Kerala is located on the south-western region of the country. The state is bordered by Karnataka to the north, Tamil Nadu to the south and the east and the Lakshadweep Sea towards the west. Before the state formation in 1957, the southern division Thiruvithamcore (Travancore), and the central division Kochi (Cochin) were princely states under the supervision of British rule and the northern division, Malabar which was a part of Madras presidency was directly governed by the British. Malayalam is one of the Dravidian languages spoken mainly by the inhabitants of the state of Kerala. Some scholars have the opinion that the term Malayalam consists of two words: Mala which means hill and Aazham (deep) which means the sea. Some scholars explain that the second word Alam means land.

The origin of the language is a subject of debate. While some argue that Malayalam had originated from Sanskrit, others argue that it originated from Tamil. There is also an argument that Malayalam is the result of a synthesis of both languages- Sanskrit and Tamil. Though Malayalam exhibits the influence of Sanskrit and Tamil in a remarkable degree it has many individual characteristics. It is also said that the speech of Kerala developed independently and became transformed into Malayalam. We can reach into a conclusion as K.M George argues that Malayalam can claim as much individuality and as much antiquity as any other member of the Dravidian family. However in a later stage, we see the influence of different languages such as Tamil, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Persian, Portuguese, Dutch, French and English in Malayalam prose.

*Ramcharitham* by Cheeramon, a collection of poems is considered as the oldest Malayalam book available. The collection has 1814 poems in it and it mainly consists of stories from Yudha Kanda of Ramayana. And Bhashakautiliyam, a prose written in the 10th century which is based on the commentary on Kautilya’s Arthasastra is the first prose in Malayalam. This can be considered as the first translation in India. Before the print medium came into existence, the literature of ancient period reached their audience mainly through the performances of art forms like Koothu, Kootiyattam of Chakyars, Chimmanakkali of Pulayas, Patayani of Nairs etc. Till the end of the eighteenth century, these forms were an important medium of expression of literature.
Kerala’s other dramatic performances *Koothu* and *Koodiyattam* which is a part of Indian culture often used Sanskrit and Malayalam. In Koodiyattom, the clown (Vidooshaka) is allowed to use Malayalam while the hero recited *slokas* in Sanskrit. As we see in the classical dramas, the prince and the priests speak in Sanskrit, while the women (even if they are princess) speak in Prakrit and the lowly characters in the Apabhramsas. We can cite this as an example of pan Indian culture and the multilingual existence in India. But one should remember that these performances were traditionally performed as a religious ritual in the Hindu temples of Kerala and only men from the Chakyar community (a high caste) were allowed to perform these inside the Koothambalam (temple theatres). This on the other hand points towards the caste system prevalent in Kerala.

**THE MALAYALAM SCRIPT**

The Malayalam script in its present form is comparatively recent and it was established as an independent literary language by 15\(^{th}\) century. Before this the main script that was used in Kerala was called *Vattezhuthu*. The word *Ezhuthu* means writing and *Vattu* means circular and thus *Vattezhuthu* means circular script. Another script *Kolezhuthu* was used in some areas. The word *Kol* means stick and as it is indicated the script is oblong in shape. There was also *granthalipi* meaning book-script which evolved in early period so as to present sounds in Sanskrit, and not found in the old Dravidian language. Researchers like MGS and Dr. Pavithran points out one more lipi called *Braahmi lipi*.

**PERIODS OF MALAYALAM LITERATURE**

In all well known histories of literature we find divisions into periods which help us understand better the evolution of language and the progress of literature. Grim has introduced the practice of dividing a language into its old, Middle and Modern Periods into English literature. As Sujit Mukherjee argues this chronological approach will not work in the context of Indian literary history since there is no predominant single language and there is constant and easy crossing over of literary traditions from one language to another in India. So the literary historian of single language has to be conscious about the crosscurrents and influences of other languages.

However Grimm’s method was introduced into Malayalam literature by P.Govinda Pillai, who published his history of Malayalam literature in 1881. He has classified Malayalam literature into
three: *Adi* (Early) Malayalam - 600 B.C-A.D. 800; *Madya* (Middle) Malayalam-from A.D. 800-A.D. 1500; *Navina* (Modern) Malayalam- from A.D. 1500. Many historians of Malayalam literature have also followed this method. Here I would follow the method of K.M.George who has pointed out that there is no ground for assigning a middle period to Malayalam literature. In the case of English literature there was the Norman Conquest which provided the grounds for assigning a middle period whereas in Kerala there is no such similar political change to assign a division.

K.M. George has classified the period Malayalam literature into two: Early Malayalam (Up to the 15th century and the Modern Malayalam after the 15th century i.e after *Krishnagatha*. He has classified the early Malayalam into three: the Tamil Indigenous stream, The Tamil Stream and The Sanskrit stream. Since it is a subject of debate we are not dealing with it here. The modern period of Malayalam literature is said to have started with Thunchathu Ezhuthachan’s (17th Century), *Adhyathmaramayanam*. But K.M. Geroge argues the modern period of Malayalam literature can be said to have commence with the age of *Krishnapattu* (Krishnagatha) i.e 15th century A.D. He points out that though Ezhuthachan has made epoch-making changes in the language of literature, there are variations between Ezhuthachan’s language and the modern language. Moreover it seems that Ezhuthachan has completed the revolution started by Cherusseri, the author of Krishnappatu.

