

The Oxford India Anthology of Modern Malayalam Literature

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1

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Showcasing a range of writers of diverse styles and sensibilities, this two-volume anthology constitutes a selection of the seminal works of innovative writing in Malayalam, the language of Kerala, which has in recent years exerted a profound influence on the Indian literary imagination. The product of a fruitful alliance of writers and translators, this anthology represents a century and more of poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fictional prose by authors from varied social and cultural backgrounds. Both volumes are supported by a general introduction, introductions to individual sections, and biographical notes on the authors.

The contents of this volume, drawn from poetry, drama, and prose, demonstrate a creative struggle to rebuild tradition from a new perspective and signal a phenomenon that emphasizes the status of Malayalam as the language of social imagination.

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

www.oup.com

ISBN 0-19-946515-0



9 780199 465156

(2-volume set)

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Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in India by
Oxford University Press
YMCA Library Building, 1 Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110001, India

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First Edition published in 2017

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ISBN-13: 978-0-19-946515-6

ISBN-10: 0-19-946515-0

Typeset in Adobe Garamond Pro 10.5/12.5
by Excellent Laser Typesetters, Pitampura, Delhi 110034
Printed in India by Replika Press Pvt. Ltd

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B. Rajeevan

(b. 1946)

B. Rajeevan was born in Kayamkulam in Alappuzha district and was educated at S.N. College, Kollam, and University College, Thiruvananthapuram, from where he obtained a master's degree in Malayalam literature. He joined the Collegiate Education Service of Kerala in 1971 and taught in various government colleges till his retirement in 2001. A staunch leftist, Rajeevan has always been politically alert. He was in the forefront of the resistance against the Indian Emergency of 1975–7 and was arrested and tortured by the police. He has been active on the cultural front and has associated with organizations such as the Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi, a forum launched by the Naxalite sympathizers in Kerala, as well as the short-lived forum for secular culture, which offered a broad cultural platform for Marxists of all hues.

Rajeevan's literary criticism of the 1970s involved analyses of the art and culture of Kerala using the theoretical principles of classical Marxism. Though the political positions of Soviet Marxism might have fascinated him to some extent in his early writings, a major influence on his subsequent theoretical interventions has come from the positions associated with the new tendencies evolving in Western Marxism and the New Left. His writings of the period after the 1980s have been marked by their increasing engagement with the postmodern positions articulated by several Marxists and post-structuralists. He is a close observer of Kerala's literary and cultural scene and has written extensively on its history, philosophy, politics, art, and literature. The published collections of his essays include *Swatantryattinte Samagrata* (1980), *Anyvalkaranavum Yogavum* (1990), *Marxisavum Sastravum* (1991), *Jananibidamaya Dantagopuram* (1991), *Varttamanattinte Charitram* (1992), *Eeyemessinte Swapnam* (2000), and *Vaakkukalum Vastukkalum* (2009).

'Ethical Foundations of Modern Kerala' (*Aadhunika Keralattinte Dharmikaasthanam*), an essay originally published in 2000 and later included in *Vakkukalum Vastukkalum* (Words and Objects), provides a new reading of the emergence of modernity and renaissance in Kerala in the context, especially of the interpretive possibilities extended by

of an ethical domain of modernity created by eastern reason. As a new manifestation of eastern reason Sri Narayana dharma in itself constitutes a resistance against the power-and-knowledge discourses of Western colonialism. (It is high time we recognized the superficiality of the argument of the nationalists who looked upon Sri Narayana's asceticism as an expression of colonial servitude in the fissured world of the Hindu theocratic regime of Thiruvitamkur and its hegemonic overlords of Western colonialism.) Since this new dharma of Sri Narayana is a complete negation of the values of feudalism, it also serves as an ethical foundation for the creation of modern democratic values.

The spirit of modern Kerala emerged in this ethical domain, which was a domain created by Sri Narayana and which simultaneously negated colonial reason and feudal values. It was on this ethical foundation laid at Aruvipuram that the unity of the depressed castes in Kerala developed into a political force through a series of democratic initiatives including the civil rights movement, the Abstention movement, the struggle for responsible government and the Punnappra-Vayalar revolt. Moreover, it is because democratic consciousness emerged here via the ethical domain of Sri Narayana dharma, which in no way can be linked to the values of Hindu theocratic culture, that the Hindutva forces, in spite of their best efforts, find it difficult to make much headway in the politics of Kerala.

Thus, if we want to redeem the ethical foundations of modern Kerala and recognize its importance as an unusual eastern political event, we need to liberate Sri Narayana dharma from the prejudices and reductionist interpretations that entangle it. In short, Sri Narayana is to be liberated from the Ezhavas as well as from the Hindu nationalist interpretations of all varieties, old and new. This great ethical philosopher of eastern reason must be sincerely acknowledged as the teacher of all depressed sections, including the Dalits, and of all those who are struggling for democratic rights. This must be a matter of thought for all those who want to recover our ethical energy that is weakening day by day and develop the identity of modern Malayali free from the parochialism of religious politics.

Translated by Ajay Sekher