CHAPTER I

THE LANGUAGE: ITS ORIGIN
AND EVOLUTION

1. Major Epochs in the History of Kerala

Kerala is an ancient land with a history of many centuries. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata refer to it, though incidentally; Megasthenes, the Seleucid ambassador who came to India in the fourth century B.C. speaks of the land and also of its king; and the Asokan edicts emphasise its status as a premier kingdom of the peninsula. The first major epoch in its history of which we have adequate data, however, is that of the Cheras who held court at Tiruvanchikkulam in the early centuries of the Christian era. It was, for aught we know, an epoch of great achievements in a people’s collective life. And to bear testimony to the prowess of that dynasty we have the Chentamil classics of the age, notably Patiruppattu, Chilappatikaram and Manimekalai.

It needs no substantiation that Kerala held a pre-eminent position in respect of foreign trade since the earliest days in known history. All the important civilisations of the ancient world, such as Egypt, Arabia, Babylon, Rome and China, maintained close commercial contacts with its shores, and the teakwood, sandalwood, spices and peacock feathers exported from its ports were highly priced in all the foreign markets, in Egypt and Rome especially.\(^1\) How intimate those immemorial ties had been is fully borne out by the Roman coins dug up from various parts of Kerala in recent years.

There is reason to believe that even in the heyday of the Chera dynasty the power exercised by the monarchy was in no way absolute. The institution of nattukuttam or the village assembly had taken such firm roots in the soil by then and for

\(^1\) There are historians who hold the view that the reference in the Old Testament of the Bible to the ships of Solomon carrying ivory, peacocks, monkeys, etc. from foreign lands into Egyptian ports relates to the commercial intercourse that that part of the world had with Malabar. They point out that there is no evidence to any other part of the world trading in ivory and peacock feathers in those remote times.
ages been playing such a pivotal role in the collective life of the people that to dispense with them or even curb their power was no easy task for the central authority. Nor would a ruler prefer to undermine the traditional polity, for the service each unit rendered him in dispensing administrative responsibilities over its jurisdiction was more than adequate compensation for any restraining influence it might exercise over his doings. The decline of the Chera dynasty facilitated their further expansion in power and prestige, and it is presumed on the strength of circumstantial data that the entire administrative machinery remained their exclusive responsibility for quite a long period of time.

Thus the polity that obtained in Kerala following the Chera epoch was essentially democratic in principle. The principal agents of the people who sat in the nattukkuttam and carried out governmental functions were the Nambutiris (Brahmin immigrants who made Kerala their home) and the chiefs of the autochthonous Naga population. The largest administrative unit into which the land was divided was the kozhakam and under the kozhakam were the smaller units like the gramam, the desam and the kootam. It was quite an ingenious system; however, it could not endure for long because of the corruptions which set in on its fabric as time went by. The alternative that the inhabitants tried was a system of vicegerency, vesting administrative powers in princes brought down from the neighbouring house of the Pandyas from time to time. The Perumals, as these viceroys were known, conformed to the laws of their office for some decades but, as it often happens in history, the ultimate result of the system was hereditary monarchy. We do not know much about their doings nor how the people reacted to their regime, but we know that the dynasty came to an end with the overthrowing of Bhaskara Ravi Varma by the Chola king Rajendra Chola (A.D. 1041-1044).

There had been in Kerala, even before the advent of the Perumals, a great many chieftains and princes governing vast regions subject only to the hegemony of the central authority. Now that the central authority was removed, they saw no reason why the land should not be split up into principalities, each assuming absolute power over his domain, and thus were
born the kingdoms of Kolattunad, Calicut, Valluvanad, Cochin, Odanad and Venad. The process of division continued over the centuries, and the main chapters in the later history of Kerala concern the destinies of these little kingdoms, their mutual wars and the fortunes of their rulers.

The appearance of the West at this stage marks the next major phase. Led by Vasco da Gama the Portuguese landed at Calicut in 1498 A.D., and close on their heels came the Dutch. The prime concern of these foreigners was trade, but they could so manipulate the course of events, playing one prince against the other, that in a short while their influence was felt in the internal affairs of certain parts of the country. Towards the close of the seventeenth century the political map of Kerala consisted mainly of three kingdoms: Venad or Travancore in the south, Calicut in the north, and Cochin in between. The arrival of the British caused further changes in the political set-up: all the kingdoms in the north including the territory of the Zamorin of Calicut passed into their hands and Travancore and Cochin were left to continue as what were then called Native States.

The attainment of independence initiated the move towards the political integration of Kerala. In 1949, the Travancore and Cochin States were welded into one unit, the Travancore-Cochin State; and, on the first of November 1956, on the implementation of the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission, a Kerala State, comprising the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin State (barring the four Tamil-speaking taluks of the South and Shencottah in the East), the entire Malabar District and the Kasargod taluk of South Kanara, was created. In the Kerala State thus brought into being, ninety-five per cent of the people speak Malayalam, the total population in 1956 being 13.6 millions.

The sense of solidarity that pervaded Kerala during the reigns of the Cheras and Perumals and was manifest in her polity continued to be an ideal even after its break-up into tiny principalities. Indeed the goal that every king, who sought to stabilise his power in Kerala, set before him was the Kerala of Cheraman Perumal.¹ There had always been a deep-rooted

¹ A great name in Kerala's dynastic traditions.
awareness among the people that the land is one and indivisible. The sentiment evidently had its moorings in a common language and a common culture and is best expressed in festivals like Onam, Vishu and Tiruvatira, in the customs and manners of the people, in their temple festivals, entertainments, art-forms, ceremonies and even in superstitions—all of which conform to an identical pattern throughout the length and breadth of the land. The efflorescence of this spirit kept pace with the evolution of her arts and her literature and eventually had its culmination in Aikya Kerala, that is, One Kerala.

2. The Genesis of ‘Malayalam’

The term ‘Malayalam’ as referring to the language of Kerala is of comparatively recent origin. To begin with it denoted the land itself. It is probable that the term is the resultant of a combination of two words, mala meaning mountain and alam meaning the land or locality (which lies alongside the mountain). Subsequently the synonyms Malayanma and Malayayma came into being as denoting the language of the Malayalam country and finally the name of the land itself was taken over as the name of its language.

Evidently Malayalam belongs to the Dravidian family of languages, but there is considerable difference of opinion about the exact nature of its relationship with the other languages of the stock, with Tamil in particular towards which it bears the closest affinity. Quite a few scholars are of the opinion that Malayalam is but an offshoot of Tamil, or rather, a daughter. This view, first held by Bishop Caldwell, has since been elaborated and substantiated by a well-known grammarian of Kerala, A. R. Raja Raja Varma. The intimacy that subsisted between the two languages all through the centuries, the identity that the grammars and vocabularies of both the languages evince, and the old practice of using the term ‘Tamil’ as a synonym for Malayalam have all lent considerable support to this theory. But in the light of the increasing application of scientific methodologies in the assessment of affinities between languages and the comparative studies since carried out in respect of the two languages, this theory would seem to require further examination.
3. Malayalam and Tamil

It is not between Tamil and Malayalam alone that we find affinities in respect of grammar, syntax and vocabulary, we find the same in respect of all the languages of the stock: Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu. In Ramakrishnayya’s *Dictionary of Dravidian Cognates*, published by the University of Madras, we have a list of about five thousand words in regular currency in all the four languages and in Tulu. It need hardly be argued that this identity does not indicate that one of these languages gave birth to the rest, but that all of them came into being from out of one original language and developed on parallel, but independent, lines. If the affinity between Malayalam and Tamil is more pronounced, the reason must be sought for elsewhere—in the unbroken continuity of their contacts, historical and regional—and not in a parent-child relationship.

Philologists do not seem to have any well-defined difference of opinion over the view that the present Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada and Telugu and the dialects of Coorg and Tulu had for a common source an original Dravidian that had currency over the entire peninsula at some prehistoric time. The diversity of geographical features and sociological tendencies must have provided the stimulus for its ramification in different directions and for the evolution of the new shoots on separate lines. In the case of Malayalam and Tamil, the Western Ghats was an effective dividing line, and during the early formative years when social and political intercourse between the two regions was meagre they took on their individual forms independent of each other. During the later centuries, however, political and administrative intercourse between Kerala on the one hand and the Cholas and the Pandyas on the other, became more intimate, and this eventually led to Tamil assuming the more dominant role. It was thus that Chentamil, as the literary form of classical Tamil is called, was accepted for centuries as the medium of royal proclamations, documents and even of literary expression in Kerala. The influence was a powerful one, no doubt, but it was not so profound as to alter in any radical manner.

1 Dr. Chelanattu Achyuta Menon, *Pradakshinam*. 
the characteristics that Malayalam inherited from the original Dravidian and preserved in the speech of the common people. The same, however, was not the case with Pandit-tamil, the common tongue spoken to the east of the Western Ghats; Chentamfl altered its form and texture to such a degree that it shed many of its basic characteristics with the passage of time. Viewed from this angle, say some philologists, Malayalam stands in closer relationship to the original Dravidian than even present-day Tamil.

The following illustrations can be cited in support of this theory: while Tamil shows ai endings, Malayalam preserves the original a; the predicate in the Tamil syntax has accepted suffixes indicative of gender and number—for example, avan vantan (he came), aval vantal (she came), avar poyar (they went), etc., while the original form which does not allow of such endings continues to be in use in Malayalam; chuttezhuthus or adjectival forms such as a (that) and i (this) are seldom used in Tamil save in poetry, whereas the same are in common use in spoken and written Malayalam; innumerable words found in the original Dravidian are found in Malayalam also, while the same are no longer extant in Tamil: for example, tellu (a little), nin (yours), ayi (over), etc; the same is the case in regard to the phonetical values of characters such as ta (as in tat). Apparently these facts have to be taken as indicative of a definite intimacy between Malayalam and the original Dravidian and the distinct individuality it has maintained since very early times. Etymologists also point out that many usages of immemorial origin, found no longer in Tamil but continue to be current in Malayalam, conform to the canons laid down by Tolkkappiyar, the earliest of Tamil grammarians. Similarly, many words taken over from the original Dravidian and proved to have been in use at one time in Tamil by such works associated with Kerala as Patitruppattu and Chilappatikaram are still in common currency in Kerala whereas their meaning hardly be made out in the Tamil country without the help of a lexicon. The following are but a few examples: tunnalkaran (tailor), peetika (shop), angati (market), aliyan (brother-in-law), pattayam (granary), itu (weight), toni (boat), pani (arm), pava (doll), pulari (dawn).
4. The Distinctness of Malayalam

From the foregoing account one fact emerges unmistakably clear: Malayalam had an existence of its own, independent of and different from Tamil since the earliest days in known history. The two had their origin in a common stock and they branched off in two different directions. While Tamil underwent transformations resulting in Chentamil, the reformed classical form, and the same altered the original features of the common tongue spoken to the east of the Ghats, Malayalam did not register any such fundamental change. Yet due to historical reasons and geographical contiguity, Malayalam had to accept a good many words and usages from beyond the Sahyas. Thus, even though it may seem at first sight that there is a deep-rooted affinity between the two, there is no valid reason to suppose that one is the offspring of the other. It would indeed be unscientific to suppose so just because there are parallel sounds in both.

Yet another reason that contributed to fostering such a view was the old practice of using the term 'Tamil' to denote the language of the Malayalam country. Of course the term in its present connotation was never used as referring to Malayalam, but to describe it as Malanattu Tamil was enough to perpetuate the impression that one is but a different version of the other. That the term in this context is only a suffix indicative of the common stock from which all the South Indian languages sprang would be evident when we note that Canarese was once called Karinattu Tamil and Tulu, Tulunattu Tamil. But in the case of Malayalam there was this difference, that the suffix continued to be in use in Kerala long after it was given up in other parts of the peninsula. It offers, incidentally, an explanation for the paradox in regard to the old practice of describing works written in the chasteest Malayalam as works in Tamil.

5. Provincialisms and Dialects

As in the case of all living tongues there have been, since early times, provincialisms in the use of Malayalam. The variations can be classed mainly under two heads: tekkan (southern) and vadakkan (northern). This division is based
obviously on the geographical distribution of the variations, but it has to be mentioned that no hard and fast boundary can be set for any one form. Perhaps if we divide the land further into South Travancore, North Travancore, Cochin, South Malabar and North Malabar, we might be able to form a fairer idea of their distribution. If any one provincialism assumes pronounced features, then we might as well call it a dialect. In Malayalam, however, there is hardly any that warrants such a description. We can only say that the language, as spoken in places to the north of Calicut, in Tellicherry and Chirakkal for instance, in the Laccadive and Minicoy Islands of the Arabian Sea and in South Travancore, knows considerable variations.