Beginning with folk literature, Malayalam literature flourished under various genres and today it is a fully developed part of Indian literature. It is said that though several noted works were written before and during the 19th century, it was in the 20th century that the Malayalam literary movement came to prominence. As we know the literary forms like short-story, essay, literary criticism, biography and novel etc. came into Malayalam as a result of our contact with English literature. We have already seen how different art forms in Kerala have contributed to Malayalam literature and Indian culture. We will also look at the contributions of Folk songs, ballads and the genre poetry in to Indian culture. You will also be introduced into various literary forms of Malayalam literature as well as some of the eminent writers of each form and their works.
THE INDIGENOUS STREAM OR FOLK POETRY

Malyalam literature has a rich collection of folk songs and ballads which contribute much to the Indian culture. These songs are related to particular caste and communities in Kerala and most of these deals with religious rituals, day to day activities, agriculture, war and worship. *Badrakali Pattu, Thottam Pattu, Nizhalkoothu Pattu, Sarpa Pattu, Pulluvar Pattu* are some of them. Other than this there is also a stream of poetry in Malayalam which has not been influenced either by the Tamil or the Sanskrit forms. Scholars like C.A Menon call it *Pacha Malayalam* or Pure Malayalam School. It comes under the category of folk literature.

Folk songs and ballads can be considered as the earliest forms of poetry. Traces of poetry can also be found in old sayings (*Pazham Chollukal*). Folk songs have started to be regarded as literature only recently. Since it has not been recognized properly it is difficult to date these poems. Folk literature may be broadly divided into two categories: (i) Folk songs; and (ii) Ballads.

FOLK SONGS

Folk songs are considered to be older than ballads and they cover different aspects of life from birth to death. There are numerous folk songs in Malayalam which could be categorized as follows:

(1) Ceremonial songs

Some of the songs belong to the lullaby variety. These songs are very simple, without any imagery or artistic excellence.

(2) Marriage Songs

There are some songs which are based on the theme of marriage. *Talikettukalyanam* was a ceremony of Nairs and Ezhavas before the actual marriage. Songs composed for such occasions are termed *Kalyanakkalikal* (festive games during marriage). Similarly, *Vathilthurappattu* (song requesting the opening of the door) is a very interesting type of song among the Christian community of Kerala.
(3) Elegiac Songs

Songs of lamentation are also a significant variety. Such songs are sung among the Pulaya community when the parents pass away.

(4) Onappattu

There are several songs connected with Onam, one of the most important festivals of Kerala. Many games are played at Onam time and there are songs for each and it is well known throughout Kerala.

(5) Thiruvathirappattu

There songs are sung on the occasion of Thiruvathira, another important festival of Kerala. Mostly upper caste malayalee women dance and sing special songs in this occasion.

(6) Religious Songs

Forces of nature such as Lightning, thunder, storm, large trees etc. were the gods of the old Dravidians. Their fear and devotion gave birth to religious and semi-religious songs. Sarpappattu or snake song is one among them. Thiyattu and Kutiyottappattu are well known religious songs. Navattupattu, Velanpattu and Chattupattu are belonging to semi-religious songs.

(7) Vocational Songs

There are also Folk songs connected to various vocations. They are more popular than ceremonial and religious songs. Krishippattukal (songs relating to Krishi or agriculture) is one such variety. Many such songs have no ideas to convey, but have a rhythm which inspire the workers to engage in hard manual work.

(8) Vanchippattu (Boat Songs)

Boat songs are very popular. Among them we find love songs and humorous songs.
BALLADS

Ballads may be divided into three categories: the heroic, the historical and the religious. The heroic ballads are more collected and published in Kerala.

(1) Heroic Ballads

Vatakkan Pattukal (the ballads of North Malabar) portray the life of few heroes. These songs deal with Nayars and Ezhavas. Thacholi Othenan and Aromal chekavar form the subject matter of most of these ballads. There are also many ballads about Unniarcha and Othenan.

(2) Religious Ballads

Mappila Pattukal (Songs of Malabar Muslims) are very beautiful and we find full expressions of heroic and erotic sentiments in this. The language is a mixture of Malayalam and Arabic, and the characters are Muslims. Among the religious ballads, the more important are Bhadrakali Pattu, Thottam Pattu, Ayyappan Pattu, Mathilakathu Kath, Mappila Paattu, Pulluvan Pattu, Paanan Pattu etc.

(3) Historical Ballads

In the historical ballads, the characters are all historical personages. The ballads on Iravikuttipillai are the most famous among this. The Christians have also added their contribution to this branch of literature. Margam Kalipattu deal with the story of Saint Thomas in Kerala. These songs are usually sung by twelve people dancing on the stage.

TRADITIONAL POETRY

The genre poetry has the longest and richest tradition.

Manipuravalam

Manipuravalam literally means ‘gem and coral’, meaning a mixture of two languages. In Kerala Manipravalam was a combination of Malayalam and Sanskrit whereas in Tamil Nadu it was a mixture of Tamil and Sanskrit. Though the name of the author is unknown, Leelathilakam, a work on grammar and rhetoric, written in the last quarter of the 14th century in Kerala is
considered as an important work of the Manipravalam literature. However this particular school of poetry was patronized by the upper castes mainly by the Namboodiris.

**Champukkal or Champu Poems**

These poems were written in the model of Sanskrit Champu Poetry. This defined the development of medieval Malayalam poetry. The *Padya* or “Verse” portion of a Champoo poem was written in Sanskrit metres while the *Gadya* or “prose” portion was almost in medieval Malayalam metres. Champoo poems can be divided into two types. (1) Pracheena Manipravala Champookkal (2) Madyakala Champookkal. Unniyachi Charitham, Unniyadi Charitham and Unni Chirutheyi Charitham are the three Pracheena Manipravala Champu poems. Ramavan Champu, Kamadhanam Champu Bharatham Champu etc are the main madyakala champu poems.

