.P. Kesava Menon who has been connected for long to political, social and religious reform movements, associating with some other leaders started 'Mathrubhoomi' to spread the message of freedom movement among the masses. In 1924 Mohammad Abdul Rahiman started another newspaper named 'AlAmin' from Calicut with the object of bringing the Muslims into the stream of national movement. Like this many people connected to the freedom struggle got associated with the press and these newspapers with the patronage of the libraries contributed much to the spread of National Movement among the masses.

Newspaper was the only medium of communication in those days and people anxiously waited for every issue. At the small reading rooms and libraries established by people they used to read newspapers aloud to help illiterate also to know what is happening around. This facility introduced to the villagers the new forms in which National Movement progressed; Swadeshi, boycott and passive resistance, Gandhian Satyagraha and constructive village

work as well as revolutionary terrorism, strikes, outbursts of urban peasants and tribal violence. This influenced the initiation of such movements in various parts of Kerala.

Wide circulation for Secret Journals

Using such libraries secret journals supporting freedom movement were also printed and circulated. During the Quit India Movement a secret journal called 'Swatantra Bharathi' was regularly published to disseminate news about the events of freedom movement and sustain the morale of the people. The names of editors and authors were not printed. But from the style of language in its articles and poems we can assume that famous writers and leaders of library movement like M.R. Nair and N.V. Krishna Varyar were associated with those secret journals. The 'Congress Bulletin' was secretly printed and widely circulated in Malabar area everyday. It is through the rural libraries and groups associated with people's library movement that these publications reached the people and achieved their objective. People decided at the library where and how they will exchange or distribute copies of the newspapers and did the job very efficiently. The police could never succeed in finding out the sources of their publication or the ways of distribution.

The government was particularly apprehensive of the influence of libraries, newspapers and the information they disseminated. Their actual circulation was not large. But this limited circulation cannot curtail the extent of their influence as each paper was read by hundreds of readers at the village libraries. It was not an easy task to publish a newspaper in those days of famine caused by Second World War. A secret journal against the government required great courage and an efficient underground network. A note titled 'To the attention of the readers' in Swatantra Bharatham reads "Due to scarcity of paper we cannot print sufficient copies. So we request you to circulate the copies without destroying them. Village libraries enabled such circulation. Each copy of the secret journal was circulated among most of the

members of the library, was transmitted from house to house and was kept live for days. All these directly affected the opinion of the class of people who were not sophisticated by English education in schools and who responded immediately to whatever the paper said. It is also a fact that the comments of Malayalam papers and secret journals were sharper and ranked more bitterly than those of contemporary English press. An article in Swatantra Bharatam under the title 'Even after the death of the cow' reads like this 'What do you think about these shameless donkeys (Britishers). They who have fled from Burma after losing all their soldiers, guns, spears, lorries and tanks still shudder when they hear the word Japanese. These great fools are never going to recapture Burma. But they have started a department to plan how Burma should be administered after its recapture; there are some jobless white people. And there is the resource of India to feed those useless ones. Trees of the forest and God's Elephant'. The effectiveness of the press and its influence among the people to the extent to which it became possible in Kerala was only due to the existence of rural libraries. The news and views expressed in the press reached most of the people through the libraries and brought the people into a single community which shared common thoughts and emotions. This supported the molding of the country into a national unity. With such involvements the libraries have played an important role in Kerala in mobilizing the people for freedom struggle.

Progressive Literary Movement

Literature as a powerful vehicle of thought has also played a significant role in articulating the national consciousness. It fulfilled its commitment to the poor and other weaker sections of the society. The initial form of expression of patriotism of the intelligentsia was through literature in regional languages. Modern literature in Malayalam also emerged in close association with the national movement. The regional theater was also anti-autocratic and anti-British.

Writings of Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders of the National Movement exercised tremendous influence on the people. The leaders of the social and political reform movements read and translated these works into Malayalam. The younger section of the congress that disapproved the moderate policy of the old leaders and organized the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala played a very significant role. A chain of well knit organizations of peasants; industrial workers, teachers and students were set up in Kerala under the Congress Socialist leadership. With the active help of these organizations and the library movement the Socialists strengthened their mass base and increased their influence. They used political and literary works, dramas and discussions to educate the public, to rouse their political and social consciousness and kindle revolution. These novels poems and essays of the progressive literary movement were circulated through the libraries in the villages. Their dramas, which discussed the social, political and economic problems, produced with the intention of forming public opinion and attracting and retaining more voluntaries for the national movement were staged by the rural libraries. All these created an awareness of their rights among the peasants, workers and lower middle class and infused into them the thought of the need to rise for their rights and shake of the yoke of foreign government.

For the leaders of political and social reform movements and for those who mobilized people for the freedom struggle the rural libraries served as the venues closest to the people from where almost a natural dialogue with the common man became possible. The Congress and Communist party workers organized in them study circles, evening classes, adult education programs and discussions on various social and political issues. These libraries helped the leaders to approach the people who normally would have remained beyond their reach or that of any communication system due to illiteracy, poverty and other social barriers.

Movement of the Working Class

As libraries functioned as centers for all these activities enormous quantity of reading materials discussing the political and social problems; published by the political parties, communal organizations, trade unions, youth associations, women's organizations, etc. flowed into them. These libraries also got organized themselves in a democratic way at local, regional and state level and they familiarized the rural population with democratic form of government.

The national movement of Kerala has become a working class movement dominated by villagers and working class due to the role played in it by village libraries. The village libraries that functioned in most of the Kerala villages helped the political parties, to become organizations of the common people drawn largely from village population. The members so attracted included lakhs and lakhs of peasants and cultivators and industrial and field workers. Most of the leaders of the political parties were those associated with people's library movement.

All political, economic and social reform movements in Kerala that formed part of our National Movement that used the public libraries were highly fruitful. The first legislature in any Indian state was set up in Kerala. Temple Entry Proclamation permitted entry of lower caste people to the temples. Law prevented untouchability and many other social evils.

The rural libraries converted the freedom struggle into a grass-roots level movement in Kerala. The rural libraries thus helped the national movement go far beyond its original elite intellectual confines. The entry of the masses into active political life, which they facilitated, helped the quick elimination of princely states in Kerala, and establishment of parliamentary democracy based on universal franchise. The common culture, language and literature popularized through libraries helped to a great extent the dissolution of the political boundaries which separated earlier Travancore, Cochin and Malabar

and paved the way for the united Kerala which joined the Indian Federation as a constituent state.

If we analyze the above factors on the basis of the historical development of freedom struggle in Kerala, we can understand that the class character of the national movement in Kerala was more or less based on the proletarian characters and that aspect was responsible for bringing leftists into political power for which contribution of people's libraries was unique.

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