

Rise and Reach of Theatre and Poetry: A study of Little Magazine *Keralakavitha*

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Abstract: Little magazines, often called ‘small magazines’ are literary magazines that publish experimental literature and the non-conformist writings of relatively unknown writers. Modern Malayalam poets had been inspired by the genre and started many publications in the post- independence era of Kerala. Most of them were published only a few volumes or editions. A very few of the magazines were fortunate enough to publish at least 10 volumes. Out of them, *Keralakavitha* stands a special place in promoting poetry and its reach in the state. This paper tries to trace the path and developments through which the magazine flourished and contributed to the blooming of new poets and theatre artists. The paper also glances through the special characteristics and features of the magazine which assisted in the widespread acceptance and thrive of the same.

Keywords: Poetry, Little Magazine, *Keralakavitha*, Modernism, Theatre, Avant-Garde

“Little magazines acted as open, heterogeneous social settings in which writers of various races, nationalities, and classes read and responded to each other's work. Today, they provide loci of identification and difference, allowing us to map the lines of connection, influence, conflict, and resistance that entangled the many strands of modernism.”¹ Little magazines served as the wings of Modernism in Literature, be it in any language. Along with Arts and Literature, these magazines impacted cultural, political and social echelons of the radical youth and society. “Most magazine editors say that there is no public for poetry... We believe that there is a public for poetry, that it will grow, and that as it becomes more numerous and appreciative the work produced in this art will grow in power, in beauty, in significance... We hope to publish in *Poetry* some of the best work now being done in English verse.”² Harriet Monroe, the founder and editor of the first ‘ideal’³ little magazine *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* published from Chicago familiarised the new poets into the world of literature. To mention some of them are Ezra Pound (foreign editor of the same), T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams who are masters of poetry respected for their valuable contributions.

Little Magazines ignited the rise of Modernism in Malayalam Literature. The traditional, conformist and conservative editors of the mainstream magazines were reluctant to give chance to many revolutionary Avant Garde writers with progressive political inclinations. An exemplary example could be the rejection of the legendary poem *Kurukshetram* by Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker by the editor of fortnightly *Mathrubhumi* Mr. N. V. Krishna Varrier. *Navasahithi* published from Madras under M. V. Devan's editorship altered the stage. *Keralakavitha* edited jointly by K. Ayyappa Paniker and K. S. Narayana Pillai focussed attention to the modernist writings and poetry studies. Many amateur and non-conformist writers found their place among the established poets such as Edasseri Govindan Nair, O. N.

V. Kurup and Sugathakumari. Being an ardent advocate of modernism, Ayyappa Paniker stood with the experiments of the new cult and gradually *Keralakavitha* turned into a haven for them.

***Keralakavitha*: An Overview**

The dedicated teamwork of countless poets, writers, critics and literary persons resulted in the birth of *Keralakavitha*. The first print of the quarterly was published on 1st January 1968 from Trivandrum. Since inception, the magazine holds a distinct position in the history of Alternative publications of Malayalam literature. The magazine gave prime importance to poems and poetry studies. Conforming to ONV Kurup, *Keralakavitha*, the substantial dream of Ayyappa Paniker, gained its shape and form during the discussions among ONV, Ayyappa Paniker, M. M. Basheer, K. S. Narayana Pillai and A. Gangadharan in the evening gatherings at Connemara Hotel, Palayam in Trivandrum.⁴ The magazine ensured an equal consideration to the poems and articles sent by mainstream poets, neo-modern poets, post-modern poets and the non-conformist poets to them without any biases. The magazine never had foreword, prelude or introduction from the editors. Every volume had unique and psychedelic illustrations on its cover designed by famed artists.

Pinnacled the Effort

The very first print of *Keralakavitha* was a cross section of the prevailing Malayalam poetry. The magazine had works from poets of fame in various genres and generations. It introduced poems in World literature to Malayalam through translations and reviews. *Poems of Lorca* by O. N. V. Kurup along with notes to each poem, *Kaapirikavithakal*, poems of Leopold Senghor by Kadamanitta Ramakrishnan, *Poems of Muktibodh* by Sugathakumari etc are a few among them. Critiques on Poetry and Poetics by K. S. Narayana Pillai and Kuttykrishnamarar put the magazine into heterogeneity in its first publication itself. Translations of renowned poets, Reviews on famous poems, Critiques on popular poetic techniques and styles, Familiarizing different literatures etc served the purpose in the following volumes too.