**Niranam Poets or Kannassanmar**

Niranam Poets namely Madhava Panikkar, Sankara Panikkar and Rama Panikkar belonged to a small village called Niranam in southern Kerala. They lived between AD 1350 and 1450. They successfully freed Malayalam literature from Manipravala style. Kannassa Ramayanam and Kannassa Bharatam are the most important of Niranam works.

**MODERN POETRY**

As already mentioned, Cherusseri’s (1500 AD) *Krishnagatha* can be considered as the beginning of modern age in poetry. The poem’s theme deals with the story of Lord Krishna. It is said that the author was inspired by a lullaby sung by a mother to put her child to sleep and he followed the same metrical pattern for his composition. However this is used for daily recitation as an act of worship of Krishna during the Malayalam month of Chingam (August-September) by the devotees of Kerala, especially women (mostly upper caste). This is a best example which shows how a literary form becomes a part of Indian culture. This also marked the beginning of Bhakti Movement in Malayalam literature.
Ezhuthachan

Ezhuthachan (16th century) who authored *Adhyatma Ramayana* travelled far and wide and was much influenced by the spirit of Bhakti cult which was very strong in Tamil Nadu. As we know Bhakti movement is a pan India movement and in order to popularise this movement Ezhuthachan chose to relate the stories of the chief incarnations of Vishnu i.e Rama and Krishna as described in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Other works ascribed to Ezhuthachan are *Uttara Ramayananam, Devi Mahatmyam, Bhagavatam Kilippattu* etc.

Poonthanam

We can consider Poonthanam as the first “romantic” poet of Malayalam. But it will be more accurate to consider him as one of the pioneering devotional poets of Malayalam. He has got some unique distinctions and he is a poet of national vision and outlook. He considered “Bhaarath” (India) as an entity. In many ways he resembles Kabir. Poonthanam is the author of the much acclaimed work *Jnanappaana*. He has also authored *Ghanasmgham, Sreekrishna Karnamritam, Anandaamrithm*, etc.

In the second half of the 19th century, there were two outstanding poets who composed poems in simple Malayalam. They are two Nambutiris, father and son, from Venmani Illam. They were called as *Venmani* poets and their diction earned the name of *Venmani Prasthanam*. They were also noted for their sense of humour and erotic element in the poetry. Later the poet Kerala Varma tried to sankritise Malayalam literature more profoundly. Kerala Varma wrote his famous poem, *Mayoora Sandesam* (Peacock Messenger) in the *Mainipravala* style. He held out a model in the hope that other poets would follow. However many poets continue to follow the *Venmani* style.

THE MAHAKAVYAS

Mahakavyas literally means ‘a great poem’. *Ramachandravilasam* (1902) by Azhakathu Padmanabha Kurup is spoken of as the first Mahakavya in Malayalam. Other prominent Mahakavyas are *Umakeralam* by Ullur, *Rugmangadacharitam* by Pathalam Kerala Varma,
“Chitrayogam” by Vallathol and “Kesaviyam” by K.C. Kesava Pillai. Most poets deal with the puranic themes, but Ullur has taken an incident from Travancore history.

The golden period of Malayalam poetry is the second and third decade of 20th century. The great trio namely, Kumaran Asan (1873-1924), Vallathol Narayana Menon (1879-1958) and Ulloor Parameswara Iyer (1877-1949) were mainly responsible for this great poetic resurgence. They are referred to as the romantic poets of Malayalam literature.

After the great Trio, poets like Nalappat Narayana Menon, Kuttippurathu Kesavan Nayar, Pallathu Raman, K.M. Panikkar, Vennikulam Gopala Kurup, N. Gopala Pilla, P. Kunhiraman Nayar, K.K. Raja, Balamani Amma, Bodeswaran and G. Sankara Kurup have enriched poetic literature in Malayalam.

The Twin Poets of Idappally

In the forth decade of 20th century two young poets named Changapuzha Krishna Pillai and Raghava Pillai came into the scene of poetry. Both these poets resemble Shelly and Keats in many ways. Raghava Pillai’s poems are compiled in Thusharaharam, Hridayasmitam and Navasawrabham and Changapuzha’s good numbers of poems are collected in Bashapanjali (Offering of Tears).

Malayalam poetry took a new turn with Changampuzha. The progressive movement in Malayalam literature was set up in 1937. Several young writers came to the forefront, imitating the diction of Changampuzha. However they had their own message to convey. Among them Idasseri Govindan Nair, Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon, Vayalar Rama Varma, N.V. Krishna Varyar, P. Bhaskaran, O.N.V. Kurup, Pala Narayanan Nair, Akkittam, Olappamanna, O.M. Anujan, C.A.Joseph, Sugatha Kumari and M.P. Appan are names which immediately strike one. Some of the noted post-modern poets of Malayalam are Anitha Thampi, A.C. Sreehari, M.B. Manoj, S. Joseph, V.M. Girija, Murukan Kattakkada etc.
THE NOVEL

Like the short-story, essay, literary criticism and biography, novel also came into Malayalam as a result of our contact with English literature. *Kundalata* (1887) by Appunedungadi was the first book having the basic characteristics of a novel in Malayalam. But the novel in Malayalam received acclaim with the publication of O. Chandu Menon’s *Indulekha* in 1889. The author was a judge and a connoisseur of art and literature. He wanted to introduce this genre to the Malayalees and instead of translating an English novel, he wrote one, choosing a local theme.

