

**CULTURAL AND SOCIAL STUDIES OF KERALA SOCIETY,
BASED ON THE NOVELS OF E.M.KOVOOR.**

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ABSTRACT

The socio-cultural interpretations of the Kerala society of the period during the first half of 20th century, as seen expressed in the select novels of E.M.Kovoor is the subject of this project study.

E.M.Kovoor is considered as one among the writers who had keenly analysed the social changes in the contemporary Kerala society of the period and had depicted them in his novels. He pictures the conflicts that had created in the society and among the individual lives by the social transformation. An attempt is made in this project to analyse those elements which had triggered the modernization of Kerala society, in the light of E.M.Kovoor's novels.

The intensity of the social problems created by the complexities of the transformation had amassed momentum and in its whirl, individual lives were shattered. Overcoming such decline, the characters in the novel had resurrected in to a new life. Such life situations are the common in the thread of stories in E.M.Kovoor's novels. Each one of Kovoor's novels revolve around the challenges which the individual members and society were facing in those times.

In the novel "Kadu", Kovoor pictures a peculiar life situation. Emergence of a new native business culture among the Keralites after the fall of the colonial rule of the British is the theme. With the decline of the British, the ownership of big plantations and its management began to be in the hands of the native people. The natives made themselves the new elite class,

replacing the colonial masters. New conflicts started bursting out, as the new masters began to apply their strategies of making profit, which were often in conflict with the interest of the common men. The novel searches the varied facets of colonial modernity.

A similar social situation is portrayed in the novel "Malakal". The lust of men for amassing landed wealth coupled with increased zeal of the characters for leading a new sophisticated life had changed the life situations. Malakal describes how the agrarian life of Kerala got transferred to industrial and commercial forms. The financial development of a middle class farmer, who drops the traditional agriculture and substitutes it with planting of cash crops is narrated in the novel.

The novel "Kodumudikal" discusses the underlying notions of the traditional Kerala Christian community. The emotional intensity of the people to their religion and its influence on their life are being debated in this novel. How the faith had helped the men in surviving the ups and downs of life is discussed with great zest. This highly human oriented novel, which is very much attached to and dedicated to the values of life, analyses the contemporary community in microscopic details.

"Mullu" is yet another novel which focuses on the complicated life experiences of persons. Big business personalities once again play a role in this novel. It depicts the ultimate helplessness which the conquerors of worldly businesses finally face with in their lives. The prosperity in the material life is escorted with conflicts and collapses in the family relations, like a shadow of the earlier. Thus this novel is a discussion in detail about the socio-cultural issues which the new middle class was facing in the society during the period.

The novel "Guhajeevikal" tells us about an altogether different world, where instances and problems of existence are different from others. Migration to foreign land which started in that decades and resultant emotional pain, through which the individuals, especially the migrants were going through, are the core theme of the novel. The migrant life, their

anxieties and pains, which are in live discussion now in the present era were made the topic by E.M.Kovoor, in this novel. The novels were written before forty years. It was the time when we the Keralites were yet to hear or discuss the concept of "diaspora". The concern about such a global phenomena has been presented in its full extent by E.M.Kovoor in this novel by characterizing the life of certain Malayali people who got migrated to America in those days.

E.M.Kovoor has studied the changes that the colonial modernity has brought into the Malayali community. He had also pointed out the social problems resulted there from and how they had created gaps in our social fabric. There is a self introspection seen in his novels as to how the colonial modernity had influenced our land and our relation to land and its benefits. The foreign influence over Kerala society served as an instrument of changing the cordial Kerala society.

Colonial modernity entered into our Kerala society in a number of ways. The missionaries began modern education by setting up grammar schools. Though the main aim of such schools were to train native writers capable for serving the British, that had enabled our men to understand the administrative ideas of the imperial powers. The "Butler English" had gradually given way to "Writer English" and it had given rise to tremendous changes in the society.

The activities of the protestant missionaries had increased the influence of the colonial practices over the indigenous ones. The natives entered into services in plantations. It paved the way for the colonial agrarian practices to intrude into our traditional agrarian systems and to transform it. The economic development which the community has experienced through the new plantation culture had attracted colonial modernity into our cultural fabric too. The natives began to associate with the Europeans, by which our culture has assimilated new life styles from theirs. Thus a new composite culture emerged in our land.

The agricultural and business establishments which started here in our land, imitating the Europeans had flourished abundantly. The coffee, tea, rubber and cardamom plantations and the like enterprises had given quantum leaps of economic development. Joint Stock Companies had added strength to the process of economic exploitation by the new masters and had given rise to new areas of economic activities too. Chitty, Banking and other financial activities were the new areas of economic development. These economic developments had produced great changes in the society. A new society started to evolve from it, in which the new middle class began to play a major role. There were a number of changes in the cultural ethos also. The new generation was keen in following the new practices and life styles which they seen practiced by the European masters. This curiosity of the men to follow the European culture and style seen evident in all their day to day affairs such as dress code, food habits, behavior, manners and also in the construction of houses. Kovoov's novels redraw the community which was influenced by these local historical changes. The novels reflect a century long process of change which the Malayali community of the period had undergone.

E.M.Kovoov is the first to portray the issues and pains of the migrant Malayalis. The novelist was farsighted even a half a century in advance to analyse the related social phenomena. Kovoov's ability to narrate these social phenomena is yet another side of his writings which deserves appreciation. The select novels of E.M.Kovoov will continue to be valid and worth for appreciation as these literary works are marked with close details of the historical ways through which the modern Kerala community had evolved and emerged. The analytical mind which E.M.Kovoov had applied in his novels, in re-presenting the instances which had changed social history of Kerala, deserves special emphasis in this study.

Principal Investigator

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