

Socio-Cultural Transformation: A Study On *Time* By M.T.Vasudevan Nair

Dr. Digvijay Pandya¹, Ms. Devisri B²

¹Associate Professor, Department of English, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India.

²Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of English, Punjab, India.

ABSTRACT: Kerala, the land is blessed with nature and its tradition. It has a copiously diverse vegetation beautiful landscape and climate. The land is also rich in its literature. M.T.Vasudevan Nair is one of the renowned figures in Malayalam literature who excels and portrays the traditional and cultural picture of Kerala society. *Kaalam*, published in 1969 is a lyrical novel in Malayalam literature by M.T.Vasudevan Nair and Gita Krishnan Kutty translates it into English as *Time*. This paper tries to analyse the sociological and cultural transformation of Kerala in the novel *Time* during the period of MT. It also focuses on the system of Marumakkathayam, joint family system and its transformation.

Keywords: Sociological and Cultural transformation, Marumakkathayam, Joint family system, Tarawads.

India is a multi-lingual country steeped in its rich culture and tradition. There are many such treasure troves of creativity in the regional languages that would have been lost to the rest of the world, but for its tradition, which is the only means to reach a wider group of reading public. Tradition helps to understand the thought process of the people of a particular region against the backdrop of socio-cultural roots. Malayalam is one of the multifaceted languages in India. Malayalam, the mother tongue of nearly thirty million Malayalis, ninety percent of whom living in Kerala state in the south – west corner of India, belongs to the Dravidian family of languages. Malayalam literature reflects the spirit of accommodation and has over the centuries developed a tradition, which, even while rooted in the locality, is truly universal in taste.

In the early decades, the main form of Malayalam literature was of poetry, even the composite literary form the Attakatha a veritable amalgam of dance, drama, music, and poetry was essentially poetic. Prose developed rapidly in the last decade of the 19th century. This helped the emergence of the novel, the drama, the short story, and literary criticism in the language. Of these various forms, the first that carved out a channel its own was the novel, and even today next to poetry, the richest literary form in the language is undoubtedly the novel. It has been pointed out that the novel arose in Kerala as in other regions of India, not just because of British influence through English education but also chiefly because of the condition that existed in India at this time. Both the internal and external socio-political conditions paved the way for the growth of this new genre in Malayalam literature.

The first novel conceived and published in Malayalam was Appu Nedungadi's *Kundalatha* (1887). Though *Kundalatha* is not considered as a major novel, it gets the pride of place as the first work in the language having the basic characteristics of a novel. O.Chandhu Menon's *Indulekha* was the first major novel in Malayalam language. It was a landmark in the history of Malayalam literature and initiated the novel as a new flourishing genre. The title refers to the main character in this novel, a beautiful, well educated Nair lady of eighteen