C.V. Raman Pillai, another prolific novelist constructed his novels with historical themes. *Marthanda Varma, Dharma Raja,* and *Ramaraja Bahadur,* are his three historical novels. After the two masters, Chandu Menon and Raman Pillai, we have a comparatively dull period, until the thirties of the 20th century. K. Narayana Kurukkan’s serialized political novels *Udayabhanu* and *Parappurath* created a stir in the society. The historical novels like *Kerala Puthran* by Ambadi Narayana Poduval, *Keraleswaran* by T. Raman Nambissan, and *Cheraman Perumal*, by Kappana Krishna Menon are also worth mentioning. Popular novels of this period are *Snehalata* by Kanan Menon, *Viruthan Sanku* by Karat Achuta Menon and *Appante Makal* by Bhavatratan Nambudiripad. Other popular novelists are K. Sukumaran, M.R. Veluppilla Sastri, M.R. Narayana Pillai, etc.

Among the popular novelists of the last decades of 20th century, Thakazhi, Kesava Dev, Basheer, Pottekkad and P.C. Kuttikrishnan are more outstanding. They wrote in simple and direct prose, which can be understood by the ordinary reader. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai’s *Chemmeen* (1957), *Thottiyute Makan* (Son of the Scavenger), *Rantitangazhi* (Two Measures) , *Enippatikal* (The steps of the Ladder), P. Kesava Dev’s *Odayil Ninnu* (From the Gutter), *Brantlayam* (House of Mad Men), *Ulakka* (Pestle) *Nati* ( the Actress), *Rowdy, Oru Suundariyudte Atmakatha* (Autobiography of a Beautiful Lady) and *Ayalkkar* (The Neighbours) are considered as good novels.

Basheer has written three novelettes of which *Balya Kala Sakhi* (Childhood Friend-1994) and *Entuppappakkoranentarnu* (My Grandfather had an Elephant- 1951) are more popular.

and Uroob’s *Ummachu*, *Sundarkalam Sundaranmarum* (The Beautiful and the Handsome), E. M. Kovoor’s *Kadu*, Joseph Mundasseri’s *Kondayil Ninu Kurusilekku* (for the Rosary to the Cross), Muttathu Varkey’s *Inappravukal* (A Pair of Doves), *Patatha Paikili* (The Bird that does not sings) and M.T Vasudevan Nair’s *Nalukettu* are also important novels.

**SHORT STORY**

Short story is one of the richest branches of Malayalam literature today. *Vasanavikrti* (The Mischief of Habit, 1981) by Kunjiraan Nayanar which was published in the monthly *Vidyavinodini* marks the birth of the Malayalam short story. Early writers such as Vengayil Kunjiraman Nayanar, Abadi Narayana Puduvil, Otuvil Kunjikrishna Menon, Moorkoth Kumaran, E.V. Krishnapillai modeled their stories after British and American authors, being unaware of the scope of the form. Short story became more effective and popular in the propagation of progressive social ideas. The spread of general education and the birth of newspapers and magazines in the last decade of the 19th century contributed much to the development of short story as a popular literary form. The great scholar and eminent critic Kesari Balakrishna Pillai introduced prominent European writers and trends in world literature to the reading public and to the up-coming young writers. The great short story writers like Thakazhi Sivasankarapillai and Kesava Dev were influenced by him.

In 1937, the young writers of Kerala formed the *Jivatsahitya Prasthanam*. In 1944, this movement was transformed into the *Purogamana Sahityam* (Progressive Literature). They stood for reform and the creation of a socialistic society and used the subject matter of literature as a tool for it. Writers such as Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Kesava Dev, Ponkunnam Varkey, Karoor Neelakanta Pillai, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, S.K Pottekkat and P.C. Kuttikrishan played an important role in popularizing the genre. However Thakazhi, Kesava Dev and Vaikom Muhammad Basheer are considered as the exponents of progressive Malayalam literature.

Lalithambika Antherjanam (1909-1987) and K. Saraswathi Amma (1919-75) are the two important women writers of the Renaissance period. Antherjanam while critiquing the conventions in Namubidiri community also portrays the problems of Namubidiri women. K. Saraswathiamma, on the other hand is an ardent advocate of the women’s cause.
Writers like Ponjikkara Rafi, P.A. Muhammed Koya, Vettoor Raman Nair and T.K.C Vaduthala’s mainly depicts the story of their own community. Other important writers of this period are Malayattur Ramakrishnan, N.P. Chellappan Nair, Anandakkuttan, K.V. Joseph and V.K.N.

**Subjectivity and Poetic Realism**

The next phase of the modernization of the Malayalam short stories begins with the writers like T.Padmanabhan and M.T.Vasudevan Nair. These writers neither indulge in direct social criticism nor do they claim to be social reformers. They have replaced realism with poetic individualism peeping into the mind of character. T. Padmanabhan’s *Prakasham Parathunna Penkutti* (The Girl who Emanates Light, 1955), *Stephen Fernandez* (1958) M. T Vasudevan Nair’s *Irutintte Athmavu* (The Sour of Darkness, 1961), *Kuttieadathi* (Elder system by Name Kutti, 1959) are some of the best known stories.