Class and communal differences also have given rise to peculiarities in the use of the language. The supposition is that the Nambutiris, the Kshatriyas, the Intermediary castes, and Nairs, all of whom have had the privilege to education since early times, speak a purer form of Malayalam in comparison to that of the so-called low castes—the Pulayas, the Pariahs and other classes who live by manual labour. The traditional notion that manual labour is derogatory contributed to their severance from the rest of the society and this, in turn, led to their developing a separate idiom. Tribal people who inhabit jungles far removed from the villages constitute another group with its own distinctive linguistic peculiarities. The language spoken by tribes like the Vedas, the Kanikkars and the Malankuravas is evidently primitive. Yet another instance of sociological factors giving rise to differences in idiom, and in this case, thanks to contacts with Arabs also, is the Malayalam of the Moplahs, the Muslims of Malabar. A general tendency initiated by modern education, to which every class has access, is the elimination of all provincialisms which leads naturally to a standardisation of the language. But it has to be mentioned that so far there has not been any appreciable change as regards the spoken language.

6. The Malayalam Alphabet

At present Malayalam has a script of its own, but in the early centuries it used a form called the vattezhuthu which had
currency all over the regions of the Cheras and the Pandyas. It disappeared from the rest of the peninsula by about the fifteenth century, but in Kerala it continued to be in use for three more centuries. Documents, letters, books and inscriptions were mostly written in this script, and even after giving it up, children first initiated into the study of the language were required to learn the vattelzhuthu characters also, besides those of Malayalam and Tamil.

From the vattelzhuthu was derived another script called the kolezhuthu. It is said that the ezhuthu or writing was done with a kol, a stick, and hence the name kolezhuthu for the script. There is no fundamental difference between the two scripts except that in kolezhuthu there are no specific symbols for endings in u and for a and o. This script was more commonly used in the Cochin and Malabar areas than in Travancore. Yet another script derived from the vattelzhuthu was the Malayanna, which was in common use to the south of Trivandrum. Malayanna also does not differ fundamentally from the vattelzhuthu.

With three scripts in current use the writing and reading of Malayalam must indeed have been a difficult affair. Vattelzhuthu was perhaps the better form, for it had currency all over Kerala and did not have any regional variations. But the absence of character combinations, the vowels a and o and conventions for symbols were real difficulties. The trouble with kolezhuthu was still more considerable, for it knew regional variations also. And in the case of Malayanna, the complexity of the script, Tamil usages and conventional abbreviations for words were handicaps which made it unintelligible to the rest of the region. It is likely that in course of time these difficulties contributed to their disappearance and brought in the grandhalipi which is the basis of the present script.¹

It is held that grandhalipi—the term literally means 'book-script'—was in use all over South India since the seventh century A.D. The advent of Manipravala literature² must have been the major factor that paved the way for its introduction in Kerala. It altered the pattern of the script then in use as time went by and by the nineteenth century when the alpha-

¹ See Appendix.
² Malayalam literature with a generous admixture of the vocabulary of Sanskrit. See Chapter III.
et was more or less stabilised, it came to be recognised as one of the scripts of Kerala with aryu ezhuthu for a synonym.

According to Dr. Burnell, the eminent philologist, all the scripts obtaining in South India are derived from what are called Cave Characters. The script used in the Asokan inscriptions of the South is, according to him, a modified form of the original Cave Characters. He presumes further that even though there are certain differences between the vattezhuthu current all over the peninsula at one time and the script of the Asokan edicts, both are derived from one common stock, a Mediterranean script. This view, which is based largely on the similarities that these South Indian scripts bear towards Arabic and Phoenecian scripts, gains in historical probability when we remember that Indian merchants had contacts with Babylon since about 1000 B.C. The brahmi, says Burnell, is the first script that Indian philologists fashioned out of the foreign characters.

Of the fourteen important languages mentioned in the Constitution of India, Malayalam takes the eighth place in respect of the population to which it is the mother-tongue. And of the South Indian languages it ranks as the fourth, there being, according to the Census of 1951, 32.9 million Telugus, 27 million Tamils, 14.4 million Kannadigas and 13.3 million Malayalis.

7. Literary Periods

Hardly does any unanimity exist among scholars in their division into periods of the history of Malayalam literature. A good many of them have chosen to divide it into the Ancient, the Mediaeval and the Modern Periods, the linguistic features of the corresponding epochs being the sole criterion. But works which do not conform to the pattern of the language which is taken to be the standard at any specified epoch have been written during all these periods so much so that such a division would necessarily tend to be arbitrary. A more satisfactory division which would not only facilitate our narrative but also conform to the general trend of the evolutionary forces which shaped the literature would be the following: the Ancient, the Modern and the Contemporary.
After the branching off of Malayalam from the original Dravidian and its assumption of an independent form, it developed rapidly into a literary language, first under the influence of Chentamil and subsequently, of Sanskrit. The literature of this period, which is considerable, falls mainly under two heads: Pattu, that is to say, the song or the ballad; and the Manipravala or literature which had for its medium a hybrid language created out of blending Malayalam with Sanskrit. This period extends from the tenth to the fifteenth century.

In the works of Cherusseri, the fifteenth century poet, we have the first symptoms of a new style, but, for the unmistakable stamp of modernism, we have to turn to Ezhuthachan who flourished in the next century. And although, occasionally, from the point of view of theme and treatment, the imprint of a mediaeval temperament is discernible in him, yet, in regard to vocabulary, syntax and the general style, his poetry is essentially modern. It has also to be mentioned that poets who follow what may be called the ‘Ezhuthachan Style’ are not rare even today.

The advent of English ushers in the Contemporary period in the history of Malayalam literature. The interest that Malayalis, in common with the rest of the country, evinced in the culture and literature of the British since their coming into power in the last century, resulted in far-reaching consequences for the literature of Kerala. Western literary patterns, both prose and poetry, were adopted with such enthusiasm that in a short while Malayalam came to have its khanda kavyam or shorter poems, the bhavagitam or the lyric, the short story, the novel, the modern drama, the essay and all such forms known to modern literature. Printing, publishing and journalism are also largely the outcome of this impact with the West.
CHAPTER II

EARLY MALAYALAM LITERATURE

1. Chants, Proverbs, Riddles

We do not know what the features of the earliest writings in Malayalam were, for we have no data in this regard. We can only presume that such simple compositions as the hymn, the ballad and the folk-song which usually characterise the formative periods of all languages must have obtained in Kerala also. It is possible, however, to gain some insight into the linguistic and literary lineaments of those non-extant compositions in the light of the subsequent tottams or chants, ballads and folk-songs which, as would be natural to expect, are composed in the unadorned language of the common people. The tottams will be particularly helpful in the context as, being sacramental, the possibility of major variations in their text or style is remote. The excerpt given below, a eulogy on the goddess Kali, reflects virtually the mood that inspired the chants:

Clenching the dagger
and swirling the sabre and lance,
in full battle array,
with bloody entrails streaming
like garlands from the neck,
and eyes darkly rolling...

Proverbs and riddles preserve and suggest some of the basic qualities of the old language. They are, as a rule, maximed versions of the common tongue and as such involve an element of the inventive, but the salient point to note is that the idiom is unmistakably native, free from the imprint of both Tamil and Sanskrit which have influenced the subsequent evolution of Malayalam. The following specimens still extant may serve to bear out the primordial features of the language and throw some light on the social, occupational, martial and domestic life of the early community:
**EARLY MALAYALAM LITERATURE**

*Kadakkal nanachale talaykal podikku.*
(Water the root for buds at the top)

*Akkara nilkumpol ikkara pacha*
(This side is greener when seen from the opposite)

*Uri nellu uran poiyittu pathu para nelli panni tinnu.*
(While out to gather *uri* paddy, the pig ate up full ten *paras*).\(^1\)

*Ari nazhikkum aduppu moonnu venam*
(Be it one *nazi* of rice, the hearth stones must number three).

*Arayan chattal podayilla.*
(The fighting ceases when the king dies).

Riddles also preserve the basic features of Malayalam:

*Ana kera mala, adu kera mala*
*Ayiram kantari pootirangi*
(The hill elephant can’t climb, the hill goat can’t climb, a thousand chillies came flowering down).\(^2\)

*Pinnale vannavan munnale poyi*
(The last to come, the first to leave).\(^3\)

*Kattil kidannavan koottayi vannu*
(He who lay in the forest came for a companion)\(^4\)

2. *Kerala and Chentamil Literature*

It is not known if there were works of any considerable literary merit in early Malayalam, but we know for certain that there was no dearth of poetic talent in Kerala. The works of the age which due to historical reasons were composed in Chentamil—the language of the royalty and nobility—speak volumes for the eminence of its many poets. The house of the Cheras, too, was an enlightened one, and the kings were

---

\(^1\) The term *uri, para* and *nazi* are from the indigenous system of measures. Two *uris* make one *nazi*, forty *nazhis* one *para*.

\(^2\) Stars.

\(^3\) Tooth.

\(^4\) Walking stick.
generous to a fault in their encouragement of Chentamil. For instance, *Patiruppattu*, a poetic saga glorifying ten generations of the Chera dynasty, tells us in every canto of it, of towns, villages, gold and precious stones being endowed to poets by their royal patrons. The kings themselves were men of letters and the contributions they made to classical literature are indeed invaluable. The most famous name in their annals, as also perhaps in the entire range of Chentamil poetry, is Ilango Adigal, brother of the king Chenkuttuvan who flourished in the second century A.D.

*Chilappatikaram* on which rests Ilango's fame is an epic extolling the glory of womanhood. Accused of stealing an anklet Kovalan is put to death by the king of Madura. But Kannaki, his wife, a paragon of every womanly virtue, would not take her widowhood lying. She proves to the king her husband’s innocence and exposes the culprit, an avaricious goldsmith. Nemesis overtakes the king on the miscarriage of justice and he dies of a broken heart; and Kannaki, in her uncontrollable wrath and grief, curses the city, which is instantly consumed by flames. Wandering along the banks of the Vaigai river she arrives at last on top of a mountain, and there, under divine circumstances, joins her husband in celestial bliss. Events of the last canto are laid in the Chera capital of Tiruvanchikkulam, the modern Kodungallur (Cranganore) in Central Kerala, and hence, appropriately enough, it bears the title *Vanchi Kandam*. The episode is the building of a temple for Kannaki in his capital by Chenkuttuvan who, listening to her story, becomes her ardent devotee. The stamp of Kerala is discernible in *Chilappatikaram* in other respects also. Commentators draw attention to the countless usages in the work which exemplify what is called the *Malanattu Vazhakkam*, the style followed in Malanad or Kerala. According to *Patiruppattu*, the poets and scholars who flourished in Madura left the city on its destruction and sought patronage under Chenkuttuvan at Tiruvanchikkulam. The more important names among those who migrated to Kerala were Kulavaniyar, Chattanar, Paranar and Kapilar. Besides the *Patiruppattu*, they composed some of the other well-known works in Chentamil like *Manimekalai*, *Akkanuru* and *Purannuru*.

Chera kings of the later centuries too have made substantial
contributions to Chentamil. Thus the well-known classic Ven-
pamala is the work of one Ayyanaritanar of the seventh century.
Of the sixty-three Nayanars, the Saivite mystics who flourished
in South India between the seventh and ninth centuries, two
hailed from Kerala—Viranmandi Nayanar of Chengannur
and Cheraman Perumal Nayanar, a reigning prince. The
hymns of the latter—he is extolled as having had a direct
darsan of Lord Siva—are indeed the spontaneous effusions of
an ardent devotee. There were many other mystics and poets in
the Chera line of whom Venattu Adigal of the tenth century
A.D. and Kulasekhara Alwar, both composers of devotional
hymns, deserve special mention.

