Chapter 2

Sukul, P B.”The theme of conflict between generations in the novels of I.S. Turgenev and O.V.Vijayan- A Study based on Fathers and Sons and Thalamurakal” Thesis, Department of Russian and Centre for Comparative literature, University of Calicut, 2013.
CHAPTER 2
TREATMENT OF SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES IN THE NOVELS: FATHERS AND SONS AND THALAMURAKAL

Introduction

Art is a specific expression of social consciousness and human activity. Literature is one of the very popular forms of art. The human life is in the focus of every form and genre of art; literature reflects multiple aspects of human life. Conflicts and contradictions of nineteenth century Russian life had provided a great source for creative writers.

“It was a century of conflict and dissension culminating in the establishment of an unprecedented political order. The role of literature in such a society was inevitably markedly different from its function in a more stable period and the demands placed on literature were rather idiosyncratic. And so we find that literature come to play a part that is always latent within any art.”

---

2.1 Changing Social consciousness during nineteenth century in Russia and its reflection in the novel *Fathers and Sons*

Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev’s masterpiece novel *Fathers and Sons* was originally published in 1862 in the Russian magazine *Russkii Vestnik* (The Russian herald) under the title of *Otsyi i Deti*. The novel portrays the typical society of nineteenth century Russia, particularly social turbulence, which happened in the middle of the century. The conflict between the two generations, that of the *fathers* and the *sons* symbolises the political debates between the older reactionaries and younger radicals of that period.

Ivan Sergevich Turgenev is the leading figure in the nineteenth century Russian literature. His writings are deeply connected with the social relations of his age. Famous literary critic Joe Andrew pointed out on his role as:

“Turgenev was the first important political novelist in the nineteenth century Russian literature. No other novelist of the period was able to combine to the same extent insight into contemporary political developments with artistic achievement”\(^{10}\)

Like most of the nineteenth century Russian writers, Turgenev also came from a rich and aristocratic background; nonetheless he is very closely

---

\(^{10}\) Ibid.p.1
acquainted with the life of common people, particularly the peasants and farm workers. His own personal experiences with provincial life provided him with plenty of materials for his literary works.

“Turgenev was vehemently against serfdom since his boyhood, its cruelties had horrified and disgusted him, its flagrant flouting of human dignity had made it appear to him the greatest and most intolerable evil of Russian life – an enemy to be combated relentlessly until it was destroyed.”

Many of the later critics pointed out that, Turgenev’s position against the social evils, seriously affected the Russian society during his age. Most often his literary creations had focused on these issues.

“Turgenev wrote greatly under the influence of the liberation movement that was developing in Russia in the middle and in the second half of nineteenth century, while at the same time his work was in itself one of the essential moving forces of this movement. He was instrumental in forming the social consciousness helping to overcome

delusions, prejudices and false views of reality and contributing to the struggle against the social evil.”

Turgenev’s novel *Fathers and Sons* is also connected with the social realities of his age. The pages of the novel portrayed actual pictures of the changing social consciousness of Russian intelligentsia. The novel was published in the year of 1862. It was an ever memorable period in the history of Russia. The historic declaration on the emancipation of serfs came out in 1861, even before the proclamation of emancipation, when the serfs were granted new freedom, a section of the moderated land owners and groups had voluntarily freed their serfs in the manner of Kirsanov brothers had done in the novel *Fathers and Sons*. The historic declaration was a milestone in the history of imperial Russia. Famous literary critic Glyn Turton wrote on the historical importance of the novel

“*Fathers and Sons* was published in 1862 just one year after the most momentous event in the history of nineteenth century Russia, the emancipation of serfs. At a stroke, the imperial decree liberating the peasantry from gentry, whose land they were obliged to till, loosened the entire structure of Russian society. The events in Turgenev’s novel take

---

place just before the emancipation at a point when land owners such as Nikolai Petrovich Kirsanov were being encouraged by the government to control experiments in economic partnership with their serfs in order to prepare the ground literally for wholesale reform.”

Turgenev dedicated the novel *Fathers and Sons* to Vissarian Belinsky, well known intellect and literary critic of nineteenth century Russia. It was very clear that Ivan Turgenev had some intentions by the dedication the novel to Belinsky, who made his own valuable contributions to the innovative thoughts that stood against social and cultural patterns of nineteenth century Russia. Belinsky was one of the pioneers of social criticism in Russia. Leon Trotsky observed: “Belinsky was not a literary critic, he was a socially minded leader of his epoch and if Vissarion could be transported alive into our time, he probably could be a member of the politbureau.” Trotsky’s words have proved Belinsky’s significant role in the Russian society during the nineteenth century.