The stories of Madhavikkutty (Kamala Das; pen-name of Madhavikkutti) who became Kamala Suraiya when she converted into Islam are memorable. Her stories which deal with the theme of sexuality are *Itanaliyile Kannatikal* (Mirrors in Corridors, 1965), *Chaturangam* (Chess, 1970). Other stories like *Pakshiyute Manam* (The Smell of the Bird) and *Malanceruvil* (In the Mountain Slope, 1955) are symbolic stories on the theme of death.

The early stories of N.P Muhammad present the distressing life of women in orthodox Muslim families. He sarcastically portrays the superstitious beliefs and customs prevalent in the community. His later stories which are steeped in lyricism and satire are *Kili Munnnuvatim Kuvi* (The Cock Crowed Thrice, 1963), *Kurangu* (The Monkey) and *Presidentinte Adyatte Maranam* (First Death of the President, 1969).

**Experience of Soldiers**

Stories dealing with military life belong to a special category in Malayalam literature. Kovilan’s *Boardout* (1953), *Orikkal Mausyanayirunnu* (Once He Was a Man, 1953) and *Marupati* (The Reply), Nandanar’s ) and Oru Kochanujane Kurichu (About a Younger Brother, 1957)*Bhayam* (Fear, 1959), *Pirannal*(Birthday, 1968) are outstanding stories.
**Revolutionary Spirit**

We see the revolutionary spirit in the writings of Kakkanadan, O.V. Vijayan, M.Mukundan, M.P. Narayana Pillai, Zachariah, M. Sukumaran, Punathil Kunhabdulla, Sethu and T. Ramachandran (T.R). They challenged the established and the widely accepted principles of literary composition and approved values. Their stories are neither realistic not sentimental. Their subject-matter is the peculiar human condition found in the present world. In other words they concentrate on the meaningless and fragmentary nature of human existence. M. Mukundan’s *Prabhatam Mutal Prabhatam Vare* (From Morning to Morning), O.V.Vijayan’s *Parakal* (Rocks, 1970) are some examples.


Some of the other important authors of contemporary Malayalam fiction are N.S. Madhavan, Gracy, T.V. Kochubava, K.B. Sreedevi, Valsala, Sara Thomas, B.M. Suhra, Geetha Hiranyan, Rosemary, A.S. Priya, K.L.Mohanavarma, each of whom, with his/her unique approach and style has contributed to the growth of the Malayalam Novel and short story. Writers like Asokan Charuvil, Vaisakhan, Sathrughnen, Unnikrishnan Tiruvazhiyodu, Mundur Sethumadhavan, Sethu, Reghunathan, Aravindakshan and C.V. Balakrishnan have their unique diction.

**THE DRAMA**

Before talking about the drama one should also mention the temple-arts and folk-arts of Kerala. Among the temple-arts, *Koothu* and *Kootiyattam* and among the folk-arts *Thiyattu* and *Mudiyettu* are prominent. Any type of visual art in Kerala, including Kathakali has drawn considerably
from these. Kathakali is performed on the stage and its literature reads like poetic dialogue: nevertheless, as an art form it is different in concept form the proper drama. Drama is a borrowed art form in Kerala. Before the Sanskrit influence in the dramatic literature in Malayalam, the Portuguese had introduced Chavittu Natakam which is a play similar to the Miracle play of the west. The publication of the Malayalam rendering of Kalidasa’s Abhijnana Sakuntalam by Kerala Varma in 1882, is a landmark in the history of Malayalam literature. This Sanskrit tradition continued and classics like Janaki Parinayam (1899), Malavikagnimitram (1890), Uttararama Charitam (1892) and Ascharya Choodamani (1893) were translated into Malayalam in the 19th century. After Kerala Varma Thampuran, the more important translators are A.R.Raja Raja Varma, Attoor Krishna Pisharodi and Vallathol Narayana Menon. Some writers wrote mythological stories in the mould of the Sanskrit drama; the notable examples are Kalyani Natakam (1888) by Kochunni Thampuran, Bhagavaddoothu by Naduvathu Nambodiri, and Chandrika (1892) by Kunhikuttan Thampuran. Kandathil Varghese Mappilai’s Ebrayakutty (1893) is a similar drama on the life of Joseph of the Old Testament. Though a few of these were performed they were not very popular.

Later on the musical drama of Tamil Nadu made its influence in Kerala. Their technique was adapted into Malayalam and it resulted in a good number of musical dramas. Among them Sadarama by K.C. Kesava Pillai, Sangeeta Naishadham by T.C. Achutha Menon and Balagopalan by Kuttamath were popular.

The next and most important evolution of the Malayalam drama is the influence of the Western plays. Though Chavittunatakam of the seventeenth century was the result of Western influence, the real impact of western plays may be seen during the turn of the 20th century. In the beginning some English dramas were translated into Malayalam and then similar classics from French, German and Russian as well. A few original playas were also written in the last quarter of the 19th century, adapting the technique of the western playwrights. The modern period of drama starts with C.V. Raman Pillai.

Plays which were published in Malayalam in the second half of 20th century can be roughly divided into five heads, namely: (1) Historical Plays; (2) Humorous Plays; (3) Social and Political Plays;(4) Psychological Plays; and (5) Other Categories.
Historical Plays

E.V Ramakrishna Pillai’s *Seethalakshmi*, Raja Kesavadasan and Iravikkuttrippillai and Kainikkara Padmanabhan Pillai’s Velu Thampy Dalava are good examples of historical plays.