It would seem evident from the foregoing account that in
the early centuries the major proportion of Kerala's poetic
talent expressed itself in Chentamil. Because of this and, owing
to the importance given to it in the administration of the
kingdom, Malayalam did not receive the encouragement that
was its due. It could, however, preserve its cardinal features
unaffected by the official language, for it had already estab-
lished its individuality. That this was so is argued out con-
vincingly by the author of Lilatilakam, a fourteenth century
treatise on poetics. He ordains that there should be no Tamil
usages in Manipravala, that is, in the hybrid medium blended
out of Malayalam and Sanskrit. After demonstrating with
many illustrations the features which distinguish Malayalam
from Tamil, he goes to the extent of asking if, in the earlier
Manipravala works, one could find any trace of Tamil usages.¹
Inevitably it takes us to the conclusion that Malayalam had
an existence of its own, independent of Tamil which was the
language of administration and literary expression. Lilatilakam
goes on to declare that being Dravidians, Keralites also are
in a sense Tamils, but that languages have their inescapable
differences. It states further that because certain sounds are
identical in both the languages, a casual observer is apt to
overlook their basic differences.²

¹ "There is not a trace of the Chola language anywhere in Manipravala"
² "I have established that being Dravidians, Keralites are Tamils as well.
But languages have their difference. The ignorant are apt to regard them as
3. The Advent of Sanskrit

The influence that Sanskrit could wield over Malayalam is considerable and dates back to the earliest times. There is reason to believe that Sanskrit reached the Tamil country early enough, perhaps even before the evolution of the literary medium, Chentamil. But in Kerala there was a special reason for its more rapid infiltration: it was the immigration of the Nambutiris.

The Nambutiris, as the Brahmins of Kerala are known, came down to Kerala long before the beginning of the Christian era. We have the well-known legend that it was Parasurama, the Bhrigu warrior, who showed them the way. The immigration continued even after the transformation of the pioneer into a mythological figure, and in due course, the community was thoroughly acclimatised to conditions in Kerala. It has to be said that the Nambutiris were never a warlike race, that their intention was anything but conquest, that being a peace-loving people their sole desire was for a permanent home in the beautiful, fertile and hospitable land to the west of the Sahya Range. Nor would it have been easy for them, had they so intended, to drive out or enslave the native Nagas either, for in their cultural, social and martial attainments, they were in no way inferior to the newcomers. In the circumstances the Aryans must have deemed it more prudent to effect a misccegenation with the indigenous population, a complete identification with its social habits, language and other cultural peculiarities.

The Nagas reciprocated with equal goodwill and the outcome was the mutual exchange of most of their manners and customs. The scope and profundity of this cultural intercourse would be best explained when we note that the Nambutiris adopted the indigenous tongue for their own, wore *pahvasikha* (tuft of hair over the forehead) after the manner of Keralites and imitated them even in their dress; and the Keralites, in their turn, accepted many of the features of Aryan civilisation including, notably, the learning of Sanskrit. And when the newcomers took wives also from the Nayar community—the term Nayar is deemed to have evolved from the original *Naga*—the merger became inextricably final. One noteworthy feature of this amalgamation is that the spread of
Early Malayalam Literature

Aryan culture was in no way detrimental to the indigenous one. On the contrary, the new influence served as an effective impetus for the further enrichment of the ancient culture of Kerala. The practical wisdom and the spirit of co-existence manifested by the Nambutiris contributed to the strengthening of this creative process and the miscegenation thus effected served to avoid all distasteful consequences to either side.

The important question is: How did the permeation of Aryan culture in Kerala react upon its language? Any vicissitude in the social structure would inevitably have its repercussion on the language of that society, and in this case it took the form of a steady flow of Sanskritic forms into Malayalam. The flow gained in depth and intensity in process of time and the subsequent course of the language and literature of Kerala has depended to a considerable degree on this literary communion.

4. Kerala’s Contribution to Sanskrit Literature

When we consider the absorption of Sanskritic forms by Malayalam we would also have to take into account the role played by Sanskrit literature in Kerala both as a precursor to, and as a factor supplementing, that absorption and also the literature produced in the classical medium by its Malayali votaries. There is reason to believe that the atmosphere of Kerala braced the innate genius of the Nambutiris to such a degree that their output in the form of treatises on Vedanta, astrology, architecture and medicine and also in pure literature became phenomenal. The earliest of Kerala’s contributions to Sanskrit now extant is put down to the fourth century A.D., but it can be surmised that the process might have begun much earlier. The names of Vararuchi, the mathematician, and of Mezhathol Agnihotri and Prabhakara, both exponents of the Purva Mimamsa, are but a few in the long and illustrious list of Keralites who enriched the Sanskritic lore. The crowning glory of this unique tradition, however, was Sri Sankara, the prophet of Advaita, who flourished sometime between the eighth and tenth centuries A.D. His works have a wide appeal all over India and, considering his contribution to the country’s religious and philosophical heritage, one can only say
that it should be even so. However, it is doubtful if the full impact of his contribution and his influence as a living force in the cultural life of the people is felt with as much puissance elsewhere as in his own birthplace.

The poets who sustained this tradition are numerous. That some of the greatest names in the annals of Sanskrit literature were Keralites speaks much for their literary traditions: Kulasekhara who composed Mukundamala, Vasudeva, author of two yamaka kavyas, Tudoshtira Vijayam and Nalodayam, Saktibhadra who wrote the drama Ascharyachudamani, Tola, author Mahodayacharitam, Lakshmldasa, composer of Sukasandesam and Lilasuka who sang the Sri Krishna Karna-mrutam.

5. The Malayalam-Sanskrit Hybrid

While Chentamil was encouraged by the Chera kings and Sanskrit was upheld by the Nambuitiris, Malayalam, the spoken tongue of the common people, was left severely alone. If, therefore, the vernacular did not develop fast enough into a literary language, the reason must be sought for in the neglect it suffered at the hands of the higher-ups in society, the custodians of literature. But it had that innate vitality which, given the necessary incentive and patterns to emulate, could burst forth into a literary medium. And such an opportunity came at last when, with the increasing social intercourse with the Nambuitiris, Sanskrit found its way into the life of the common people.

When the Aryans were naturalised as Malayalis and the Malayalis assimilated much of the Aryan culture, it became inevitable that Malayalam, now the mother-tongue of both the races, should undergo certain transformations. The mixing up of both the vocabularies in the give-and-take of daily life must have originated the process of this transformation. And gradually, a hybrid language was evolved, first perhaps for the exposition of religious, ritualistic and scientific theories, and subsequently as the spoken tongue of the literates in society. The sway that Tamil held over Kerala began to decline and, when Koothu and Koodiyattam, both dramatic art-forms, became the favourite entertainments of all the ranks in the community, the hybrid vocabulary gained much
popularity. The coalescence of the two languages went on over the centuries and eventually the resultant medium was put to literary purposes also. The first exercises in the new medium were the commentaries on Sanskrit works, for the rapid spread of Sanskritic learning necessitated them, and ultimately original works too came to be composed in it. And from this point begins the Manipravala epoch, one of the most fruitful periods in the history of Malayalam literature.

6. Ramacharitam Pattu

But before we take up Manipravala, another branch of literature which might well be deemed to have existed anterior to it claims our consideration. That also had the resultant of a coalescence of two languages for its medium—Malayalam and Tamil. Sanskrit words are also traceable in it, but their proportion is, on the whole, negligible. This is the poetic form called pattu which literally means song.

The author of Lilatilakam defines the pattu on the following lines: Its entire vocabulary should be such as can be written in the Tamil alphabet; the second letter of every foot must rhyme with the corresponding letter in the following feet; the first letter of the first half of the foot must be identical with the first letter of its second half; any metre may be adopted but not from Sanskrit. Though it is specified that only such words as can be written in the Tamil alphabet alone should be used, it does not necessarily preclude the adoption of words from Sanskrit. It only means that whenever Sanskritic vocabulary is availed of, as was often done, the poets should take care either to transform it in such a manner as can be accommodated within the Tamil alphabet, or more preferably, choose only those words which sound much like the rest. The law pertaining to metre is inviolable: it should invariably be from Tamil poetry. It would thus seem—and there are statements in Lilatilakam demonstrating it—that, on the whole, the pattu was conceived on the lines of Chentamil epic poetry.

The earliest of the pattus discovered so far is Ramacharitam which, according to the late Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer, an eminent poet and scholar of Kerala who published the first
The importance that the author of Lilatilakam attaches to the pattu and the quotations he provides to illustrate the same take us to the conclusion that there must have been many works like Ramacharitam in the North as well as in the South. In regard to the language of the pattus in general and of this poem in particular, it has to be inferred that it is a specially devised one, applicable to this branch of literary composition only. That it does not denote any particular epoch in the evolution of Malayalam would be evident from the fact that at the time these pattus came into being, other styles which depended exclusively on the vocabulary of Malayalam also were followed and that there are even pattus written in that style. It would thus be difficult to judge the age of a pattu by its linguistic characteristics, for its idiom, being a specially devised and conventional one, could be adopted any time. According to Dr. K. M. George who has done extensive research on the subject, the pattu and the Manipravala poetry, both composed in hybrid media, were invented and meant solely to meet the ends of literature; that is to say, they do not as such have any significant bearing on the pattern of Malayalam which obtained at the time of their composition.¹

It would seem as though that the poet of Ramacharitam had in mind the soldiers of the land as his particular audience, for no other reason can apparently be attributed to his con-

¹ Dr. K. M. George, Ramacharitam and the Study of Early Malayalam, p. 81.
fining the theme to the *Yuddha Kanta* of the Ramayana. He follows Valmiki’s version of the story to a considerable degree, but there are countless passages which bear amply the stamp of his originality. A thorough knowledge of the story of Rama, deeply felt emotions, picturesque imageries, euphonic arrangement of words replete with echoes and onomatopoeic effects and an all-pervading simplicity are the distinguishing features of *Ramacharitam*. All the demands of the *pattu* form of poetry such as the word-by-word rhyme, alliterations and metrical formalities are met with the utmost facility and, had it not been for the archaic vocabulary, it would have had a perennial popularity. It cannot, of course, be claimed that the author reaches the highest flights of poetic imagination, but the melody of his words and the harmony he spins out of his material can hardly fail to charm even those who do not understand the text fully. The work begins with the following invocation:

Ah, my Lord with lotus-eyes  
Who beds Thy being on the breasts  
of Lakshmi with the luxuriant hair  
which wreathes of blossoms beautify!  
Ah, the Be-all of all knowledge  
to *yogins* ev’n unknowable,  
search howsoever longingly  
they might the *vedic* mysteries!  
Ah, the strange illusory One  
Who with a mountain balked the rains!  
Grant me the muse to sing the tale  
of Thy becoming a king to slay  
in war the prince of *asuras*—  
oh Lord, who takes the serpent-bed!

The pen-pictures strewn throughout the work have a lucidity and freshness seldom surpassed in old poetry. Here is one of them, a vision, as it were, of Sita bound on trial by fire, entering the presence of her lord:

Breasts of transcendent grace pressing,  
the long blue eyes with tears brimming,
lotus-face bent and bosom hidden
in garlands and the figure wrapped
with arms and cloud-like hair and robes,
Janaki with flower-decked hair
and the blushful-feminine speech,
adorned fully, and swaying soft
with gentle steps, approached the king,
and environed by celestial hosts,
stood on his left, illumining
the Universe.

Being a pattu, the music of which had thrilled generations
of Keralites, Ramacharitam could affect rather deeply the course
of subsequent poetry. Its linguistic traits and regional asso-
ciations have been the subject of much research in assessing
the evolutionary forces which led to the transformation of
Malayalam into what it is today.

It is obvious that many pattus of the type of Ramacharitam
were written both contemporaneously and subsequently, but
it so happens that most of them are no longer extant. It is
probable that its archaicism and the use of Manipravala
relegated the pattu to the background as time passed and
even its claim to be classed under literature was weakened by
the imbecile productions of later periods. The few fragments
unearthed so far are not only a far cry from Ramacharitam in
respect of literary qualities, they do not even bear the stamp
of Kerala. Anchutampuran Pattu and Ulakudaya Perumal Pattu are,
for instance, composed in a dialect of Tamil which obtained
in South Travancore. Ramakatha Pattu of Ayipilla Asan, how-
ever, has about it the true ring of poetry. It retells, like Ram-
charitam, the tale of the Ramayana.

The aforesaid pattus do not suggest any appreciable change
in respect of the evolution of the language since the days of
Ramacharitam. But a radical change was coming over the lan-
guage all the while, freed from the influence of Tamil and
nurtured by Sanskrit it was moving fast towards the splendid
Manipravala phase. The pattus of the later periods suggest the
tendency, but it is in the works of the three Niranam poets
that the unmistakable note of the new idiom is struck. These
poets, whose works will be dealt with more adequately in
another chapter, flourished much earlier to the period of the composer of Ramakatha Pattu, but their style is more markedly akin to the Manipravala of the later centuries than to the contemporary pattu literature. They do conform to the canons in respect of the pattus except perhaps in regard to the specification about words being written in the Tamil alphabet, and contain many Tamil usages besides, but their idiom with its generous admixture of the Sanskritic vocabulary indicates a clean break with that of Ramacharitam and the other Pattus.