It is necessary to analyse the social milieu of the novel, before discussing the other aspects of the text. The novel *Fathers and Sons*

---


represents a particular historical context. The declaration of the emancipation of serfs was just a beginning, there were many social unrests followed by the declaration in Russia. The Polish revolt against the Russian rule was a first sign and a series of student’s unrest were happening in many parts of the country. These social agitations occurred prior to the beginning of the process of political disintegration that led to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Famous critic Richard Freeborn, remarking on the role of Russian realistic novels of nineteenth century, observes:

“The role of the Russian nineteenth century novel as a chronicle and criticism of its time acquired at this point on the eve of the emancipation of the revolutionary dimension. Its revolutionary character hinged both on its public function as a forum for opinion and on its specific literary power to project images of change”\(^\text{15}\)

By the eighteenth century, Russian empire had already became a great European power, despite the fact, that its socio-political structure was very different from that of most western countries. Russia’s vast geographical and demographical features were completely under a unique feudal system. Russia had a long history of autocracy and serfdom under the monarchy of Czar.

Serfdom was the name of the status of peasants under feudalism and it was a condition of a peasant who was not enjoying the rights of a free person. It was a condition of bondage or modified slavery which developed the middle ages in Europe, in the Russia it lasted till the Emancipation Proclamation of 1861.

The social condition of imperial Russia during the early decades of nineteenth century was almost the same as the eighteenth century situation. Czarist Russia’s total population was seventy five million at the time when Turgenev wrote the novel *Fathers and sons*; and the ninety percent of the total population lived in the country side. Around fifty million of the total population of the Empire were privately owned serfs or state peasants. Since the time of Peter the Great, the members of the country’s old aristocracy and elite class gained the status of the gentry (the status of the most powerful members of the society). The Serfdom became the dominant form of relation between peasants and nobility since the middle of the last millennium. Serfdom in Russia developed gradually over many centuries; historians usually trace the roots of serfdom to the eleventh century. Serfdom mainly existed in the central and southern areas of the Russian empire.

The pathetic condition of the social relations and the economic backwardness of the vast nation resulted in a series of social unrest in the country by the beginning of nineteenth century. The nineteenth century is considered as the period of transition in Russian history. The centuries old
social systems of the nation faced serious challenges from the emerging unrest of the different sections of people. The first Czar to rule Russia in the nineteenth century was Paul-I (1796-1801). After the short period of his reign, he was deposed and strangled to be succeeded by his eldest son Alexander-I.

The regime of Alexander-I was a new beginning, he led the vast empire from 1801 to 1825. It was one of the crucial periods of social change in the country. Eminent historian Michael T Florinsky wrote about this period “the accession of Alexander-I was in more than one respect the beginning of the economic and social conditions inherited from the eighteenth century remained practically unchallenged”\textsuperscript{16}

The first half of the nineteenth century was a transitional period in the history of imperial Russia. Existing values and concepts were challenged with the introduction of new ideas. The social changes, which took place in Russia during the nineteenth century resulted in a new historical stage of social development. The nineteenth century in general and the first half in particular witnessed tremendous transmission in almost all the fields of Russian society. By the middle of the nineteenth century, a greater transformation of social structure was underway. Social sections, which had led the Russian society during the period were declining, while new sections rose in their place. The

\textsuperscript{8} Florinsky, T Michael, \textit{Russia: A Short History}. USA: Macmillan, 1964. p. 64
Restructuring of social setup led to drastic changes in all spheres of Russian life. Eminent writer Andrew Joe wrote:

“The nineteenth century in Russia saw immense social change, bringing with it the final destruction of semi feudal society. Industrialisation, the rise of capitalism and the bourgeoisie, increased secularisation all this was carried through alongside the disintegration of old values and believes.”¹⁷

These social developments had made a serious impact on the origin of new radical movements, which have surfaced in Russia by the middle of nineteenth century. The humiliating conditions of the downtrodden people were the representative feature of the pre-revolutionary Russia:

“One notable barbarous feature of Russian society was serfdom, the system whereby estate owners from the gentry possessed, who tilled the land along with the land itself. These serfs’ slaves in effect were some times treated worse than domestic animals.”¹⁸

---


The authorities of Czar Regime always supported the inhuman activities of serf owners and the vast majority of the population continued to live in a miserable life.

