PREFACE

I deem it an honour that I have been asked by the Sahitya Akademi to write this account of Malayalam Literature for their series of short histories of the important Indian languages. I must confess, however, that the actual writing of it has proved a more difficult task than I thought it would be. It is the need to be concise, and at the same time comprehensive, that proved particularly challenging. A history in some greater detail, I feel, could have made for a smoother, a more spontaneous, piece of narration. It is a vast subject, the history of Malayalam Literature from its earliest days up to the present time, and when it has to be presented in a volume of this size, even the most important material has got to be condensed drastically. At the same time, it is necessary to discuss even relatively unimportant factors which went into its shaping. Every major poet and author, and all the movements they enriched, have to be presented in their proper sequence and perspective, and the social circumstances of the times in which they flourished interpreted and evaluated in terms of the present-day situation. Needless to say, to synthesise and coordinate the various factors has been no easy task, and the author had no models to go by, either.

However, I have sought to make this work as comprehensive, within the framework of the series, as possible. It is the idea of the Sahitya Akademi to bring out, through this series, the correspondences and similarities among the various regional languages and the unity that underlies Indian Literature as a whole. It is also their idea to translate the work into other Indian languages. It has therefore become necessary to conceive this work from a wider perspective and leave out certain details which may not interest non-Malayali readers.

It has been my idea not to make the work a catalogue of names. In fact there is no relevance in a work of this kind to speak of authors whose works have no direct bearing on the growth of literature. But this choice of names becomes a real problem when we come to the modern period. While dis-
cussing a movement, many names may have to be mentioned, but it is hardly possible to discuss them all. I can only say that if some names are left out, the omission is in no way else deliberate. I may also add that if a few well-known works, published since the preparation of the manuscript, have been left out, that too was inevitable.

I acknowledge with thanks the very considerate assistance rendered to me by the Malayalam Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi in the preparation of this work. Sardar K. M. Panikkar, President of the Board, Professor Joseph Mundasseri, Sri Suranad Kunjan Pillai, Sri G. Sankara Kurup, Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair and Sri N. V. Krishnawarier have all gone through the manuscript and helped me with their valuable suggestions. The discussions I have had with Sri Suranad Kunjan Pillai were particularly useful. I am also indebted to Dr. K. M. George, Assistant Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi. As a linguist and critic, he has been of even greater help to me than as an official of the Akademi. We have had to correspond with each other at great length, and his suggestions have had much to do with giving the work its final shape. Once again I thank these distinguished men of letters and the Sahitya Akademi for their very kind help and guidance.

Trivandrum
7-2-1958

P. K. Parameswaran Nair