7. Manipravala

The circumstances which led to the emergence of Manipravala have been pointed out already. As the influence of Sanskrit waxed under its protagonists, the Nambutiris, and was eventually accepted as the medium of higher learning, it brought about profound changes in the vernacular of Kerala. The new words found their way into the spoken tongue and a compound of both the languages was freely used for puranic and philosophical expositions, for commentaries and debates at the seats of learning, at congregations of scholars and religious centres and even for declamations in the popular stage-shows. Hence it was but logical that the new medium should serve for literary expression also: men of letters who commanded mastery over both the languages drew freely from both the vocabularies for their compositions. A label was also devised to indicate the nature of the new medium, 'Manipravala'. A combination of two words, mani (pearl) and pravalam (coral)—which here denote Malayalam and Sanskrit respectively—the term derives its significance from the fact that just as the two precious stones are fairly identical in respect of lustre despite their difference in calibre, even so, Malayalam and Sanskrit which hail from two different families evince, when brought together, a real measure of homogeneity.

Manipravala is not a feature of Malayalam alone: there were similar epochs in the history of almost all the Dravidian languages. The only difference would seem to be that whereas it flowered into a great literature in Kerala, it did not do so in the rest of the region. There are different strains even under
the general category of Manipravala, but the differences among them are primarily one of degree, depending on the quantum of words taken from both the languages, and not of kind.

When Manipravala registered a bounteous growth, it became necessary that some rules should be formulated for its correct use. *Lilatilakam*, the treatise on poetics referred to earlier, supplied this need. It defines Manipravala simply as the coalescence of Malayalam and Sanskrit, and proceeds to explain that good Manipravala is that which appeals to men of taste. It is evident from the proportions prescribed for words of both the languages which go into the blending that the intention was just to enrich Malayalam with the Sanskritic vocabulary and not change its basic qualities. Certain features of Sanskrit grammar, those pertaining to inflections particularly, were occasionally availed of for ensuring harmony, but that did not affect the Malayalam syntax in any radical manner.

*Lilatilakam* enjoins that two conditions should invariably be observed in the handling of Manipravala: first, that the Malayalam words used should have the widest currency, even among illiterates, and secondly, that the Sanskrit words borrowed should be both familiar and simple. The intention is that such a medium would have an ideal homogeneity, thanks to similarities among its components, even as a string of pearl and coral shows homogeneity. The *uttama* or the noblest variety of Manipravala is that in which Malayalam vocabulary and *rasa* (aesthetic flavour) preponderate, the *madhyama* or the medium, in which both the elements are of equal proportion, and *adhama* or the low, in which Sanskrit dominates Malayalam and words stifle *rasa*. It is apparent from this classification that Malayalam was held to be the more important ingredient in the hybrid medium. The rule that the Sanskrit words borrowed should be both familiar and simple could easily have served as a pretext for bringing in a higher percentage of that vocabulary into the new medium, but in practice it was seldom so. Save in the later *champu* works whose authors were enamoured of the high-sounding Sanskrit phraseology, Manipravala was always of the *uttama* variety. The following remarks of the author of
Lilatilakam would be particularly appropriate in this context: "Thus a composition featuring identical words (of both the languages) should seem to be a composition in Malayalam and not one in Sanskrit. And that is the correct thing too."

It has also to be stated in this context that Manipravala is, in the final analysis, as much a symbol of the vicissitudes which came over the social structure of Kerala in the medieval ages as it is a literary medium.
CHAPTER III

MANIPRAVALA: THE EARLY PHASE

1. The Temperament of the Age as Reflected in Maniprala

It was the discovery, half a century ago, of Lilatilakam that provided for the first time a comprehensive view of the extent and uniqueness of Maniprala literature. The date of this work is still one of argument, but the view that it is a fifteenth century work holds a certain measure of unanimity among scholars. At any rate, it is evident from its range and comprehensiveness that Maniprala must have had a growth of four or five centuries before it could be written. The quotations it abounds in also substantiate this theory.

In later Maniprala we have a much higher percentage of Sanskrit words than in these fragments, and that would seem to imply that they are culled from works of an earlier period when Sanskrit was just getting acclimatised to Kerala. The variety of forms and themes handled by their anonymous authors is also instanced by these quotations: hymns on gods, eulogies on kings, sthala mahatmyas or the exposition of the puranic associations of places, portrayals of famous beauties, sandesa kavyas or messenger-poems, descriptions of festivals, romantic effusions, etc. It is indeed a pity that so far only an infinitesimal fraction of this old literature could be retrieved. The quotations provided in Lilatilakam are evidently taken from sandesa kavyas or are vandanaslokas (dedicative quatrains) of works of which practically very little is known. It is possible, however, to form some idea of the features of ancient Maniprala literature in the light of the few fragments we have come by—for instance, Vaisika Tantram and Unnunili Sandesam.

It may not be easy to specify another body of literature, not in Maññyalam at any rate, which reflects so much the joy, the charm and the simplicity of life as does ancient Maniprala. The erotic, it is true, provides bulk of the grist to the poetic mill, but then we are not far wrong in supposing that the zest for life usually finds expression through the
erotic. At any rate, it is safe to venture that Manipravala literature is the product of one of the most romantic periods* in the history of Kerala.

The one curious thing about the literature of this epoch is that not a trace of the life of the ordinary people is discernible in it. The view we gain even of the superior denizens in that feudal society is oblique and approximate. It may well be that a comprehensive view of life embracing all sections of the community and its ideals, its aspirations and questionings, its joys and miseries was not deemed as falling within the pale of poetry. To enchant the senses was all that the poets expected of their muse, and this they achieved with unsurpassing ability. The logical consequence of such an approach to poetry was the adoption of sringara, the erotic, as the main rasa. And indeed, every shade of it has been thoroughly analysed and paraded with an ineffable delight and confidence. The artistry that these poets are capable of is instanced by not only the delineation of the lovers whose beings, naturally enough, are taken up in striving for the fruition of their mutual love, but also of the atmosphere in which they move—an atmosphere charged with every charm that contributes to the heightening of their passions. The one nightmare they dread in their lives is separation, but they seem to be well aware that the bliss that reunion brings transcends even the choicest in heaven. The best of circumstances that Nature and man can provide is there as a backdrop to their longings—the cool moonlit nights of the fragrant spring, gorgeous mansions set amid blooming gardens, all kinds of fineries and every imaginable luxury, attending maids to carry messages and confidantes in whom to repose the secrets of love.

Almost all the extracts given in Lilatilakam are exquisite illustrations of poetry of an emotive character. Notwithstanding the tautology and the monotony that treatment of the same rasa, namely sringara, entails, the reader is drawn almost unawares to partake of the feelings that the poets could evoke and identify himself, not infrequently, with the character whose joys and woes are presented with such convincing sincerity. The music of the verse is as much a force that captivates the reader’s sensibilities as its meaning and, divested of that music, it can at best only suggest the trend of the poet’s
fancy. The following piece—a poet indulges in the memories of an embrace he had had from his beloved—however, might still be of help in forming some idea of the general pattern of old Manipravala poetry:

\begin{center}
Am I deluged by ambrosial seas,
or extended over the full moon’s pale?
Am I fast sinking in moonlit-lakes,
or in attar of roses immersed?
Ah no, an embrace! my dearest one,
beholding me in Kama’s travails,
bequeath on me in pity and love
an embrace so close and ravishing!
\end{center}

We have to conclude that most of the Manipravala works composed round about the time of *Lilatilakam* were devoted to portraying and eulogising the charms and excellences of heroines. The *champu*, another branch of Manipravala literature which derived from the *puranas*, had not then appeared on the literary scene. In the meanwhile the poets must have seen nothing better for the stuff of poetry than their own experiences, centred, as they are, round their inamoratas. At no time in the history of Malayalam literature, except perhaps the present, has poetry been so empirical. The women to whom the poets dedicated their muse were all living persons, either their paramours or at least their acquaintances. Occasionally, it so happened, the praises were composed at the behest of some prince who desired to gain the favours of a celebrated beauty. Despite the tautology that singing the same theme involves, these poems, on the whole, are less artificial than the later-day *champus*. *Unniyachi Charitam*, and *Unnichirutevi Charitam*—works which belong to this age and category—are thus distinguished by a certain measure of genuine feeling. The full text of none of these poems is available, but the fragments so far discovered are sufficient to throw light on their general features. The verse is in quatrains, but it is marked out from the later-day *kavyas* by the interspersion of a certain type of literary prose replete with rolling rhythms. These rhythms, it may be interesting to note, reappear after a lapse of much time, in the Tullal works of the
seventeenth century. The story element is largely fictitious and not infrequently woven round the love that some celestial being—a Gandharva or Indra or Chandra—bore for the human charmers. Yet the settings are realistic and provide occasionally some insight into the history of the times. It is apparent that the implication of celestial ones in affairs in Kerala is a contrivance of the poets to widen their canvas for painting the heroines in various situations and attitudes. Maybe, the Malayali beauties were irresistible even to the gods!

The feelings are genuine and the settings realistic, but the idiom often betrays efforts at ornamentation. It is ridden with too much of fancy and too many imageries and though instances of flights into the highest realms of poetic imagination are not rare, in describing the charms of natural phenomena especially, the bulk of it smacks of similar efforts in the Sanskrit kavyas. The one redeeming feature of these imageries, however, is that they bear the stamp of Kerala, both in respect of objects and the underlying sense of humour. For instance, the canopy that the poet of Cheriyachi Varnanam puts up in the autumnal skies for the coronation of god Kama as the lord of the realms of the heroine’s charms is a pandal after the Kerala tradition:

Behold the pandal, my dear friend,
raised in the blue of the sarat skies
spangled with pearls, the radiant stars,
and the strip of a crescent to sway—
to crown Kama with every glory
lord of the realms of Cheriyachi’s charms.

And for a metaphor to describe the rising moon, the poet would turn to the hand-ball game, a favourite pastime of Cheriyachi and the maidens of medieval Kerala:

Raising her play-ball, the rising moon,
striking with palms, the heaving sea-waves,
her hair, the darkness of the night, swirling,
and stars, her droplets of sweat, budding,
eventide takes on Cheriyachi’s guise
(rapt, as she is, in the hand-ball game).
In portraying the physical charms of women and conjuring up the ecstasies of consummation and the pangs of separation, the heights attained by these poets have seldom been surpassed in Malayalam poetry. And with all its voluptuousness, old Manibravala has still a fascination for the discerning connoisseur.

It would seem as though for these poets life and Nature herself derived their significance from the presence in them of the goddesses of their adoration. If they love the panorama of Nature—the full moon and the bright stars, the fragrant flowers, the tender breeze and the heaving waves—it is just because they find in them intimations of the charms of their beloveds. They would even define her glories, the breeze in the following lines for instance, in terms of their love-life:

Every breeze a breeze can't be:  
But ah, the one that from the country  
blows and o’ver its river swims,  
tender and cool, and dallies about  
the lush coconut palms,  
and caresses my love Rohini—  
her peerless, ravishing form—  
and then so kindly embraces me,  
with ecstasies to thrill me—  
well that, I say, is the real breeze!

Thus Nature and their sweethearts were, to the Manibravala poets, the two facets of life, and while revelling in amorous pursuits they had not forgotten to embellish their effusions with a rare aesthetic glow.

2. Vaisika Tantram, Attaprakaram and Anantapura Varnanam

Besides the aforesaid poems, erotic as they are in their themes, a few fragments of a didactic, theoretical or devotional nature have also been discovered recently. Of these the most important and representative are Vaisika Tantram, some slokas on the art of Koodiyattam, a few stotras and sandesa kavyas. Vaisika Tantram which is believed to have been composed in the eleventh century A.D. is a treatise on the art of
the courtesan. It is a curious theme, no doubt, and what is worse, is composed in the form of exhortations a mother gives her daughter on how to make the best out of a career as a vesya, but it has to be said for its poet that he could raise to the level of literature even passages which could easily have lapsed into exercises in obscenity. Nothing much is known about him, but apparently he was a man of sound common-sense, well-versed with the ways of the world and principles of material success. Occasionally his poetry tends to become didactic and takes on the form of aphorisms:

Presume not so, my dear girl,
that any there are of no use
to thee: for see, even the crow
is needed once to feed upon
the balls of rice we offer
to the shades of departed ones.¹

Youth, my daughter, is too fleeting,
of youthful ones, thou Kama’s dart!—
a flash of moonlight by the rains;
and so the riches now amassed
should serve to help thee ford the sea
that lies ahead—the sea of age.

An important bearing that Vaisika Tantram has on the history of Malayalam is that it reads much like modern poetry despite its antiquity.