Humourous Plays

The most notable humorist of the 20th century is E.V. Krishnapillai. Other than Historical plays he has also written many humorous plays and farces. B.A. Mayavi (The Mysterious Graduate), Pranayakkamishan (Commission for Love), Mayamanushan (The Mystery Man), and Pennarasunad (The Land where Women Rules) are his interesting comedies. T. N. Gopinathan Nair’s *Nilavum Nizhalum* (Moonlight and Shade), Parivarthanam (Change) and Akavum Puravum (Inside and Outside) are noted humorous plays. Thikkodiyan and Professor Sivadasa Menon have also written hilarious comedies. Omcheri and Jagati N.K. Achari have produced a good number of humorous skits.

Social and Political Plays

Kocheppan Mappilai’s Mariamma is considered as one of the earliest attempts at social drama in Malayalam. The play tells the story of Christian society. V.T. Bhattachirippad’s Adukkalayail Ninnum Arangathekkku (from the Kitchen to the Drawing Room) and M.P. Bhattachirippad’s Ritumati (the Pubescent) deals with women’s issues in Nambudiri community. Tharavaditham by Cherukad is an impressive social drama depicting certain evils of the undivided family system of Nayars in Malabar. K. T. Muhammad’s Ithu Bhoomiyavanu (This is Earth) portrays the life of the Muslim community of Malabar.

Kesava Dev, Ponkunnam Varkey, and Idasseri Govindan Nair have written plays which are political, than social in approach. One of the earliest political plays in Malayalam entitled Pattabakki (Arrears of Rent) is by K. Damodaran, a Communist leader. This is a realistic and effective political drama.

The medium was so powerful that Ramakshna Pillai’s *Prathima* (Statue) and Vellappokkam(The Flood) were banned by the Travancore Government. Other important political plays are Thoppil Bhasi’s Ningalenne Communistakki (You have made me a Communist), Mutiyanaya Putran (The Prodigal Son, Sarvey Kallu (The Survey Stone), Puthiya Akasavum Puthiya Bhoomiyum
(New Sky and New Earth), *Aswamedham* (The Horse Sacrifice) and Kesava Dev’s *Jnanippo Communistavum* (I will Become a Communist Now) and *Manthriyakkalle* (Don’t make me a Minister).

*Kootttu Krishi* (Joint Farming) by Idasseri Govindan Nair is another play with socio-political background. Ponkunnam Varkey has also written a good number of social and political plays. His *Jethakkal* (The Victros), *Premaviplavam* (Revolutionary Love) and *Kathir Kanakkli* (the Bird which has not seen an Ear of Corn) are worth mentioning.

**Psychological Plays**

N. Krisha Pillai has introduced this form into Malayalam literature. Following Ibsen’s method, he wrote *Bhagnabhavanam* (Broken Home), *Kanyaka* (The Virgin), and Balabalam (Trial of Strength). His other plays are *Anuranjanam* (The Compromise), *Mutakku Mutal* (The invested Capital), *Azhimukhathekku* (Towards the Rivermouth).

**Other Categories**

There are several plays which cannot be included in the above categories. Kainikara Kumara Pillai’s *Mohavum Muktiyum* (Illusion and Deliverance) is an allegoric drama. K.M.Panikkar’s *Mandodari* is a puranic story, written in the *Mani pravala* style.

G. Sankara Kurup followed symbolic style in his plays *Sandhya* (Evening) and *Irittinu Munpu* (Before Darkness). C.J Thoma’s *Crime No. 27 of 1128*, K.Surendran’n *Bali* (Sacrifice), G. Sankara Pillai’s *Snehadoothan* (The Messenger of Love) are important plays.

One act plays and Radio plays are also popular in Malayalam. K. Ramakrishna Pillai and N.N. Pillai have contributed to the field of one act plays. The most well among the people who write radio plays are Dr.S.K. Nair, Ananda Kuttan, P.Bhaskaran, Veeraraghavan Nair, C.N. Sreekandan Nair, R.S.Kurup, N.K. Achari, Idasseri Govindan Nair, P.A. Varier and K. Padmanabhan Nair.

**Autobiography**

In an earlier phase Malayalam literature like any other literatures, celebrated the lives of great person through biographies and autobiographies. Vaikkom Pachumoothathu’s autobiography is

Later several autobiographies came out from the marginalized section of society by questioning these conservative types of autobiographical writings. There are many autobiographies by women, dalits and tribals in Malayalam Literature. Till the 19th century, women had shown their presence in every literary genre, except autobiography. In Malayalam, the first autobiography of a woman is B. Kalyani Amma’s *Oru Vyazhavatta Smaranakal (Memories of Twelve Years)* published in 1916. It is the memories of a married life that lasted for twelve years. K. Revathy Amma’s *Sahasrapoornima (Completing A Thousand Full Moons)* in 1977, the autobiography of a Thiyya woman which got the Kerala Sahithya Academy award of 1980 can considered as the complete autobiography from a marginalized woman in Malayalam. Kamala Suraiyya’s *My Story* (1973) and Nalini Jameela autobiography *Njan Laingikathozhilzli (Me, a Sex worker)* are noted autobiographies which openly talked about women’s sexuality. The autobiographies – Rosy Thomas’s *Ivan Ente Priya C.J. (He, My Dear C.J.)*, Leela Dhamodhara Menon’s *Chettante Nizhalil (In the Shadow of the Husband)*, and Seethalekshi Dev’s *Kesavadev, Ente Nitya Kamukan (Kesavadev, My Eternal Lover)* Smt. Annie; s Thayiyil’s *Idangazhiyile Kurisu (Cross within a Bushel)*, Ajitha’s *Ormmakkurippukal (Memories)* are also important.