The subsequent volumes set in print works of prominent and admired poets such as Balamaniyyamma, Edasseri Govindan Nair, N. N. Kakkad, M. M. Basheer, K. Satchidanandan,

M. Govindan, Attoor Ravivarma, Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri and so on. Satchidanandan had himself attributed much to *Keralakavitha* in building him as a translator and a critic. He says, "...recently, the translations of North-east Indian poets were also for *Keralakavitha*... I have 16 collections of poetry translations in my name, but the source of inspiration remains with *Keralakavitha*."⁵

The second volume focussed on the emerging trends in the modern poetry. K. Satchidanandan attempted in introducing modern Indonesian poetry whereas N. N. Kakkad articulated on Neo-Poetry. The third volume centred around poetics along with analytical articles on much appreciated poems. The fourth volume celebrated the first year of magazine. It suggested on the use of poetic language by various poets. *Kavyabhasha* by Satchidanandan is a key article of the volume.

¹ Churchill, S.W.W., & McKible, A. (2005)

² Monroe, H. (1912)

³ Carr, H., (2015)

⁴ Panangad, Pradeep (2018)

⁵ Satchidanandan, K. (2006)

The fifth volume concentrated on Tamil poetry. The cynical critique of Nakulan on modern Tamil poetry is the main article. It also had translations of many famous Tamil poets. The succeeding few volumes were dedicated to discussions on poetic drama⁶, the child of modernism. Since then, many dramas found its place in the magazine.

It was in the ninth volume, Ayyappa Paniker published his poem, under ONV's editorship. He, again in eleventh volume, translated *Wasteland* by T. S. Eliot which popularised the poem in the Malayalam literature. Post modern poems and techniques were explored in the magazine. B. Rajeevan and K. G. Sankara Pillai wrote about the post-modern Karnataka Poetry. Modern Kannada Literature was discussed in detail in the eighteenth volume and the subsequent volumes had many experimental poems of amateur writers.

In hand with Drama

Though the name of the magazine particularly pointed to poetry, the editors took keen interest in publishing original and translated versions of several theatrical works. Important among them is the translation of *Waiting for Godot* by Kadamannitta Ramakrishnan published in the sixteenth volume. The third volume witnessed the publication of *Sakshi* by Kavalam Narayana Paniker. Almost all the famous theatrical works of Kavalam were published primarily in *Keralakavitha*. Poetic Drama found its place of discussion in the magazine in the sixth volume. "Poetic Drama is incorporated in Poetry...a true poetic drama delivers out of a poet who learns to write drama."⁷ The seventh volume published two poetic dramas- *Thiruvazhithan* by Kavalam and translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.

"During 1960's almost all branches of art all over India began a search for the identity of the local culture signs. Kerala had experienced it through G. Sankara Pillai and Kavalam Narayana Paniker, though attracted severe criticism. A few theatre artists tried to amalgamate Margi and Desi concepts of classic and folk-art forms; and in literature, the presence of M. Govindan created a flutter in the intellectual circles."⁸ And according to Kavalam, *Keralakavitha* conferred the place for him to experiment and excel in theatre. And Ayyappa Paniker entitled his specialisation in genre as poetic drama.⁹

Each volume of *Keralakavitha* was published from various places and the ceremony would host the theatrical performance of the respective drama published in that volume. Not only through print, but through actions too *Keralakavitha* went hand in hand with drama and poetry. Every publication ceremony stood as a platform for young and emerging poets to recite their poems.

⁶ Poetic drama is a genre of literature that refers to plays that contain distinctly poetic elements.

⁷ T. Ramachandran in *Keralakavitha* Vol.

⁸ Antherjanam, S. (2018)

⁹ Panangad, Pradeep (2018)

An Epilogue

Keralakavitha, through its wide history of decades, could amass artists who had inclination to poetry and theatre. *Keralakavitha* could develop a parallel culture in all realms of poetry- rendering of poem, its appreciation, successive developments and in publication. Alienating from mainstream magazine in contents, authors, form, style and even page setting, *Keralakavitha* remained a dream come true for the non-conformist Avant Garde bunch of writers who later became the renowned poets of ages.

Little magazines exist across time and space, adopts a variety of physical forms and play many roles in affecting the progress of society. Despite its nebulous properties, little magazines hold unique personality in the cultural and social settings of the times. *Keralakavitha* is no exception to this. The magazine imbibed habits of mainstream poetry magazines which then channelled to the neo-liberal and radical thought stream of the society.

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