When Koodiyattam, the performance of Sanskrit dramas in temple premises by the Chakyar community, grew to be a popular entertainment, works laying down its principles became necessary. The need was soon met by experts and treatises which came to be known subsequently under titles like attaprakaram and kramadipika fixed the pattern for the rendering of the dramas adapted for Koodiyattam. Of those who reformed the art from time to time two names deserve

¹ The reference is to the Hindu ritual of pitrupinda performed by relations or the propitiation, peace and salvation of departed ones. The belief is that if the crow does not partake of the pindam offerings, usually cooked rice rolled into balls, the souls of the pitrus or elders are not pleased with the survivors.
special mention—Kulasekhara Varma and Bhaskara Ravi Varma, both royal patrons of the art. The reformation was biased in favour of incorporating more and more of the language of the common people, and this was realised through the vidushaka, the jester, who was not only permitted to speak in Malayalam but also crack jokes, usually parodies of the slokas and declamations of the hero, to entertain the audience. An indirect outcome of this latitude allowed to the vidushaka was the propagation of the Manipravala style; for the audience, the majority of which could not have understood Sanskrit, was given a clue to its vocabulary, thanks to the parodical and hermeneutic role played by its favourite. The attaprakaras and kramadipikas written at this period—the authorship of most of them is attributed to Tola, a court poet of Kulasekhara Varma—are largely in prose interspersed with poetry and contain a generous amalgam of the vocabulary of the ordinary folk. That this vocabulary is much the same today as it was at least eight centuries ago is evident from the treatise on Koodiyattam and the many parodies of Tola used by vidushakas.

The conversational idiom of the common people of those days, as exemplified by the following colloquy among women, was also a simple and direct one:

‘Kali, take the bathing herbs.’
‘Karur has no breast-cloth.’
‘Tell me, where’s the key, Nanga?’
‘Well now, have you got ready Chitta, the lacquer juice?’
‘Listen, alas! my bangle is lost, My only bangle, call the girl!’
‘Pappi, is this the loin-cloth?’
‘Kaduka, sweep and scrub the hall.’

The attaprakaras were written in Manipravala, but their tone was set by Malayalam. The proportion of Sanskrit words is very small and the Tamil usages negligible. The original of the following extract taken from an attaprakaram hardly gives the impression that it is a product of the Manipravala epoch in Malayalam poetry:
Hair that compares with dark blue clouds
pregnant with rain, and wreathes of flowers
whereon hum madly beetle throngs,
and forehead gleaming crescent-like,
and lips where glows the reigning red—
redder than flame-of-forest blooms—
and smiles surpassing the jasmine’s white
in beauty, and the lotus-face
which turns to naught the full moon’s pride
and arms, like garlands, long and round,
and breasts so glorious, which echo
the elephant’s head in size and shape.

Anantapura Varnanam, a Manipravala work of the thirteenth
or fourteenth century, is a devotional poem with pundarikaksha puja or worship of Vishnu (the god with the lotus-eyes) as He
is enshrined in Anantapuram, that is Trivandrum, for its
objective. The language conforms to the dictates of Lilatilakam: Malayalam provides the major part of the vocabulary. The
descriptions are very realistic—an unusual feature in old
poetry—and, instead of creating a city inhabited by celestial
beings, it portrays one where common people live their day-
to-day lives:

Sailor-merchants are walking the streets
with goods that came by the sailing crafts.
“Barter the paddy for rice,” say some,
“betel for mangoes, not coconuts...”

And then there are the fisher-women
swaying their bodies, heads and breasts
throwing forward and backward, and lost
to everything save the selling of fish,
talking and wrangling all the while;
and yonder lies the Kantalur fair
wealthy and bright, and in front of me
Rise three temples and Brahmin homes.

Stotras or devotional hymns constitute another significant
branch of ancient Manipravala literature. Lilatilakam contains
many muktakas, devotional quatrains, taken either from works of an exclusively devotional character or from others which contain incidental ones. That the poets were not satisfied with just a string of the attributes of their gods or tributes to them, but embellished their compositions with fine poetic imageries, is a universal feature of the Manipravala stotras.

May the god of the cowherd tribe,
who, to the rhythms of anklets sweet,
dances on top of Kaliya’s hood,
rapt in the nectareal melodies
of celestial nymphs who shed blossoms,
be my preserver for evermore!

3. Sandesa Kavyas

Sandesa Kavyas or messenger-poems have always held a pre-eminent position in the literature of Kerala. The number of poems produced in Kerala, in Sanskrit and in Malayalam, is so high that one is tempted to think that no other region has produced as many. The Suka Sandesa which, barring the Megha Sandesa, is perhaps the most outstanding messenger-poem in Sanskrit, was composed by a Keralite in the tenth century A.D. Some of the other important kavyas in Sanskrit—Chataka Sandesa, Bhramara Sandesa and Kokila Sandesa to name a few—were also composed in Kerala. The main reason for the popularity of this type of poetry among the Keralites would seem to be that their poets whose chief equipment was a fertile romantic imagination found in the sandesa kavyas the aptest poetic form to indulge their exuberant lyrical fancies. Thus the first phase in Manipravala literature was the golden age of the sandesa kavya, for it permitted free play for the romantic imagination as also for the erotic which is the dominant rasa. A good many sandesa kavyas are mentioned in Lilatilakam, but together with the mass of the old Manipravala poetry most of them are irretrievably lost to literature. And of the extant specimens, Unnumili Sandesam, the most important one, deserves special consideration.

Unnumili Sandesam is, by all standards, a first rate kavya, not only among works of its kind, but in all Manipravala litera-
ture. Nothing much is known about its author, nor when he flourished, but judged in the light of internal evidence, it is a fourteenth century composition in which the poet himself is the hero and the heroine, a young woman related, on the paternal side, to the Vadakkumkur royal family of Central Kerala. The separation of the lovers takes place one night in the hey-day of their connubial life: a jealous yakshi (fairy), enamoured of the hero’s handsomeness, carries him off from their home in Kaduthuruthy where he lay in bed with his beloved, and flies southward to some mysterious destination. But when dawn breaks over Trivandrum, and the hero awakening from his slumber and realising his plight chants the Narasimha mantra, the lustful nymph, compelled by its power, drops him over the city and flies for dear life. The hero finds his way to the temple of the city and there, meeting his friend and classmate, Aditya Varma of the royal house of Quilon, entrusts with him his message of love.

It cannot, of course, be claimed for Unnunili Sandesam that it commands the breadth of vision or lyrical heights attained by the Megha Sandesa, but it has to be said that it belongs to the best of its category. The romantic temperament, so natural to Manipravala poets, reaches unprecedented pinnacles in this work, but its more salient feature is the realism that permeates through all its descriptions. The hero in the episode is not specified by name, but considering his reactions to the circumstances of the poem, the ease and confidence with which he identifies himself with them and the intimacy he could command with the prince, his messenger, there is reason to suppose that he was a Kshatriya youth of the royal house of Vadakkumkur. There is no apparent reason why the poet should suppress his identity, it might be because the poem does not provide him with an appropriate situation to disclose it.

Nothing that is relevant and beautiful in all that one can come across on the messenger’s route from Trivandrum to Kaduthuruthy escapes the poet’s fancy. The delight and reverence he feels in the presence of the manifestations of Nature impart to his descriptions a glow and sweetness seldom met with in similar poetry. Indeed there is no poem in the literary lore of medieval Kerala which reflects so much the scenic
splendour of the land and the joy of life that characterised
the age. Groves clothed in vernal glories, with coconut palms,
jack and mango trees and plantain herbs, footpaths lined
with ketakas in full bloom and avenues canopied with infinite
stretches of green foliage, the local beauties who flit like
streaks of lighting across one’s vision, homesteads wreathed in
jasmines, chrysanthemums and champakas, patrician maidens
singing in garden bowers and their lovers lurking beside them,
the music of the koels, the lisplings of parrots and trumpet-
crow of cocks, the rolling sound of the western sea, the fleets
of fishing boats plying over the blue lagoons, teeming rice-
fields and rivers and brooks meandering amidst them—the
whole panorama of Kerala in all its multitudinous charms un-
folds before our eyes as we accompany the messenger of
Unnunili Sandesam.

Any poet could, of course, make a long list of the beautiful
things in Nature (and that is what most often we get in san-
desa kavyas) but a genius alone could transform, as with the
touch of a magic wand, the raw realism of the whole into
phenomena of an ethereal make. The poet of Unnunili San-
desam is such a genius, and the ability he evinces in blending
realism with the highest flights of poetic fancy is indeed
remarkable. And every quatrain is, with its rich shades of
emotions and ideas evoked by choice words, an illustration of
the uttama patterns in Manipravala. One gets a feel of Kerala’s
atmosphere from the very beginning and, as the kavya pro-
gresses with portrayals of the important places on the messen-
ger’s route, it gains in the sweep and depth of its imageries.
The slokas have a jewel-like quality and are embellished with
echoes, alliterations and onomatopoeic effects. Two of them
are reproduced below—the first, a description of the dawn
with which the kavya opens and the second, one of the count-
less vignettes scattered throughout the work:

Like the trumpet of Kama, blown
to mark his retreat, crowed the cock;
the sun and moon were poised like
the cymbals of the maid of dawn;
the starry hosts were strewn about
and turning pale, like flakes of maize;
and beetles rose like smoke from flames from the hollows of lotus blooms.

May He, the sportive cowherd boy effulgent in the cloud of dust kicked up by hoofs of tramping cows and hair arrayed in peacock plumes, whose form is draped in golden robes and fingers hold the goad and flute and complexion blue, be enshrined for ever in our inmost hearts!

The descriptions of Kaduthuruthy and the home of Unnu-nili, the heroine, in the second part of the kavya, are remarkable as much for their realism as for the romantic outpourings the poet is capable of. The scene brims with the longings of love and the pangs of separation, and the miraculous loveliness which pervades the whole soars into a crescendo worthy of the finale of such a composition.
CHAPTER IV

THE OLD SONGS

1. The Works of the Kannassans

It became inevitable with the progress of time that the pattu, with its canons dictated by Tamil poetry, should register some significant change in the face of the growing importance of Sanskrit literature. The rule that its vocabulary should be such as could be set in the alphabet of Tamil was the first to be violated, and its systematic Sanskritisation brought it more or less in line with Manipravala, the dominant literary medium of the day. But the composers of the pattu would not go all the way with the Manipravala poets; they clung to the puranic lore of the country for their themes, while their compatriots wallowed in the mire of their romantic imaginings. It is likely that they thought of themes bearing on contemporary society, especially those pertaining to the erotic life of man, as too imbecile for the high purpose of poetry; and in their search for something loftier and more substantial, which the times too warranted, they had recourse to the puranas which, naturally enough, furnished them with a high pinnacle from where to observe the world of men and things. There cannot be a nobler function for poetry, so they thought, than unfolding to the Malayalis the vast panorama of the puranas and the itihasas of India which epitomise all the higher strivings of man. And the result of such a conviction on their part was the enrichment of Malayalam with some of the noblest works on the themes of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata.

Of those composers of the pattu who took to the Manipravala style and left imperishable names in the annals of Malayalam literature, the Kannassans, known also as the Niranam poets, deserve specific reference. Three poets are known by this appellation—Madhava Panicker, Sankara Panicker and Rama Panicker—and in the light of evidence gathered from the works of the last named poet, we have to suppose that the first two were brothers and the third, their nephew. At any
rate, all of them belonged to the same family and took the name of Kannassan from a progenitor called Karunesan who, according to Rama Panicker, a grandson, ‘was a mahatma, a great master and king of poets’.

The Kannassans flourished between the second half of the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth and lived partly at Niranam, a village in the Tiruvalla taluk of the Travancore area (whence the appellation Niranam poets), and partly at Malayinkizh in the south near Trivandrum. It is presumed that the reluctance of the Kannassans to have a complete break with Tamil, with the pattern set by Rama-charitam, despite their acceptance of the Manipravala style, was due to their association with the south where Tamil was still a force.

The more important among the works of the Kannassans are Bhagavad Gita of Madhava Panicker, Bharatamala of Sankara Panicker and Ramayanam, Bharatam, Bhagavatam and Sivaratri Mahatmyam of Rama Panicker. Madhava Panicker’s translation of the Gita would seem to be the earliest in any Indian language. He had a perfect understanding of Sri Sankara’s bhashya (commentary) on the Gita and could delve into the very fundamentals of the work so much so he could shorten the original with its 700 slokas into 328 couplets without omitting any important idea.