“In the eighteenth century Catherine the Great gave serf owners the right to punish their peasants with imprisonment and exile in Siberia, or by sending them into slavery elsewhere, and keeping their parents. He could prevent his serfs from marrying or he could make them marry against their will, breeding them like cattle. He could turn them into a ballet troupe, or have them flogged to death in his stables and without any one showing much surprise in either event.”19

Imperial Czarist Russia was backward in many ways in comparison with western countries. The nation was far behind in terms of industrial development, use of technology and enlightenment of masses. Poor quality of general education and low standard of health care were the common features of Czarist reign. “In general, Russia had more primitive machines, a lower level followed by the general education and culture, poorer roads, worse

famines and more serious epidemics than the chief countries of western
Europe above all.”20

The young Alexander-I, at the beginning of his reign, faced many
challenges – both foreign as well as domestic. Nonetheless, he gradually
earned a prominent place among other European leaders, thanks to his victory
in the Patriotic War of 1812 against Napoleon and his participation in the
European alliance. The close contact between Russia and the West resulted in
a new wave of changes among Russian intelligentsia. The western influence
brought many alien ideas to Russia. These western ideas first of all influenced
the educated youths of aristocratic families. It led to the emergence of a
completely new breed of intelligentsia, which finally culminated into Russia’s
first revolt by the aristocrats – the Decembrist’s Revolt of 1825. One of the
major challenges faced by the young Alexander-I was the French invasion of
Russia, in which he managed to overcome very successfully.

Even though he was liberal in thinking, Alexander couldn’t change the
hundreds years of old social structure of Russian society. One of his chief
advisors Michael Speransky had tried to introduce a plan for constitutional
reform, including the separation of Power among legislative, executive and
judiciary under a unique supreme power and he put forward an idea of state

20 Ibid.19
Duma and its election. But Speransky’s rivals from Russian nobility increased their pressure on Czar Alexander-I to remove him for his realistic and sound plan for final reform of the empire.

Some minor reforms introduced by Alexander-I during the early years of his regime and the educational reform was one among the newly proposed amendment. But the results of these reforms were not enough and it had made many problems in school education and higher education. But the new educational policy helped the nation in another way. As part of the new education policy, many foreign scholars, especially German and Austrian were recruited to Russia and it helped to open the window to western knowledge and thoughts. A section of Russian intellectuals were influenced by the new western thoughts and it resulted in a great divide in the society. The ideological conflict between the new western thoughts and traditional Russian believes became a centre of attraction during this period and the novel *Fathers and Sons* deals with the same theme.

At the early decades of Alexander I’s reign, Russia faced serious challenges from both internal and external enemies. The countries worst social condition was the internal rival. But the external challenge, Napoleonic war (Napoleon’s attack on Russia) had created important results in the social atmosphere of the nation. Alexander had a realistic approach towards the Napoleonic challenge. In 1805, he formed a coalition with Britain and the
Holy Roman Empire against Napoleon but it was not a successful attempt. Around June 1812, Napoleonic Invasion of Russia started. The soviet historians had labelled the 1812 invasion as the opening of The First Fatherland War. The Napoleonic invasion and occupation of Russian lands lasted less than six months and finally Napoleon’s army captured Moscow itself. But bad weather and strategic moves of the Russian royal army under the leadership of General Kutuzov resulted as a serious setback to Napoleon and finally he decided to withdraw from the mainland of Russia. After the Napoleonic invasion Russian intelligentsia increasingly turned to western thoughts. Many Russians travelled to western countries. These people became dissatisfied with the standard of living to which they had been familiarised. Some of them compared the comparatively more advanced and efficient governments of the west and the pathetic home situation. A section of them had been attracted by the liberal or semi-liberal organisation.

Russian soldiers were also influenced by western democratic ideas during Napoleonic wars and these circumstances were the background of 1825’s famous ‘Decembrist’ mutiny. After the crucial Russo –French war an urge became more strengthened among the noble class of the Russian society for liberal reforms. The growth of a new western educated group gave a significant support to the political opposition for radical reforms in the country. A smaller group of educated nobles and intelligentsia of the period had made serious criticisms against autocracy and brutal law of serfdom.
Notable persons like Novikov and Redishchev had boldly raised their voice against serfdom and its cruelties in the previous years of eighteenth century. But they got punished for their brave act, but the deeds of these early revolutionaries continued to inspire the new generation of the country. A section of the new generation founded small groups, which were later known as secret societies and finally it resulted into the Decembrist revolt of 1825.

Most of the Decembrist leaders were from the Russian nobility; many of them had directly participated in the Patriotic War of 1812. Prominent leaders of the Decembrist movement were Prince Sergei Trubetsko, Paul Pastal, Sonot, the former Governor General of Siberia – Prince Sergei Volkonsky and Nikitha Muraviev. Many of the leaders of the mutiny were young guard’s officers, who fought against Napoleon, both in Russia and in the other part of Europe.

During the period of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a series of peasant unrests were reported as a common occurrence from many parts of the Empire. In 1816, under the leadership of six young noble men, all of them were the guards of officers, founded a secret society The Union of Salvation in St. Petersburg. The newly established society dedicated to the reform of Russia and Colonel Pavel Pestel, a cavalry officer was one among the prominent members of the society. Col.Pestel had been educated abroad and he published a famous book Russian Justice. Soon after the society split up
and then it was re-organized. The new organisation was known as *Union of Welfare*. The real objectives of the union were to overthrow the Russian autocracy, to free serfs and to carry out necessary reforms. Seeds of the revolutionary thoughts were included in the slogans of secret societies.