years. C.V.Raman Pillai's *Marthandavarma* (1891) had many distinctions: it was the first historical novel in any South Indian languages, first novel from Travancore, first Malayalam novel to be a part of a trilogy, and the first Malayalam novel to have a masculine title. During early twentieth century, Malayalam received outstanding novels, either as translations or as adaptations of Western literature. The post-independence period saw a fresh start in the history of longer fiction in Malayalam as in many other Indian languages, parallel to the evolution of post-world war fiction in other parts of the world. It was both a break and a continuation. P. Kesava Dev, who was a Communist in the thirties and forties turned away from diehard ideologies and wrote a symbolic novel called *Arku Vendi? (For Whose Sake?)* in 1950, challenging the philosophy of Stalinist liquidation of political enemies. After portraying the class struggle of farm laborers in *Randidangazhi (Two Measures)* in 1949, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai turned away from party politics and produced a moving romance in *Chemmeen (Shrimps)* in 1956. For S.K.Pottekkatt and Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, who had not dabbled in politics, the continuity is marked in the former's *Vishakanyaka (Poison Maid, 1948)* and the latter's *Ntuppuppakkoranendarnnu (My Grandpa had an Elephant, 1951)*. P. C. Kuttikrishnan (Uroob) with his *Ummachu (1955)* and *Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum (Men and Women of Charm)* championed the non-political social or domestic novel. In 1957, Basheer's *Pathummayude Aadu (Pathumma's Goat)* brought in a new kind of prose tale, which perhaps only Basheer could handle with dexterity. The fifties thus mark the evolution of a new kind of fiction, which had its impact on the short stories as well. This was the auspicious moment for the entry of M. T. Vasudevan Nair upon the scene. Front-runners in the post-modern trend include Kakkanadan, O.V.Vijayan, M.Mukundan and Anand. Kakkanadan once attached to leftist ideology, turned away from it to write one of the most powerful narratives based on that experience in his novel *Ushnamekhala (The Tropics)*. O. V. Vijayan, having spent a number of years in Delhi, locates his classic novel *Khasakkinte Itihasam (The Legend of Khasak)* in the remote village in his native Palakkad. M. Mukundan is a front-runner in the post-modern trend with such works as *Mayyazhippuzhayude Theerangalil (On the Banks of Mayyazhi)*, *Daivathinte Vikruthikal (God's Mischief)* and *Kesavante Vilapangal (The Lamentations of Kesavan)*. Several writers are there who portray the decline of the feudal system and of the old order of the joint family, among whom easily the most gifted is M. T. Vasudevan Nair, author of a large number of popular favourites like *Nalukettu (The Legacy)*, *Asuravithu (The Demon Seed)*, *Randamoozham (Bhima)*, *Manju (Mist)* etc. M.T.Vasudevan Nair is one of the renowned figures in Malayalam literature who excels and portrays the traditional and cultural picture of Kerala society.

Madathil Thekkepattu Vasudevan Nair, born in Kudallur, Palakkad district, is one of the genius writers in Malayalam literature. He manifested his excellence in his novels and short stories. Later, he became a filmmaker and scriptwriter. He uses simple and subtle language in order to portray the agony and sufferings of the people of India during the period of feudalism. His works include *Naalukettu (The Legacy)*, *Manju (Mist)*, *Kaalam (Time)*, *Asuravithu (The Demon Seed)*, and *Randamoozham (Bhima)*. Equally impressive are his achievements in the field of cinema. He has directed seven films and has written script for about 154 films. He is the recipient of many awards like Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, Jnanpith Award, Padmabhushan Award, Vallathol Award etc. He has received the National Film Award for best screenplay for the films *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha*, *Kadavu*, *Sadayam* and *Parinayam* and J.C.Daniel Award for Lifetime Achievement in Malayalam cinema in 2013.

The premiere writer, M.T.Vasudevan Nair excels in all genres of writing in Malayalam literature. He was born and brought up in a village on the banks of river Nila or

Bharathapuzha. The writer has creatively inspired from the quintessence of his village and river Nila. His passionate pathos and succulent depiction of human experiences captivates the writer to his readers. He subtly encapsulates the agony and angst of Kerala during the period of feudalism in his novels. His writing is mainly influenced by the local community, its myths, and metaphors and also pictures the social unsettlements of Kerala and presents its family culture truthfully. Nila occurs and reoccurs in MT's fiction, as presence and as a symbol. The predominant backdrop of his writings is Valluvanad village. The landscape and ethos of the Valluvanad region and the transformations undergone by them in the course of the century, involving relics of the Nair Tarawads and the communal tension provide a challenging theme for the highly evocative style of M.T.Vasudevan Nair's narrative techniques. The fleeting context of his fiction extends to the second half of the twentieth century. Most of his works feature the basic Kerala family structure and culture and many of his novels were path breaking as far as the history of Malayalam literature is concerned.

For more than fifty years, M.T. has been the supreme being of Malayalam literature. With his contemporaries O.V.Vijayan and Kamala Das, M.T. remains unchallenged as the eminent celebrity of Malayalam literary world. He is notable for the skilful representation of the social history of Kerala in his works. The main locale of his fiction, Kudallur that is Valluvanad region is a scenic beauty and it is considered as the prototype of Kerala's agrarian society. The economy has been built based on feudalistic aspects that show the world of sufferings and pain, the exploitation of patriarchal and caste-driven society. M.T. Kudallur was the laboratory of the transformation that overtook Kerala in the second half of the twentieth century. The transformation was the result of a composite movement evolving within the triangle of the freedom struggle, a social revolution, and cultural renaissance. Notwithstanding his preoccupations with themes that relate to traditional Kerala society and its underlying conflicts, M.T. remains one of its most genius writers of Malayalam fiction.