Sankara Panicker’s Bharatamala is more a condensed version in Malayalam of the Mahabharata—and a highly imaginative one at that—than a translation of the original. His work seems to be the first major work in Malayalam based on the theme of this purana.

Pre-eminent among the Kannassans is Rama Panicker, the last of them, whose works excel those of the other two, not only in quantity but in their intrinsic literary merit as well. His version of the Ramayana is undoubtedly one of the best works in Malayalam and, but for its language which has since become archaic and its metrical affinities with Tamil, it could easily have commanded a popularity comparable to the later work of Ezhuthachan. The prosodic and syntactic features of Malayalam took an altogether different turn immediately after the days of the Kannassans and hence their works would seem to us much older than those of Ezhuthachan who com-
posed in the next century. Yet, with all their archaicisms, the
works of Rama Panicker, especially his Ramayana, cannot fail
to fascinate the modern reader thanks to the spontaneity of
its verse which is couched in a choice vocabulary, the loftiness
of his thoughts and the charm and appropriateness of his
imageryes. There is a perennial freshness about his poetry,
and that provides a more than adequate compensation for
the difficulties inherent in unfamiliar metres and Tamil usages.
The imprint of his genius is best borne by contexts wherein
he deviates from the original of Valmiki, and such contexts
are many. It takes Valmiki two or three slokas to describe
the reactions which came over the audience when Rama
broke the bow at Sita’s swayamvara, but Panicker would not
only abbreviate the whole episode in just four lines, but also
embellish it with an apt simile:

At that a good many kings trembled
while Janaki danced with joy,
even as the peacock would while listening
to thunder, which the serpents frighten.

It may be mentioned in this context that the famous lines in
which Ezhuthachan describes the event are but an adaptation
of Kannassan:

Listening to the thunder of the bow breaking
the kings were seen like serpents shivering
while peacock-like rejoiced Maithili.

Whatever be the rasa—love or compassion or heroism—
Rama Panicker knew how best to evoke it with effortless ease.
The following is from a description of Ravana’s harem, of
how it looked after its inmates had a surfeit of amatory
pleasures in the company of their lord:

Drunk with madhu in the company
of the ten-faced one, and indulging
proudly with him in amorous sports,
and then tired and heavy with sleep,
in diverse poses the women lay,
with beetle-black tresses flowing free
and pastes and garlands falling away,
more beautiful than ever before.

And here is how the woe-begone image of Sita reacted on
Hanuman as he saw her in the *asokavana* of Lanka:

Her hair by then had matted become,
and grieving sore on the earth she lay:
I saw her face, bedimmed with tears
flowing incessantly from her eyes
and mingling with dust: as when the sun
is seen through curtains of falling dew—
and ah, her sorrow!—and also like
a lamp oppressed by smoke, flickering.

*Bhagavatam*, *Bharatam* and *Sivaratri Mahatmyam* are also works
of considerable literary merit, but not perhaps so outstanding
as his Ramayana. It has to be said in conclusion that of all
those who brought the literature of Kerala into closer contact
with the literature and thought patterns of Sanskrit, the
Kannassans, Rama Panicker especially, take the foremost
place.

There were many imitators of the Kannassans, but only
a few of their works could live to this day. It is likely that
the poetry of Ezhuthachan contributed to the discarding of
the Kannassan style, and when, with him, the language and
literature of Malayalam moved in new directions, they had
to brave the tide of oblivion. Yet the contributions of the
Kannassans could, as indeed they ever will, survive the vicissi-
ditudes of time and taste thanks to their intrinsic literary
worth and be ranked with the best productions of the Mani-
pravala age.

2. *Folk Songs*

There is a sizable body of folk literature in Malayalam.
Its authors, as elsewhere, were not men of any erudition, but
simple souls who expressed their natural thoughts in spon-
taneous verse. Its output began long before the coming of Manipravala, and though a few of the words and techniques of the new medium found their way into it when Sanskrit gained wide currency, and the puranic lore too, the basic features of its language and literature remained unaltered and rooted to the soil of Kerala. The bulk of the old songs are no longer extant, but the few that have survived the centuries tell us much about the peasant life and the customs and manners of the different communities of olden times. Incidentally, folk literature was seldom a written literature, but transmitted orally from generation to generation.

The collection so far made comprises the following categories: *Krishi Pattus* (peasant songs), *Nhantu Pattus* (planting-the-seedling songs), *Pullwan Pattus* (songs of the Pulluvas, folk priests of the serpent-gods), *Kuravar Pattus* (songs of the Kuravas, the indigenous gypsies), *Kalyana Pattus* (marriage songs), *Ona Pattus* (songs on Onam, the regional festival), *Panan Pattus* (songs of the Panas, the folk exorcists), *Tumbi Pattus* (dragon-fly songs), etc.

The songs of the *cherumas* and *cherumis*—the youths and maidens of castes like the Pulaya and Pariah (deemed the lowest in the social order of Kerala) who toil in the paddy fields—brim with a buoyancy seldom paralleled by other categories of songs. These songs of immemorial origin preserve all the traits of an old archaic style and instance adequately the naïveté which characterises folk songs in general. Here is a *Nhantu Pattu*—a song sung during the planting of paddy seedlings:

The rains have rained so heavily,
the small fields drenched so thoroughly,
the fields, ploughed up and ready, lie,
and seedlings tied and broadcast fly.
Omala, Chennila, Mala,
Kannamma, Kali, Karumbi
Chatha, Chadaya and such like
cher' mi farm-maids have all come;
row beyond row they fall in line,
and count up and share the seedling tufts,
and tuck up their clothes and bend down
to wind up, in concert, the planting;
Kannamma just then calls out
to Omala: “Hark, my dear friends,
all of you here a song must sing
er the planting today is done.”
And there then was seen the girl Tatta
crying perched on the harrow frame
which seeing, Omala said:
“Tell me Tatta, what brought you here?”

There is a song called the *Payyannur Pattu* which, according
to Dr. Gundert, the eminent linguist and lexicographer, is one
of the oldest in Malayalam, but it so happens that its full
text is not extant.

Tribal people like the Velas, the Panas and the Kuravas
have been an integral part of the social fabric of Kerala.
Their services are deemed essential for the security and well-
being of people living in the plains. Thus the Velas by their
exorcistic prowess guard them from the evil spirits let loose
by enemies, and the Pulluvas, by propitiatory rites, from the
‘curse’ of serpents. The chants which these classes use for
the rituals are based largely on mythologies, and in regard
to linguistic features are primitive, but they are lively and
reflect the customs and manners of ancient Kerala. Incidentally,
the syntactic and metrical patterns of these chants are helpful
in tracing the evolution of the language of Kerala.

There is often a streak of poetry in the chants which the
Velas use for their adjurations. The bedevilled woman is
seated before the exorcist, and waving over her head a twig
of the *elangji* tree he intones lines like the following:

By Hari, be it
the haunting spirit’s end—eh
by Hari,
the haunting spirit’s end!

With waving the twig
o’er the flow’r-decked hair
be thou gone,
thou haunting spirit!
With waving the twig
o’ver the golden forehead
be thou gone,
thou haunting spirit!

With waving the twig
o’er the mirror-like cheeks
be thou gone,
thou haunting spirit!

With waving the twig
o’er the lake-like eyes,
be thou gone,
thou haunting spirit!

Panan Pattu, known also as the Tuyilunarthu Pattu, is a song for the ‘waking up’ of the family, and is sung even today in villages by Panan couples in the small hours of the morning in the month of Karkidakam (July-August), the last of the Malayalam calendar. The theme of the song is the conferment of a blessing by Lord Siva on a devotee, Tiruvarankathu Pananar by name, and listening to the song during the tuyilunarthu, the ritualistic ‘waking up’, is deemed to bring prosperity to the household. Of late the practice has lost much of its old popularity, yet the sight of men and women gathering round burning oil lamps to listen to the beneficent tale from the lips of the Panan couple and to make them presents of rice and coconuts is not altogether rare.

Pulluvan Pattu is associated with ophiolatry, an ancient cult of Kerala. Its burden is the origin, evolution and propagation of the serpent-race, and its recitation is deemed not only to propitiate the serpent-gods, but also to safeguard the family in the presence of which it is done from the ‘curse’ of those mysterious beings. A pandal, usually a thatched roof, is thrown up in front of the house, and life-like figures of five- or seven-hooded serpents are artistically drawn with multi-coloured powders; after this preparatory ritual, which is called kalanezhuthu or ‘painting the yard’, a Pulluva couple squat before the figures and intone their songs to the accom-
paniment of the *kudam*, a mud-pot sounded with a stick, and the *pulluvan vina*, a primitive violin.

The story of the *Kuravar Pattu*, known also as the *Nizhalkkuthu Pattu* is woven round the Mahabharata war. Instigated by Duryodhana, a Kurava casts a spell on the Pandavas with the black magic called the *nizhalkkuthu*—the term means 'stabbing the shadow'—and brings over them a death-like state. But the Kurathi, his wife, would not stand his treachery and, chanting the antidotal *mantra*, revives her favourites. The story of the Mahabharata, as retold by the Kuravas, has many deviations from the original: according to them, Kunti is the queen of Kurunad, and Gandhari of Karunad; the youngest of the Pandavas is Kunchu Piman or 'Little Bhima' and the Kauravas number only ninety-nine. Maybe, some rustic bard composed for them this version of the purana either at a time when the original was just becoming popular in Kerala, or earlier still—which is more probable viewed in the light of the primitive idiom of the song—when it was known here as a legend.

The aforesaid *pattus* are evidently indicative of a social system in which, at a comparatively prosperous period in Kerala's history, the upper classes were anxious to preserve their *status quo*, and willing, at the same time, to contribute to the sustenance of the humbler classes.

There is the unmistakable stamp of Dravidian culture, of Kerala's especially, in all these songs and rituals. It is true that the miscegenation consequent on the advent of the Aryans had exerted a profound influence on them. Thus the cult of Bhadrakali, which is essentially Dravidian in origin, was transformed in the course of centuries into the Aryan cult of Kali; the Pulluvas took over Vasuki from the Mahabharata, the Panans feature Siva and Parvati, and the Kuravas refer to the Kauravas and the Pandavas.' Yet with all these borrowings, the songs breathe a primordial Dravidian spirit, and the related rituals hardly instance any exotic influence. The concept of the Mother in Kali-worship, the characters Daruka and Vetala who figure in the same, the rituals of the aforesaid sacerdotal tribes, their songs and the primitive language and the quaint idiom in which they are couched—all these bear the stamp of a basically Dravidian culture.

During those early centuries, when the songs and related
rituals came into being, the process of the miscegenation of
the indigenous and exotic cultures was only just beginning,
but with the rapid permeation of Sanskrit, its pace was consider-
ably accelerated and, as a logical consequence, \textit{vedic} rites
found their way into the religious observances in Kerala.
It cannot therefore be said that there is no trace of the Aryan
practices in the rituals as they obtain today, nor that the
vocabulary of Sanskrit is completely eschewed in related
literature. The important point to note, however, is that,
fundamentally, they are the products of the imagination of
the children of the soil. And what fascinates us most today
in this folk literature is not so much its inherent literary
worth as its spontaneity and the light it throws on the social
customs and the social structure of the ancient community.
It indicates, moreover, the linguistic features of Malayalam
as spoken by the common people, as unaffected by Tamil or
Sanskrit. The spirit and personality of Malayalam in its pristine
purity are best understood in the light of its folk songs.

There is a considerable body of folk literature which be-
longs to later periods and reflects the changes which came
over the culture and the customs and manners of the people
as time went by. Its merit as literature is not much, but the
influence it could exert on the evolution of subsequent litera-
ture is by no means inconsiderable. It preserved the native
purity of Malayalam at a time when Manipravala established
the supremacy of Sanskrit as the all-important medium of
scholastic and literary exercises and when, subsequently, the
people became conscious of the artificiality engrained in such a
medium, it provided the poets of the land with patterns which
could become popular with the common people, contributing
thus to the renaissance of the native tongue.