On November, 1825, Emperor Alexander-I died in Taganrog, but the news of his death reached the capital after a week. It became the real source of great confusion. An opportunity arose when a dispute regarding the successor occurred following the death of Czar Alexander-I. His brother Constantine (1779-1831) yielded his succession rights to his brother Nicolas (1796-1855). But without Constantine’s public acknowledgement, Nicolas hesitated to take the throne. This state of confusion was considered favourable to the plans of the secret societies and pressed them to action. The rebel officers raised a slogan of ‘Constantine and Constitution’. In the days of confusion, 3000 soldiers with 30 officers from various guards marched to the senate square shouting the slogan that they wanted Constantine. Nicolas appealed to the mutinies to disperse from the street and when this failed, he ordered to oppress the rebels. About 80 people were killed in the dispute between Decembrist’s and Pro-Czar forces. Most of the leaders of the mutiny were arrested by the rulers. Pestal and many others were sent into exile. The lack of popular support for the Decembrist was the major reason for the failure of the uprising, but it was a starting point in the history of armed struggles of Russia.
There were a lot of intellectuals and artists who supported the Decembrists. Famous Russian poet Alexander Pushkin was one among them. Pushkin was a good friend to many of the Decembrists. In his famous work *Siberia*, in which he voiced for the revolutionaries. He wrote:

“The heavy hanging chains will fall

The walls will crumble at a word

And freedom greet you in the light

And brothers give you back the sword.”

After the failure of Decembrist movement, Nicolas continued as emperor and ruled Russia for the next thirty years.

*Orthodoxy, Autocracy* and *Nationality* were the three basic ideas and the official motto of the czar regime during this period. According to critics, the better translation of those three words of the motto would be The church, the crown and the common people. And in its practical application, it became the crude militant and aggressive nationalism. Serfdom was the inevitable part of this nationalism. Czar Nicolas tried to introduce minor reforms in the complicated social structure of Russia. But it did not make any serious response from the masses.

---

Strategically Russia was not in a strong position during this period. Though it was considered as one of the major powers in Europe, its neighbouring countries became a serious challenge to their imperial aspirations. In central Europe, Russia was bordered by the kingdoms of Prussia and Austria. Prussia was gaining strength but Austrians were declining. In Western Europe, France stood as a major power and they continued their traditional upper hand on the area. Great Britain was rapidly evolving as a great maritime power during this period posing serious challenge to the supremacy of the Russian Empire. Russians had limitations in terms of a strong navy. From the other side, Turkish Empire continued as a local challenge to Russia. The growing power struggle among the European nations had created a tensed situation and it gave rise to a series of crises and clashes which reached to the climax in the Crimean war. The Crimean war has a great significance in the history of Russia. The war was fought between the Russian Empire and an alliance of the French, British, Ottoman empires and the kingdom of Sardinia. There were three key factors behind the war. First reason was the weakening of Turkey, which was generally viewed as the *sick men of Europe*. The second reason was the increasing power of Russians in 1850’s, which led to the third reason – a general fear of Russian Empire among the European powers.

The Crimean war prolonged for three years and concluded in a serious setback and defeat for Russia. The Crimean war once again revealed the
comparative backwardness of Russian power on the fronts of technology. Its
defeat in Crimean war forced Russia into a secondary role in Europe and encouraged it to turn its eyes on eastern side of the continent. There was a feeling that Russia’s old economic and social system, of which serfdom was the main feature, had caused her defeat in the Crimean war. One of the barbarous features of Russian society was serfdom, the system whereby estate owners from the gentry passed the people who tilled the land along with the land itself. These serfs in effect were treated worse than domestic animals. In the eighteenth century Catherine the Great gave a right to serf owners to punish their peasants with imprisonment and exile in Siberia, or by sending them into army. The origin of serfdom in Russia may be traced to the eleventh century; however the most complete form of feudal exploitation enveloped only certain categories of rural population.

The failure of Decembrist revolt and Russia’s defeat in Crimean war had made a great impact on the Russian society. There was a short period of silence after the Decembrist upsurge in Russia. The defeat of the Decembrist movement inaugurated a new epoch in Russian thought. By this defeat the Russian intelligentsia had lost hope of political change and they shifted their attention from political to philosophical questions. Some new trends had appeared during that period.
“When the Decembrists were swept off the scene, there was for a time of silence, but both in St. Petersburg and Moscow a few elect thinkers were turning eagerly to the study of contemporary thought in Europe. The main interest was sociology, and in this field a number of masters, Kant, Fitche, Schelling and Hegel followed each other in succession in Germany.”\textsuperscript{22}

2.2 Emergence of new intelligentsia-Nihilist Views of the youth

By the middle of the nineteenth century a major transformation of social structure in Russian empire was underway. The existing social classes which provided leadership for Russian society began to decline, while new groups were rising in their place. These social changes may have had an important influence on the rising of many movements of social and political protest which arose in Russia towards the mid century. A section of intelligentsia and a small group of individuals began to raise their opposition against the Nicolas reign by 1830s.