1 Thiyya is one of the ‘backward’ communities in the northern part (Malabar) of Kerala. They were considered as the untouchable for long time in the Caste fold system of Kerala.
INFORMATIVE LITERATURE

Literary criticism, biography, essay and travelogue can be categorized as informative writing than creative writing. We will discuss these four forms in this section.

Literary Criticism

Based upon the Sanskrit tradition, the early critics used to look at only the external apparatus like rhyme, rhythm and figures of speech, when literature was essentially verse and composed in difficult language. A break from this tradition was brought by A.R Rajaraja Varma and P.K. Narayana Pillai in the early part of twentieth century. They have showed how the internal and intrinsic quality of literary works should be examined without forgetting the external apparatus which is but a means to that end. However the next generation critics like A. Balakrishana Pillai, M.P. Paul, Joseph Mundassery, Kuttikrishna Marar and Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai have influenced the later generation.

A.Balakrishan Pillai’s Rupamanjari(1937) and Novel Prasthanagal (1947) explain the various branches of literature highlighting the important types quoting examples from European languages and also from Malayalam wherever possible. M.P Paul’s Novel Sahityam(1930) and Cherukatha Prasthanam(1932) explains the basic technique of the novel and short story respectively. Mundassery’s Kavya Peedhika is the first major work which discusses the eastern and western principles of literary criticism indicating where they differ and where they can merge and how a proper blend can be evolved and applied in Malayalam.

Critics such as M.R. Nair, S.Guptan Nair, Sukumar Azhikode, N.V. Krishna Warier, P.K. Parameswaran Nair etc. have blended the tradition and modern approaches in their writings, whereas as critics like M.Achuthan, M.Leelavathi, P.K. Balakrishan, M.K. Sanoo and M. Krishana Nair have assimilated eastern concepts and western ideas of criticism.

Biographies

Biographical writing in Malayalam is a modern development like other literary forms such as novel, the short story and drama. Though missionaries have started some work in the field long before most of the biographies appeared in Malayalam by 20th century. But by the end of the 19th century itself, the first organized attempts were made to write biographies. Visakham Tirunal, a
prince of Travancore, translated some short biographies of Aristotle, Alexander, Bacon, and others from Mander’s *Treasury of Great Men* and requested the great scholar Kerala Varma Valiya Koyi Thampuran (1845-1914) in 1880 to add other biographies to it for the benefit of students. This work consisting of 107 brief life-sketches of eminent men, appeared in 1895. Later, admirers of kings and dewans wrote biographies of their patron. There were also three or four early biographies written in verse about eminent Kerailite, e.g. *Kesavadasa Caritram* by Kottarathil Sankunni (1855-1937).

As already mentioned the main works appear only with the beginning of the 20th century. The first organized attempts to develop this branch of literature were made by Thomas Paul, a well-known publisher. The idea was to public the biographies of eminent Malayalam writers as a series. But only five parts, containing 22 biographies of Malayalam poets and writer were published, most of them were written by A.D. Haridas Sarma.

Some eminent biographers are K. P. Kesava Menon, A.D. Hari Sharma, P.K. Parameswaran Nair, N. Balakrishanan Nair, Moorkoth Kumaran, Kunnathu Janardana Menon, Pallipapat Kunhikrishnan, Vakkam Abdal Khadar, etc. Some noted biographies are *Kesava Pillai* and *Rantu Sahitya Nayakanmar* by Hari Sharma, *C.V. Raman Pillai* and *Sahitya Panchanan* by P.K. Parameswaran Nair, Raja Ravivarma and Sri Swati Thirunal by N. Balakrishnan Nair, *Sri Narayana Guru, O. chandu Menon and Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar* by Moorkoth Kumaran, *Vallathol* by V. Unnikrishnan Nair, *Kumaran Asan* by K. Surendran etc.

**Essays**

Kerala Varma, A.R. Rajaraja Varma, Kunhiraman Nayanar (Kesari), Moorkoth Kumaran, C.V. Kunjuraman, C.P. Achutha Menon and Appan Thampuran, R. Eswara Pillai, K.R Krishna Pillai, O.M. Cherian, I.C. Chacko are the noted essayists of Malayalam literature. Most of R. Eswara Pillai’s essays have been collected in seven volumes under the title Cintasantanam (offspring of Thought). The following 16 subjects are dealt with in the first volume: literature, the writing of books, reading, physical education, human life, moral education, truth, libraries, teaching, war-then and now, eyes, health, old age, morals, eloquence.

Appan Thampuran’s *Mangalamala* (5 volumes) K.P. Kesava Menon’s *Nam Munnott* (We Go Forward), *Purna Jivitam* (A Complete Life), and *Jivita Cintakal* (Thoughts on Life) are important
collection of essays. Essayists like Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai, C.J. Thomas, M. Govindan and V.T. Bhattatiripad are progressive social critics.

Travelogue

Travelogues are very popular in Malayalam Literature. Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar’s Varthamanapusthakam, the first travel account in Malayalam was written in 18th century. S.K Pottekkad is another prominent writer of this genre. His Indonesian Diary, Balideep, Kashmir, Soviet Diary, Simhabhooomi and Nile Diary are well known works. Mundassery’s China Munnottu and C.B. Kumar’s Mexican Natukalil are also noteworthy. Among the recent travelogues, N.V. Krishna Varier’s Putumayude Lokam and K. Bhaskaran Nair’s Amerikayil Poya Katha are to be noted.