Side by side with the chants associated with the worship
of Kali, the \textit{Pulluwan Pattu}, the \textit{Velan Pattu}, the \textit{Panan Pattu}
and the \textit{Krishi Pattu}, there flourished a body of songs exclusively
devised for the entertainment of the community. A good many
of them are evidential of the fusion of cultures which followed
the arrival of the Nambutiris, the best example being their
Sanghakkali which is a complex art-form comprising votive
recitations, much horse-play and physical feats. The invocation
of Bhadrakali and Sasta, the presiding deities of Kerala, at
the beginning of the performance, goes to show that the Sanghakkali songs were composed after the Nambutiris became thoroughly domiciled to the land of their adoption. The rites are many: the purvangam (prologue), the nalu padam (four-pect), the pana (singing), vattamirippu kali (playing in a circle), the Kaimalute varasu (Kaimal’s arrival), the ayudhameduppu (taking the weapons), and so on. The devotional and humorous songs which punctuate a Sanghakkali performance are deemed to denote the oldest style of singing in Kerala. The Purakkali Pattu of the Teeyes of North Kerala illustrates another ancient style of singing. The list would indeed be a long one if the songs associated with marriages, the spring festival of women called the Tiruvatira, the regional festival of Onam, the boat races, the kolkali or the ‘stick dances’, etc. are also to be enumerated. The tide of modern civilisation has in its wake swept away many of them, but what remains by itself constitutes a rich variety.

3. Vadakkan Pattu

No account of the ancient folk literature of Kerala would be complete without reference to the immense body of ballads extant today. Noted for their thematic excellence and metrical perfection, these ballads extol the heroic deeds of men and women who lived at a time when personal valour and the mastery of arms decided all the worthwhile endeavours of life. The most important compositions which fall under this category are of the saga called the Vadakkan Pattu (the ‘Northern Ballad’) a collection of medieval origin. The doings of the heroes and heroines—men like Aromal Chevakar, Tacholi Otenan, Thacholi Chantu and Palattu Koman, and women like Unniyarcha and Matu—would seem to us superhuman, at any rate exaggerated, but they are not without foundation in the social history of Kerala. No social criticism, apparently, is meant by the anonymous bards but some kind of a backcloth had to be supplied by them for the actions of their heroes and heroines, and from this we could decipher the set-up of that feudal society—the customs and manners of the people, their systems of marriage and inheritance, the features of their domestic ceremonies and the temple festivals,
their beliefs, superstitions, education and physical training, status of women, the pastimes of the community and the general pattern of social behaviour. It cannot be said that the ballads are of any high literary standard, but their naïveté is indeed charming.

And how language lent itself to the general style of conversation in medieval Kerala is also illustrated by the Vadakkan Pattu. The idiom is extremely simple and unadorned, but the effect is something that cannot normally be achieved with high-flown expressions or literary artifices. In fact it would seem that the simplicity of the narration enhances the grandeur of the heroic deeds extolled in the narratives. The descriptions are in a realistic vein, but the sense of power and magnificence which they evoke is such as can hardly be attained with the use of imageries. This forthrightness of idiom is a universal feature of the ballads and lines like the following illustrate, besides, the prowess in physical feats which the heroes are said to have possessed so abundantly:

And from there Aromar rises
and pulls the stool to position:
He spreads on it the battle-skirt
and puts on it a metal plate,
fills the plate with polished rice
and lays on it a coconut,
and then upon the coconut
a red ripe arecanut,
and an egg upon the nut;
and then upon the egg
he sticks a pin and upon the pin’s point
the coil-blade, and then he mounts
atop the point of the blade
and dances fast the seven dances.

The invincible Unniyarcha decks herself in the following fashion while setting out to see the koothu or festival at Allimalarkavu, the ‘grove of blossoms’:

Goes to the sandalwood fraying stone,
rubs the sandalwood, wets the paste
and streaks the forehead with the paste
and puts on it the tilak mark
seeing herself in the looking glass
and, within it, the saffron mark;
knots the beautiful flowing hair
and paints her eyes with collyrium
and dots her brow with vermilion
and smears her body with sandal and musk

And with a dagger girdles her waist.

The last line needs a word of explanation, for a dagger can hardly be a trinket which women cherish. But in medieval Kerala there was nothing unusual about women attending the kalaris—the military gymnasium—where fencing and other methods of offence and defence were taught and gaining proficiency in the use of arms to enable them guard themselves. Hence there is nothing surprising about Unniyarcha deck ing herself with a dagger too.

Though the dominant rasa of the Vadakkan Pattu is the heroic, it is by no means the only one. There are passages instinct with such sentiments as karuna (compassion), and srinagara (erotic) also. The deaths of Aromal Chevakar and Otenan are, for instance, portrayed with such poignancy as could draw tears from the hardest of hearts; and the love of the sensuous is not altogether avoided while singing of the loves of the heroes and heroines. That the bards were richly endowed with aesthetic sensibilities can be instanced by any number of passages, only they did not indulge in far-fetched similies or metaphors as their contemporaries, the Mani-pravala poets, did. The imageries which the composers of the Vadakkan Pattu chose are such as would occur effortlessly to the artless imagination of rustic bards; and that they are none the less poetic can be vouched for by the following soliloquy of Kandan Menon who loses his head over Matu, the valiant wife of Thacholi Chantu:

Are there such women in this world?
Has she perchance fallen from heaven?
Or perchance from the earth sprung up?
What can I say of her complexion!—
like to the cassia in bloom on the hill,
the sapling of mango shooting its leaves,
or like the hue of the tender palm leaf,
or of the Wayanadan turmeric flake?

The earliest compositions in this saga do not date back beyond the sixteenth century, but their idiom and vocabulary would seem to be much older. They seem to mark the last phase of the medieval epoch in the evolution of the Malayalam language. It is plausible that a good many ballads on identical themes composed in the earlier centuries are now lost to us, but what the linguistic and literary features of those songs were can be inferred from the collection now available. At a time when literature of a scholastic type was produced under the tutelage of either Chentamil or Sanskrit, and the language itself was undergoing a series of transformations under the impact of Sanskrit, the Vadakkan Pattu kept away from the aforesaid influences, maintaining consequently the innate strength and shades of the spoken tongue of the ordinary folk. That it could not keep away for long from the main current is altogether a different question.

4. Krishna Gatha

At the time when ballads like Vadakkan Pattu provided for the common people their sole literary nourishment, themes and ideas from Sanskrit too were infiltrating into their midst. The logical outcome of this infiltration was a change in literary propensities and the replacement of the unlettered bards by more learned ones who, while adapting the same musical folk metres, could compose on the popular exotic themes. It was a beneficent change, for it enriched Malayalam with an excellent body of noble literature, notably Krishna Gatha or Krishna Pattu composed towards the middle of the fifteenth century.

It is apparent that the metrical forms of Krishna Gatha are adapted from folk literature. Its affinity with Vadakkan Pattu is significant. Presumably most of the ballads extant now might have been composed after Krishna Gatha but, as was
pointed out earlier, they marked the culmination of the literary tradition of a much earlier origin.

Cherusseri Nambutiri, poet of *Krishna Gatha*, lived at a time when Manipravala was the prevailing literary genre. But he would not fall in line with the Manipravala poets in regard to themes nor would he borrow the diction of Sanskrit, save very sparingly. The theme of his *magnum opus*—the story of Krishna as told in the Bhagavata—and its inescapable association with the thought-patterns of the Aryans would normally necessitate the adoption of the Manipravala medium, but it would seem as though he was deliberate in linking the idiom of his poetry as intimately with the spoken tongue of Kerala as possible. Thus *Krishna Gatha* was in a sense a challenge to the *champus* of the later Manipravala phase which not only borrowed the vocabulary of Sanskrit unreservedly but even its inflexions. Cherusseri was erudite in Sanskrit, was well versed in the puranas and, being a Nambutiri, was bred in the best traditions of Aryan culture. Yet, first and foremost, he was a Malayali, and wrote his *kavya* for the edification of the Malayalis. Indeed he was the first poet anterior to Ezhuthachan to handle the puranas with a vision and individuality all his own, and the pioneer to strike the first notes of modernism in Malayalam poetry.

The poetry of *Krishna Gatha* is simplicity itself. Not a trace of ambiguity is discernible anywhere, so clear and direct is Cherusseri’s muse. The plenitude of the figures of speech is another feature of the work, but in sharp contrast to a good many *kavyas* in Malayalam wherein the figures are plagiarised versions of identical ones in Sanskrit or are used, not without much artificiality for their own sake, the *upamas* and *utprekshas* of Cherusseri are characterised by a natural elegance which gives one the impression that they spring up spontaneously. They coalesce with the narrative so smoothly and contribute to defining and clarifying the thought-processes of the poet so powerfully that the emotive and aesthetic qualities of the poem are very much enhanced, and no diversion to the labyrinthine channels often created by strained fancies in search of images is involved.

The artistry of the pen-pictures drawn by him, so abundant and yet so various, is indeed inimitable. His poetry is a true
index of his personality: his disarming sincerity, his unreserved identification with the situations he depicts and the logical clarity with which he bodies them forth. For instance, when he describes the pranks of children at Ambadi he does not keep aloof as a detached observer would, so that he can compose his picture from the correct perspective, but romps with them—for such is the impression his descriptions give—participating, perhaps, in their frolics with child-like joy:

Straight would they run out when the rains descend
to stand beneath the eaves of the roof
and take the torrent full on them;
and when some one would approach nigh
to pull them away by the hand, would shout
‘ayyo!’ and raise a hue and cry;
and when they eat ripe plantain fruits
would put them eke to the mouths of toys—
toys, so wondrous, by sculptors bestowed;
and then would each give his mother a toy
and plead with her: “Please suckle it.”
And when they drop on the laps of sleep
would lay beside them their toys too;
and when they see their reflections
on the bright begemmed floors,
would smile bewitching smiles and run
to clasp them—their own reflections!

In portraying episodes like Akrura’s arrival at Ambadi and the Rasa Krida, it would appear as though the poet had actually seen those sights and had participated in those situations, so vivid and convincing are his delineations.

But all this ingenuity in presenting lively pictures of scenes and situations would hardly have mattered much had it not been sweetened with his abounding humanity. Kamsa is done away with and Krishna goes straight to the prison to release Nandagopa. Embracing his foster-father he exclaims:

Upon the feet of Achyuta,
I know no father other than thee;
nor do I think of a different one
for a mother who gave me birth and life;
thou art the one who nurtured me
protecting me from fire and flood;
and so, even if I forget myself,
ever indeed can I forget thee

And kindly then request my mother
to hold me in her remembrance.

In turn, the foster-parents too bear for Krishna an affection equally deep. Krishna, grown old, meets the aged Nandagopa and Yasoda at Bhargava Tirtha, and the meeting provides Cherusseri scope for the expression of some delectable heart-warming pleasantries. Yasoda embracing Krishna enquires:

There is no wound, I trow,
in thy tender flower-like frame
caused by the cord I bound thee with
and tightened for thy naughtiness.

And Nandagopa adds, his words heavy with emotion:

The dreams I've dreamed so ceaselessly
are truths today, for so I say,
for I could embrace my darling child
as I've done in the days bygone.
Would you now, Kanna, like to play
the mahout-and-elephant, clambering
on to my back, or on to my neck
to raise thine arms for the distant moon,
or run up to me and seat thyself
upon my lap and pull my beard?

It often happens that when a poet draws upon the store of his experiences for material for his poesy, the circumstances of his life would also get into it, perhaps inadvertently. In the case of Cherusseri, although the subject matter of his poetry is puranic, the background of his descriptions is Kerala complete; it would seem as though the ritus, the seasons, of
Kerala prevailed at Ambadi too. The descriptions of the rains, the spring, the summer and the winter are inextricably lovely, but hardly can one notice any difference between those of Kerala and of Krishna Gatha.

The Nambutiris, as a class, are noted for their wit and humour, and Cherusseri is no exception. All the situations which the theme would lend for a little fun are exploited to the best advantage, and indeed there is a subtle current of humour throughout the work. Disguised as a sanyasin, Arjuna gains the presence of his beloved, Subhadra, and accepts from her hands his bhiksha, food. But oblivious of what she is doing, infatuated with love for her hero, Subhadra serves him the skin of the plantain fruit instead of the fruit itself, and equally oblivious of what he is doing, being overwhelmed with the presence of his beloved, Arjuna consumes the whole lot as if it were some ambrosial fare! Cherusseri's humour gives one the impression of a delicate gauze clothing the entire body of the poem, situations which call for a more solemn treatment not exempted, gathering occasionally into folds of gentle satire.

Viewed as a whole Krishna Gatha is perhaps the first, and undoubtedly one of the foremost, works in Malayalam which sprang from the poet's direct intuitive experience. How profound its influence has been over the whole course of subsequent poetry would be made clear when, later in the book, we take up modern poetry for our consideration.
CHAPTER V

MANIPRAVALA—THE LATER PHASE

1. The Champus: Punam and Mazhamangalam

The canons laid down by Lilatilakam were not sacrosanct to the later-day poets; its injunction that the vocabulary of Manipravala should be weighted in favour of Malayalam was particularly objectionable to them. It was the ever-increasing fascination which Sanskrit and its literature held for the poets and scholars of Kerala that opened the floodgates of the medium in use to a higher influx of the Sanskritic vocabulary. And when the poets chose to retell for their compatriots the tales of the puranas and the itih الأس instead of confining themselves to more topical ones like those of Unniyachi Charitam and Unniyadi Charitam the process of saturating Malayalam with the exotic vocabulary became complete. To begin with, they translated, adapted and imitated the masterpieces in Sanskrit and, when they became sure of their ground, recast them freely in the mould of their own genius. The literature thus produced under the shadow of Sanskrit constitutes a new category; and in this latter phase of Manipravala the most important works are the Champu Prabandhas.