As in the past, most of the opposition came from the new generation of the aristocracy. A section of them were friends or familiar to Moscow rulers. By the end of 1840s, a section of Russian intellectuals turned to the way of

\textsuperscript{22} Pares, Bernard. \textit{A History of Russia} NewYork: Alfred Knopf. 1946. page.365
various French and German philosophers in their efforts to further define Russia’s place in history. Famous German philosopher, George Hegel, held a particular attraction for them and his concept of historical progression through the synthesis of opposing forces were applied to the social and political fields. At the same period some academic circles were formed in the capital and they gathered to find the meaning of the existing social system. There were two circles especially prominent in the early periods of Nicolas I’s reign. A section of the group was headed by Nikolai Stankevich (1813-1840) and it included Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876), Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), T. Granovsky and Constantine Aksakov (1817-1860). The second one was headed by Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) and his colleague Nikoloi Ogarov(1813-1877).

During the 1840s, Russian political thinkers and intellectuals were divided into two important schools. They were Slavophils and Westerners; they represented schools of opposing thoughts centred on the issue of which model of development Russian should acquire. The difference between the Slavophils and Westerners however were not always clear cut. Slavophils were a group of educated landowners of Russia, who criticised the westernisation of the nation and preached a return to the Old Russian life. The Slavophils developed their views in ideological disputes, which became aggregated after the publication of philosophical letters by Russian philosopher Pyotor Chadaayev. The Slavophils advocated Russia’s unique
way of development, which was completely different from the western model. They believed that Russian culture was unique and superior to western culture. *Westerners* were advocates of western model of development; they viewed Russia as a European country and wanted Russia to embrace the western life style. The *Slavophils* supported autocracy and opposed political participation; nonetheless, they also favoured emancipation of serfs and freedom of speech. German philosopher Johaan Von Schiller’s influence on the movement was a very important factor. Ivan Kireevsky (1806-1856), was considered as the founder of Russian *Slavophilism*. His philosophical thinking concentrated on the criticism of European rationalism and individualism.

In the later period the *Slavophils* became increasingly nationalist. Many of them ardently supported *Panslavism* after Russia’s defeat in the Crimean war. The *Westerners*, the radical wing of higher thoughts, believed that Russia’s social, cultural and economical development depends on the adoption of western thoughts, technology and liberal government. Alexander Herzen described their ideological disputes, held at Moscow’s literary salon. The representatives of the group rejected feudalism and serfdom in the economy and they stood for new political life and culture and demanded western style of socio-economic reforms. They didn’t believe in the uniqueness of Russian tradition and to consider that Russia and Western Europe were not different. In their approach they were rationalistic and often agonistic rather than emotional and mystical. In the later developments, some
remained moderate liberals, while others become socialist and political radicals – revolutionary Democrats. The philosophy of the early westerners was influenced by Johann von Schiller, George Hegel, Eudwing von Feuerbach, Saint Simon and Angus Comte.

Famous Russian historian Nicolas V Riasanovsky viewed the two major intellectual way of thinking in Russia during the first half of nineteenth century that “The Slavophils and Westerners started from similar assumptions of German idealistic philosophy, and indeed engaged in constant debate with each other, but came to different conclusions.”

Alexander Herzen and his colleagues had influenced by German philosopher George Hegel and they were sympathetic to the ideas of the French utopian socialist St. Simon. Czarist authorities discovered the group’s ideological connections and they were arrested, imprisoned and later exiled in to provinces. Bakunin and Belinsky were also influenced by the German left Hegelianism. Bakunin’s experience in Western Europe helped him to analysis more radical thoughts. There he met the revolutionary thinkers like Karl Marx and Joseph Proudhon and in 1848 he published ‘An appeal to the Slavs’. In this work Bakunin summarised his views on the future of Russia and slavs. Vissarian Belinski was one of the most important literary critics of Russia

during the period who elaborated an aesthetics which was strongly influenced by Hegel as well as French utopian socialists. In 1847, Belinski wrote a letter to famous Russian writer Gogol, where he criticised Gogol’s *work ‘Selected passages from a correspondence with friends’* for glorifying Russian orthodoxy. This letter became a turning point in the literary circle of Russia. In 1840’s the radical *westerners* became more popular through their more developed social views and they began to criticise religion and showed much interest in socialist ideas.