The beginning of M.T.Vasudevan Nair's literary career spans during the age of modernism in Indian literature. The society suffered from a trauma brought about by the colonial education, ruthless urbanization, and inhuman industrialization. MT concentrates on the despondency of the lonely individual who has lost his identity and finds himself alienated from himself as well as from society. M.T.Vasudevan Nair's novels are always preoccupied with an inclination to nostalgia. Most of his characters crave for a rustic life and dismisses the civilized modern way of life. M.T.'s writings are always place in juxtaposition with the writings of O.V.Vijayan, the other major figure of twentieth century Malayalam literature. M.T.'s simple and subtle style of writing and narration always equals with the real life of the village people and this made him an eminent personality among the readers. Whereas, O.V.Vijayan's ingenious prose which is embedded with symbolic aspects pleases to the discerning readers.

MT has inherited an obsession towards nation from his childhood itself. He has a feeling of loneliness and neglect during his childhood and this strengthens his writing career. He clearly presents the inner psyche of the individual and the sufferings in his fiction. The character of his fiction seeks relief from nature and recreates their broken inner self and they do not have an existence without their village life. They always attached with their culture, customs, and rituals of the village. MT made his native village, Kudallur a canvas of creative inspiration. Unlike the regional writers of English literature like Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner, Valluvanad region is an epitome of the world for MT. All his experiences are applied back to his experiences and his experiences of the place color his experiences of the outer world.

The renowned epic of M.T.Vasudevan Nair's literary career started with the publication of his short story *Valarthumrugangal* in 1953. The story depicts the poignant difficulties and troubles of the circus artists. He has written a number of short stories with different themes and contexts. Major collections of his short stories include *Irruttinte Aathamavu* (translated to English as *Soul of Darkness*), *Olavum Theeravum*, *Bandanam* (translated to English as *Bond*) *Vaarikuzhi*, *Swaragam Thurakkum Samayam*, *Vanaprastham* (translated to English as *Retreat*), *Kuttiyettathi*, *Oppol*, *Perumthachan* and *Sherlock*. MT is also mastered in writing non-fictional works. He has written two books about the process of writing- *Kaathikante Panippura* and *Kaathikante Kala*. His speeches and articles are also compiled together under the titles *Kilivaathililude*, *Kaalam Vaakkukalude Vismayam*, *Kannanthalipookkalude*, *Ammayku*, and *Eakakikalude Sabdam*. Stories like *Irruttinte Aathamavu*, *Kuttiyettathi* and *Oppol* exposes society's double standards. In others like *Vanaprastham*, *Bandanam* and *Perumthachan* MT explores the complexities of human relationships.

Naalukettu is the debut novel of M.T.Vasudevan Nair. It is translated to English as *The Legacy* won the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 1958. His other works include *Asuravithu* (translated to English as *The Demon Seed*), *Manju* (translated to English as *Mist*), *Kaalam* (translated to English as *Time*), and *Randamoozham* (translated to English as *Bhima*). Most of his works depicts the matrilineal family structure of Kerala and the also portrays the system of Marumakkathayam system, which is prevalent in twentieth century Kerala society. *Naalukettu* (*The Legacy*), *Kaalam* (*Time*), and *Asuravithu* (*The Demon Seed*) pictures the matriarchal family life of Kerala. *Randamoozham* (*Bhima*), the most renowned novel of MT, recounts the story of *Mahabharatha* from Bhimasena's perspective. *Manju* (*Mist*) is the only novel stands on a different plane as far as the theme, setting, and characters are concerned. *Manju* (*Mist*) is MT's only novel with a female protagonist with a different setting in the splendid landscape of Nainital.