Although in themes and treatment the champus of Manipravala bear a close resemblance to those of Sanskrit, they bear, in their poetry, the distinctive imprint of Kerala. The authors of the champus could not ignore the demands of popular taste, nor would they translate or imitate the originals slavishly. What they did was the reconstruction of the original tales against the background, and in keeping with the literary traditions, of Kerala. Thus the style of the narration approximates to anything else narrated for a Kerala audience, the imageries are drawn from Kerala, and the undertone of humour also is of the variety familiar to Keralites. There is, besides, a generous proportion of the indigenous vocabulary in them to assist in the comprehension of the whole. The one reason why Sanskrit was used so profusely was to enhance
the diction of the prose and verse of the champus, and not for its own sake, nor because Malayalam was less expressive. It is evident, at any rate, that champus in Manipravala were intelligible to the common reader while those of Sanskrit were hardly so. The prose interspersed throughout these works evinces two distinct features; it has a metrical pattern and it is embellished with as many, if not more, of imageries as the verse itself.

The champus constitute an immense body of Manipravala literature. Indeed the age of the champus was the golden age of Manipravala. Of the puranas and itihasas from which the composers drew their material, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the most important. It would not be easy to draw up an exhaustive list of the champus in Malayalam, they are so many. But we know that among the major ones the following would find a place: Ramayana Champu, Bharata Champu, Naishadha Champu, Ravana Vijayam Champu, Rukmini Swayamvaram Champu, Kamadananam Champu, Rajaratnavaliyam Champu and Kodiyaviraham Champu. The authorship of most of these works has not yet been fixed, but we know for certain that Punam Nambutiri and Mazhamangalam Nambutiri are the most outstanding names and that theirs are the most important works.

Punam who is featured in Chandrotsavam, a contemporary kavya, in lines like

With countless works in prose and verse,
which with ambrosial scent is filled
the fame of Punam still radiates
unto the bounds of horizons,

is undoubtedly an engaging personality. There were, according to a popular legend, ‘eighteen-and-a-half poets’ in the court of a fifteenth century Zamorin of Calicut, and Punam, it is said, was that ‘half-poet’. It is inconceivable how he, of all poets, could only be a ‘half-poet’. It is generally believed that eighteen poets composed in Sanskrit and hence were deemed ‘full poets’ and Punam who composed in Manipravala could only be regarded a ‘half-poet’.

The magnum opus among his works is Ramayana Champu, a
very voluminous work covering the entire story of the Ramayana, from the birth of Ravana up to the ascension of Rama. The whole story is conceived as twenty episodes and each episode is treated in a separate prabandha. The diction of Sanskrit sets the general tone but scattered throughout are beautiful passages illustrative of the uttama patterns in Manipravala. The harmonies spun out of choice words from both the languages, the impression of familiarity the verse imparts even while the vocabulary is almost exclusively Sanskritic, the delightful delineation of men and nature, imageries which illumine an infinite variety of ideas and emotions and the subjectivity of approach in describing situations commend Punam to the votaries of Manipravala literature. Of the innumerable portraits with which the work is embellished, here is one, of Sita at the time of swayamvara, with bridal garland in hand, entering the scene:

The throng was hushed when garland in hand—
its fragrance holding the crowd in thrall—
Sita rose, her countenance sweet
adorned with jasmine-smiles, and women
of auspicious import escorting,
the heavy hips slackening her pace,
and eyes with sidelong glances brimming,
slowly she moved in, Lord Kama’s flower-dart.

Her hands the lovely garland holding,
and beetles o’er the flowers humming,
whelmed with virgin modesty, stealing
intermittent looks of Rama’s face,
and leaning on her confidantes
the scene she illumined with her grace;
and trembling with joy she walked slowly
up to her lord, with beautiful steps.

Mazhamangalam Nambutiri is another important name in
the history of champu literature, and though he does not command the same prestige as Punam, his eminence as a poet is beyond question. Besides Naishadham, his most important contribution to champu literature, he is credited with
the authorship of some lesser known works of the same category, such as Rajaratnavaliyam, Kodiaviraham and Banayuddham.

In his handling of puranic themes, his attitude is more independent in comparison to that of his confrères. He borrows a story, and the story alone, and reconstructs it in a free and original manner, drawing exclusively upon his own resources. Thus Naishadham, a story that has been treated in a wide variety of ways in Sanskrit, assumes an altogether refreshing glow when it becomes the subject of his chūmpu. As a lyrical poet his talent is of the first order and his idiom, which is very simple, has a rare evocative power. King Nala is vanquished by his younger brother Pushkara in the gambling contest and Damayanti sets out with her lord to the forest. Her maids-in-waiting offer to accompany her, but she would not agree to their sharing her misery:

Follow me not, dear friends mine,
bewailing, as I do, engulfed
in the ocean of God's great wrath—
for such happens to be my fate.
I lived in peace and happiness
with my lord, King Nala, but now
I must take to the forest: what more
is writ in my head, I do not know.

In the strength of observances,
in prowess in the battle-field,
in regal pomp and majesty
and plenitude of noble traits
there's none, alas! like him, and yet
by the foul fiend dragged and tormented
he fought the gambling fray: am I
the cause, my friends? I do not know.

Rajaratnavaliyam and Kodiaviraham differ from the rest of the chūmpus in that their themes are not puranic, but partly historical and partly imaginary. The first work centres round Rama Varma, a raja of Cochin (A.D. 1565–1595) and his alleged love for a Vidyadhara, a celestial nymph, Mandaramala by name. He is, according to the chūmpu, a
mighty prince, and is fortunate in his strange romance. *Kodiaviraham* too is largely a work of fiction. A Kshatriya youth, Sangitaketu by name, falls in love with Sringara-chandrika, a beauty who comes to see the Pooram festival at Trichur. They spend some time together as lovers, are separated by circumstances beyond their control and reunited ultimately in happy wedlock. The two *champus* have a bearing on the social history of Kerala: they throw some light on the features of contemporary society.

There are many more *champus* which deserve mention, the more important being *Chellurnadhodayam, Narayaniyam, Tenkailasanadhodayam, Kamsa Vadhom, Dakshayagam, Syamantakam*, and *Kaliyamardanam*. The authorship of all these works still remains unknown, and though the literary worth of some of them at least leaves much to be desired, they represent on the whole the hectic literary activity which went on in Kerala in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The *champu* has long since ceased to be a live literary force; however, the role it played in building up Malayalam literature cannot be overemphasised. It marks a phase in the evolution of that literature when poets could not only assimilate the spirit and content of Sanskrit but express the same through their medium with even greater force and sensibility. It is not usual that lyrical imagination combines harmoniously with conventional classical themes, nor the humour characteristically of a people goes hand in hand with tales exotic to them, but the Nambutiris could achieve it, thanks to their being Aryans as well as Keralites. It may be mentioned incidentally that the tone of the humour which characterises much of subsequent poetry was primarily set by the *champus* and the Chakyarkoothu, an indigenous dance-drama.

The role the *champus* played in evolving the idiom of the language also was not a minor one. At a time when Sanskrit was universally acknowledged the noblest medium for literary expression, it was almost a sacrifice on the part of the authors of *champus* to compose in Manipravala which, though weighted in favour of Sanskrit, was adequately intelligible to the common people. The case of Punam who was dubbed a 'half-poet' because he composed in Manipravala is relevant to the point. The ultimate result of their condescension as manifest
in their incorporation of a good amount of the vocabulary of the common people into the texture of their poetry was the elevation of Malayalam into a literary medium and the preservation of its primordial features. Interspersed throughout the *champus* are fine specimens of Manipravala which the author of *Lilatilakam* would enthusiastically have hailed as *uttama* had he belonged to a later generation. These specimens have had a far-reaching effect on the entire course of subsequent poetry, for they served as patterns even to moderns like Vallathol.

The passages in prose which punctuate the verse also had a bearing on later poetry: poets like Kunchan Nambyar adapted the metres of the prose compositions for their Tullal works. As a matter of fact, the verse of the Tullals hardly differs in its metrical forms from the prose of the *champus*. Nambyar took yet another clue from them: the tone of satire which permeates his works was set for him by the works of Punam who was a satirist also.

It would thus seem that even though the *champus* are a closed chapter today, they could influence the entire course of later Malayalam poetry.

2. *Chandrotsavam, Muktakas, etc.*

The *champus* constitute but only one branch, though a major one, of Manipravala literature. There were yet other forms—the *kavya* or epic, the *stotra* or hymn, the *otta slokas* or single quatrains, etc.

*Chandrotsavam* is the only work so far discovered which falls under the category of *kavya*. Composed in five *sargas* (cantos) and five hundred and seventy quatrains, it has for its subject a story involving both men and gods. A Kinnara indulging in amorous pleasures with her Gandharva lover in the valley of the Emerald Mount is attracted by an unearthly fragrance which, she presumes, emanates from some mysterious flower. She requests her lover to procure the flower for her and the Gandharva, ever ready to oblige her whims, sets out on his mission of love following the trail of the fragrance. And that takes him to a place called Chikkilappalli near Trichur in Central Kerala where, to his great surprise, he
learns that the perfume originates from a divine lamp which the courtesan Medini Vennilavu—'Moonlight of the Earth'—lit to celebrate Chandrotsavam, the Festival of the Moon. He camps there for a while to witness the celebrations and returning to his beloved, gives her a vivid account of all that he heard and saw. The circumstances of the courtesan's life, her birth and upbringing, her plans to celebrate the Chandrotsavam, the dignitaries who participated in the celebrations—aristocratic Brahmins, Sanghakkali performers, poets and courtiers—and details of the Gandharva's journey are all delineated in vivid detail in the kavya. Allowing a certain margin for the fanciful nature of the descriptions and idealised views of life—features quite common in Manipravala literature—we can still gain from it a glimpse into the medieval society of Kerala. It begins with a panegyric on the land:

Eight other regions around us there are
of which South Bharat, lovely one,
is enchanting; and there we have
the glorious land of Cheraman
like to the graceful tilak mark
beautifying all the three worlds,
and a fertile habitation
worthy of Lakshmi and Kama.

The six slokas which follow are in a patriotic vein, something unusual in Manipravala poetry.

When a courtesan is chosen as the heroine of a kavya it would be natural to expect that her friends and acquaintances who appear in it also would be votaries of Kama. It is even so in Chandrotsavam, and justifiably enough, the reader would get the impression that chastity was never a strong point with the women of medieval Kerala. But this is far from the truth: though sex was seldom a taboo, sexual promiscuity was not a habit with that society. The introduction of a courtesan in the kavya as the central figure is simply a poetic device—and it is in keeping with the Manipravala tradition in which the erotic is the dominant rasa—to create enough compass for recounting feminine charm at greater length.
It would therefore be wrong to suppose that the women of Chandrotsavam represent the women of medieval Kerala.

The poet seems to be conscious of the loveliness of his idiom as also his lyrical abilities, for he has no hesitation to declare that his poetry is couched in Madhumadhura bhasha samskrutanyonya sammelana surabhila, that is to say, 'fragrant with the blending of sweet bhasha (Malayalam) with Sanskrit'. That his claim is by no means extravagant can be testified by almost all the slokas of Chandrotsavam.

Countless are the muktakas or quatrains composed during the period, either as eulogies on kings or as supplications to fair women. The best of these extant now are the compositions of the court-poets of the Zamorin of Calicut, Punam and Mazhamangalam in particular, and the personages extolled by them, Manavikrama Raja and Manavedan Raja, their patrons.

The age of Mani-pravala was, on the whole, one of unprecedented enthusiasm for poetry. Leadership came from the court of the Zamorin where, in spite of battles and invasions which were the order of the day, the poets had a fine time of it. Brahmins and poets were always held in the highest esteem by all the princes of Kerala irrespective of whence they came or who their whilom patrons were, and so they could compose in peace without being unduly concerned about the political fortunes of princes and the attendant vicissitudes in regard to patronage. And that is the prime reason why contemporary issues do not figure prominently in Mani-pravala literature.