As part of these radical thoughts, some nihilist views also made significant impact on Russian society. The term ‘nihilism’ was used in Russia in the first half of nineteenth century in Turgenev’s famous novel of 1862, *Fathers and sons*. It is the best example for the social influence of the new radical view that the protagonist of the novel Bazarov, a young radical who declares himself a *nihilist*. Nihilism was an intellectual phenomenon of the 1860’s associated with the revolt of the younger generation against all established authority. Nihilism was strongly influenced by the almost universal revival of interest in natural sciences in Europe. The large number of scientific discoveries dramatised the growth of the natural sciences and drew the attention of inquiring minds. Many important scientific works were translated and published in Russia in the late 1850’s and had an influence on radical thought in Russia which can hardly be exaggerated.
Panslavism was another movement, which had made great influence among the privileged minority class in Russia. Actually it was an outgrowth of Slavophilism. Ivan Aksakov was one of the early Panslavists. Other important activists of the movement were N L Danilevski (1822-85), R A Fadeyev (1824-83) and N P Ignatiev. The movement had numerous varieties of Panslavism. The Russian Slavism was very much interested in the expansion of Slavic “kingdom” under the leadership of Russia.

Death of the Czar Nicolas-I in 1855 was a turning point in the history of Russian Empire. Russia’s shameful defeat in the Crimean war proved the inefficiency and cruelty of Nicola’s rule. Nicolas-I’s successor Alexander-II, became Czar when he was 37 year old in the midst of the Crimean war. He had received a fairly good education and could speak foreign languages well. Alexander-II was a man of conservative outlook; he admired his predecessor’s imaginative methods of government. Through Russia’s defeat in the Crimean war, Alexander-II realised that Russia was no longer a great military power. His advisers argued that Russia’s serf based economy could no longer compete with western nations. The new czar began to consider the possibilities of bringing an end to serfdom in Russia. But the influential nobility objected to the idea and they argued against the move. But Alexander’s view was different and he told a group of nobles: “It is better to
abolish bondage from above than to wait until it will begin to abolish itself spontaneously from below."

In the middle of nineteenth century it was estimated that more than half of the forty million Russian peasants were serfs. Most of them were the property of the nobility but large numbers were owned by czar and religious foundations. The centuries Old Russian serfdom had its own peculiarities. The most complete form of feudal exploitation enveloped only certain categories of rural population.

The emancipation proclamation of 1861 was an important milestone in the history of Russia and it is considered as the most important liberal reforms introduced during the tenure of Alexander-II. The emancipation manifesto declared liberation of the serfs on private estates and of the domestic serfs. Through this act more than twenty three million people achieved their freedom.

As part of serious social conflicts many social groups were originated in Russia by the middle of nineteenth century. Almost all groups urged more social improvements in different ways. By the end of the century a major section of these groups became more radical. The most important result of this social turbulence was the division in the intellectual community of the

country which was also reflected in the literary texts. Like other writers of the period, Ivan Turgenev also contributed his own shares to this great debate.

Ivan Turgenev’s awareness of social issues makes his literary creations a kind of chronicle of the middle decades of nineteenth century Russia. It was a period, when Russian economy was moving from feudal system to more liberal and capital based system of social relations. The plot of the novel *Fathers and Sons* is also developed from this particular transition period. The nineteenth century witnessed rapid and widespread changes in the history of Russia. On account of these changes, the new stern thoughts contrary to the traditional beliefs and understanding were looped into the country. The western ideas created a group of thinkers with a new political and logical thought. Meanwhile there was another group of Intellectuals, who upholding the Russian tradition with some what progressive stands. These different intellectual groups deeply influenced the nineteenth century Russian society.

Ivan Turgenev Presented the Particular transition period in his novel *Fathers and Sons*. The character of Pavel Kirsanov in the novel is a representative of the upper class of the Russian feudal society, who is proud to uphold the tradition and at the same time claims themselves as reformists. Evegeny Bazarov, the protagonist of the novel, is a representative of the group who prefers more logical and scientific reasoning based on the western thought. These characters reflect two streams of thoughts, which originated in the middle of the nineteenth century.
2.3 Changing Patterns in the Social Consciousness of Malabar and its Reflection in the novel *Thalamurakal*

O.V. Vijayan’s last novel *Thalamurakal* (Generations) was published in 1997. The novel traces two hundred years of socio-political history of the Malabar. It portrays a traditional Ezhava landlord family and its experience of coping with the caste identity in the upper-caste dominated society of Malabar. The novel is both historical and autobiographical in its approach. The writer himself has admitted that to a great extent, *Thalamurakal* is autobiographical in nature: “It was my father, my grandfather, my uncle and me – my entire family history – that inspired me to write the novel *Thalamurakal*. Thanks to Vijayan’s incisive talent of journalism and his authoritative writing skills, the novel evolved as a detailed study of the social stratification of the then Malabar, especially the caste system. The novel masterfully encapsulates the regional history of Malabar including the caste system, renaissance movements, nationalist movements, religious conversion, migration from Travancore to Malabar and spread of communist movement. It also takes into consideration important international issues of that time, such as – The Second World War, Nazism, political changes in Eastern Europe and Stalin regime in USSR.