Kaalam, published in 1969 is a lyrical novel by M.T.Vasudevan Nair. It is translated to English as *Time* in the same year itself. Like the other two novels, *The Legacy* and *The Demon Seed*, this novel also depicts the degeneration of matrilineal joint family structure and the disintegration of Marumakkathayam system of Nair Tarawads. The novel sets in the milieu of land reforms and poverty in the twentieth century Kerala society. The Nair community of Kerala plays a crucial part in the novel. They also had a vital position in the tradition of Kerala. The Nair community belongs to the warrior class and they are the only matrilineal category in India. Almost all the characters in the novel exist to this Nair community.

Sethumadhavan is the protagonist of the novel. He realizes that life exists only at the mercy of time. His dreams and desires are shattered because of the poor and pathetic conditions of the family. His father always ignores his family. Because of his poor economic condition of the family, Sethu cannot afford the luxury lifestyle in his college days. During the course of his life, he meets three women. The first woman is Sumitra. She is his cousin and this relationship is presented as a mere materialistic fancy love. Secondly, Thankamani, whom he wants to marry. After his studies, he joined in a firm as a clerk under Srinivasan Muthalali. Sethu meets Lalitha Srinivasan, wife of his boss. They both developed a relationship and as the result of this, Lalitha divorces Srinivasan. Like his father, Sethu also neglected his family and he forgets himself in the luxury life of the city. However, later he acknowledges that this upper-class society life is not a permanent escape. He returns to his own village and finds himself as alone in the world.

The novel *Time* begins with a very minute description of the nightfall. The river of Sethu's village plays a crucial role in the novel. The emotional state of Sethu is always equals with the changes in the river. Sethu started his life with many dreams and desires but in the midst of his life journey, he trapped between the materialistic life and his emotional life. The river silently witnesses all the problems of Sethu's life. The life of the river mirrors the life of Sethu because the sensuous beauty of the river transformed into dry sand at the end of the novel. M.T.Vasudevan Nair in *Time* uses the lyrical prose and captures the changing moods of Sethumadhavan and the seasonal changes together. The novel *Kaalam* won the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1970. The novel narrates the life of the protagonist Sethumadhavan, who leaves his ancestral home for his studies. His excellence in his academic life seems to promise him a bright future. Yet, as the year, pass and Sethu wobbled from one failure to another, solacing himself with a series of dejected love affairs. He started to develop an aversion towards his life. Subsequently, he is compelled to return to his ancestral home and he has declined himself for long from others.

Sethumadhavan in *Time* tries to take control and power over his family to get the position of Karanavar of the Tarawad. In *Time* Sethu's mother holds the power of the Tarawad because her husband is the only breadwinner of the family. MT portrayed the character of Sethu's mother as a rough and bold woman like a Karanavar. After completing his studies, Sethu started to work in a firm in the city. His father neglects his family so Sethu sends to Tarawad and he is treated as a respectable person in his family. Later he has changed himself like his father and he started to enjoy the luxury of the city life. Atlast he comes to his village and becomes the Karanavar of the Tarawad. The real protagonist of the novel is time itself. The life of Sethu was determined by the constant flow of time. The time has separated him from everyone and everything he loved. MT portrays the experiences of his characters as universal and very specific based on their time and place. Readers everywhere can realize the teenaged Sethu's uneasiness in his family.

M.T.Vasudevan Nair depicts the unpredictabilities, conflicts and the struggles inside the matrilineal joint family in his novels. The novel *Time* is also not an exception. Set against the background of matrilineal joint family system of Nair Tarawads in Kerala with its trivial disputes and envies, its Sambandham system of contractual marriage, its struggles, and inconsistencies. It tracks down the occurrences of conventional medieval Kerala society and its transformation into present Kerala. This transformation is clearly shown through the character of Sethu that parallels the transformation of the society. The novel *Time* depicts the systematic decline and disintegration of the matrilineal joint family system. Marumakkatayam is banned in 1930. Because of this, many of the prestigious Nair family lost their fortunes of Karanavar of the Tarawad. M.T.Vasudevan Nair, the writer of Valluvanad region in Kerala displays the twentieth century Kerala. He pictures a Kerala, which is untouched by modernity.

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