History of Literature

P. Govinda Pillai’s History of Malayalam literature was the first attempt in this genre. the most important work on this subject is Kerala Sahitya Charitram by Mahakavi Ullur Parameswara Iyer in five volumes (1953-57). it covers the entire range of Kerala’s literary and cultural wealth, which includes a survey of Kerala’s contribution to Sanskrit literature as well. Other notable histories of Malayalam literature are by P.K. Parameswaran Nair(Published by the Sahitya Akademi, 1958), N. Krishnapillai(Kairaliyute Katha, 1958), and Madassery Madhava Warriar’s Kuncan vare(1962), Kuncanu Sesam(1952, 2 Volumes). All these are critical histories based on the social background of literary production. Another important history of literature is by a team of scholars (ed. K.M. George) Sahitya Charitrannm Prastanangalilute (History of Literature through Genres, 1958). Each genre is taken for special study in this history by a specialist. T.M. Chummar’s history of poetry (Padyasahitya Charithram, 1936) and a history of prose (Bhasha Gadya Charithram) are also important.

Children’s Literature

Literature for children is a specialized category. It is said that there was practically no literature for children in Malayalam before 1947. The first conscious effort for the production of children’s books in Malayalam was made by Mathew M. Kuzhiveli in 1948. By modeling after Arthur Mee’s Children’s Newspaper, he started a weekly newspaper for children, Balan. He launched a
scheme for publishing 300 books for children and in the course of two decades Balan publications brought out over 250 books. Following this other publishers also shows interest in bringing out books for children. The Writers Co-operative society has brought out over 50 books. Popular monthly for children are Balarama by Malayala Manorama, Poompatta, Balayugam by Janayugam publications etc.

**MOVEMENTS**

Certain non-literary factors have influenced the Malayalam literature in its various stage of development. The role of the movements, institutions and organization in the development of Malayalam literature are mentioned in the section.

**Bhakti Movement**

The 16th century witnessed a cultural renaissance throughout Kerala inspired by the Bhakti movement which was a pan Indian movement. Saint Chaitanya had visited Kerala and under his influence the Vaishnava Bhakti dominated the intellectual atmosphere. The translation of the Bhagavad Gita into Malayalam by Madhava Panikkar(14th century) is considered to be one of the earliest in any Indian language. Though this was essentially a cultural movement, the genre poetry flourished under its influence and it resulted in the standardization of the written language. Ezhuthachan’s(16th century) Adyatma Ramayanam, Puntanam Nambutiri’s(16th century) Jnanappana are the best examples.

By the 18th century, the Bhakti Movement had lost much of its fervor. However Ramapurathu Varier (1703-53) enriched the devotional literature by his poem in the Vanchippattu(boat son) metre, namely Kuchelavrittam(The story of Kuchela) . He also gave a free rendering of the Gita Govindam entitled Bhasastapadi in his own musical scheme. Several poets of the 19th century wrote a number of Muktakas(single-stanza verse) invoking gods and goddesses. But is said that their poetry had the guise of humour. The major devotional poets of 20th century are P. Kunhiraman Nair, Ottur Unni Nambudiripad and V.K. Govindan Nair.

**Social Revolt**
Malayalam writers have been subjected to several sorts of discrimination throughout the history of Malayalam literature. Punam Nambudiri(16th century) was called as half-poet(arakkavi) because he preferred to write in Malayalam than Sanskrit. It was in the early 20th century, a lower caste poet Kumaran Asan, (a disciple of Sri Narayana Guru) went out of Kerala to study Sanskrit. He used poetry as a weapon to strongly react against the discrimination towards the lower castes. Following Asan other lower caste writers like Moorkoth Kumaran, K.P. Karuppan, C.V.Kunjuraman, Pallathu Raman and K.Ayyappan also gained acceptance in a literary world dominated by the caste Hindus.

Nationalism

Vallathol Narayana Menon (1878-1958) is the pioneer of Nationalism in poetry. In January 1922, he rejected the royal award from the Prince of Wales in recognition of his literary contributions. His earliest nationalist poem was on the death of Dadabhai Naoroji in 1917. Though he was not an activist, his poems composed between 1917 and 1924 made him the most powerful spokesman of nationalism in Malayalam poetry. G. Sankara Kurup(1901-78) imbibed a blend of Gandhian Nationalism and Nehru’s internationalism. he wrote many moving poems on the partition of India, the newly independent colonies of Asia and Africa and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. However it is interesting to note that the creative prose was not much influenced by nationalist sentiments. Nationalist impact mainly remained confined to journalism and poetry.

Progressive Movement

It is said that inspired by the All India Writer’s Conference held at Lucknow in 1936, some progressive minded writers assembled at Trichur in 1937 and started Jivat Sahitya Samiti (Society of Live Literature). This Samiti soon ceased functioning due to First World War. The first Puroganmana Sahitya Sammelanam (Progressive Writer’s Conference) was held at Shoranur in Malabar in 1944. The organization then formed was called Purogamana Sahitya Samiti. Though the progressive writers’ movement was a failure due to the ideological different among the members, it could establish contacts with sister organizations in other languages. this in a way have resulted in the development of Indian literatures and culture.
Other than the above mentioned forms of literature and the movements, there are many institutions and organizations like Bhashaposhini Sabha, Sahitya Parishad (1932), Kerala Sahitya Akademi (1956), Sahitya Pravartaka Co-operative Society (1945) which also have contributed to the development of Malayalam literature and Indian culture.