Malabar, a district on the western coast of former Madras Presidency, was geographical and cultural entity under British authority in 1792. The word ‘Malabar’ is a semi foreign origin ‘Mala’ is a Dravidian word means a hill or a mountain and ‘bar’ is a foreign word which means country. “The Arab Navigators from the six and eleventh century used the word ‘mala’ for coast and called it ‘Malabar’, ‘Manibar’ and ‘Munibar’.26

Malabar was annexed by the British Empire in 1792 after the fall of Tipu Sultan of Mysore; and Malabar was brought under Madras presidency under the Treaty of Sriranga Pattanom. Unlike, Travancore and Cochin, Malabar had a different administrative system under the British rule. The social structure of Malabar region during the eighteenth century was complex with rigid caste system. The hierarchical structure of caste divided the people into distinct groups. The caste system in Malabar was different from the one found in the rest of Indian peninsula. The caste system in Malabar was ritualized but it was not the Varna model found in the other parts of India.

“A glimpse into the idea of pollution entertained by the different castes in Malabar shows how harsh and inhuman the caste system has grown on this coast. An orthodox Hindu considered himself to be polluted by the touch of a

person belonging to an inferior caste at a certain distance, even touch was not necessary to convey pollution. A Nayadi community member within 300 feet of a high caste person was imagined to convey atmospheric pollution.”

On the top of the caste hierarchy were the Malayali Brahmins (i.e. the Namboothiri Brahmins), who enjoyed social and sacerdotal superiority over other castes. They were the landowner-aristocrats and were known as Janmis in the local tongue. Nair were on the next level of the caste hierarchy after Namboothiri. Nair is a collective term for a set of castes which occupied the middle stratum of the society and engaged with agriculture. Brahmin and Nair were the two uppercaste communities popularly referred to as savarna. Ezhava/ Thiyya were on the third level of caste hierarchy. At the bottom of the society were Cherumar, who were attached to the land as slave labours. Cherumars suffered the most due to caste discrimination and were brutally oppressed by the higher castes of the society. Ezhava/ Thiyya and Cherumar were the Avarnas (i.e. the lower castes). Avarnas were the untouchables in the cast hierarchy of Malabar. Avarna were excluded from the Varna system.

“The caste system which prevailed among Hindus in Malabar was characterized by a social hierarchy peculiar to

---

this coast and by extraordinary rigidity in social
precedence; of course the Malabar Brahmins known as
Namboothiri takes the foremost place”.28

During the eighteenth century, Malabar was predominantly an agrarian society. People depended on agriculture for livelihood. A person’s relation with the land determined his social status, unlike in Cochin and Travancore where the land was owned by the government. In Malabar lands were owned by the upper castes and were transferred to their next generation as inheritance. The colonial authority recognized the landlords as the owners of the land. The landlords sometimes held the lands in their own hands, but commonly, leased them to tenants on rent (pattam) who are called pattakkar. According to the tradition, Malabar’s land system consisted of three components which were Janmis (landlord) the Kanakkar (cultivating tenants) and agricultural worker. The pre-British period witnessed the emergence of kanakkar (cultivating tenants) as having controlling rights over land while the landlords simply held the ownership. Another important feature of Malabar society during the eighteenth century was the slave labour.

“Slave labour was an integral part of the production system of Malabar in Palaghat, South Malabar. A farmer with 35 Acres

required 5 ploughs, 10 oxen and five families of slaves.”29 The conditions of the slave labourers of were pathetic and they were treated as animals. “There is no race or people in India in a condition so utterly wretched, as the slaves of Malabar and Wayanad”30

Under the feudal system a minority of the population owned the vast majority of agricultural land in Malabar. Most of them were Namboothiris and Nairs. Meanwhile a small numbers of low caste people and few Muslims also owned agricultural land during the period. “Under the Jenmi system, as retained by The Company, all the land in the district was recognized as private land owned by one or the other Janmies or land owners. Many of the Janmis were Namboothri Brahmins, but there were also a number of Nairs, a few Thiyyas (Ezhavas) even some Mappilas (Muslim) and Mukkuvas (Fishermen)”31

Colonial rule over Malabar helped the transformation of the society parallel to the rest of the India. The social, political and economic interventions of the colonial powers radically altered the rigid caste based


society of Malabar. The new changes altered the living condition of almost all social sections and classes of this region.

By the last decades of the eighteenth century, Malabar region witnessed more dynamic developments in all spheres of the society. The establishment of British power in Western Ghats by 1792, following The Treaty of Sreeranga Pattanam was responsible for these changes. The centuries long medievalism and traditionalism of the society had been partially destroyed by European contact.

The political system established by the colonial forces led to decline in the social influence of the traditional elites and their privileges that they enjoyed for many centuries. In the new system of administration, the English educated people irrespective of their caste identity were placed in a better position _viz a viz_ the traditional elites or influencing groups. The growth of capital based economy, western education, rule of law, new trading and industrial establishments, new transport, communication facilities and new values were among the important benefits of the colonial rule in Malabar.

Traditional believes of the feudal society were affected by the new changes. Traditionally, Nair community enjoyed the status of military class of society. Actually, the practice of war had been considered as the monopoly of Nair community. But after the entrance of colonial powers, the century long customs had been challenged. They included other castes like Ezhava,
Mukkuva (Fishermen) and Mappilas (Muslims) in their armed troops to accomplish their defence ambition. The European powers, especially The East India Company became the emancipators of the lower caste communities, who enjoyed the equal status with higher caste people like Nair in the Armed forces.

Another major change introduced by the British East India Company was in the sphere of criminal and civil judicial system of Malabar. Earlier, the Judicial and administration system was based on three pillars – tradition, convention and custom. But The East India Company stopped such practices by the commissioner, who enforced the need of regulations for the administration of criminal and civil justice.

The introduction of modern education had played a key role in the transformation of Malabar society. Its pre-British education system was traditional and custom based one. During the period the traditional education reserved only for the elite class of the society. The backward caste people were completely deprived of formal education. With the rise of British colonialism, the Education system of Malabar, moved towards the European way. During the early period of English education, the upper caste people, including Namboothiri and Nair took a stand of negative approach towards the new system. The only caste which was enthusiastic to undergo the new system was the lower caste Ezhava community. Through the English
education an elite section of the community got British occupation and the subsequent economic activities made them an emerging middle class section.

The colonial state authority and the missionary groups questioned the rationale of the institutions and practices prevalent in the society. The missionary groups, especially Basel Mission took a firm stand against the caste ideology; subsequently several downtrodden communities were attracted towards its educational institutions. The low caste Ezhava/Thiyyas had achieved some success in acquiring modern education through these initiatives. Meanwhile, the condition of other depressed classes like Pulaya, Paraya and Nayadies were pitiable. Even the missionary groups failed to enrol them in the primary education because of the ardent opposition of upper castes. These backward communities were not aware of the necessity of education, since the renaissance movements have failed to bring them in to the mainstream of the society. The interventions of missionary groups strengthened the process of modernization of the region.

“In Malabar the dissemination of Western ideas came through English education initiated by the missionaries. Here the Basel mission assumed the leading role in the spread of English education”.  

2.4 Renaissance Movements in Malabar and the New Generation

The colonial policy on Malabar had destroyed the concept of caste-wise distribution of skill and profession. Any caste could join education or any type of job. This shattered the conventional myth and behaviour of castes. The socio-religious, cultural and political awakening of nineteenth and twentieth century had its impact on Malabar society too. The teachings of the intellectuals of this transformative period like Sreenarayana Guru, Brahmananda Sivayogi, Vagbadanatha Guru Deva, Sivananda Paramahamsa and Ayyankali had played a significant role in the transformation of Malabar society. Under the leaderships of these intellectuals many reform movements had been originated in Malabar and the neighbouring areas. These social reformation movements concentrated on the eradication of social evils, especially the caste-based discriminations. A large number of people were attracted to the preachings of these intellectuals, who seriously involved in the reformation process of Malabar and Travancore. It led to emergence of many reformative Movements.

By the last decades of nineteenth century there were some socio-religious groups and individuals active in Palaghat and surrounding areas. Theosophical Society of India was one among these new groups. In 1882 its first branch was established in Palaghat. This Society emphasized on human brotherhood and attracted the attention of a section of the lower castes.
Another important social movement during this period was the Brahma Samaj. By the end of the century they were also established its branch in Palaghat. The Brahmasamajist were the pioneers of the movement for the eradication of untouchability in Malabar. Sreenarayana Movement and Ramakrishna Mission also started their social reforms in Malabar during the early decades of twentieth century. Socio-religious activities started by Sreenarayanaguru at Aruvipuram in Travancore made its impact on Malabar. Arya Samaj, one of the major social movements also started during this period. Their contribution in social upliftment of lower castes during the time of Malabar Rebellion was tremendous. The Arya Samaj supported the Kalpathi Satyagraha, the movement against the caste discrimination. The Kalpathi Satyagraha was a milestone in the struggle against the caste ridden society of Malabar.

The Kalpathi Satyagraha, has an important role in the plot of the novel *Thalamurakal*. The Satyagraha is directly mentioned in the pages of the novel. The Kalpathi Agharam was a strong castle of caste elitism. Only the high class elites were allowed to enter the Agharam or in the streets of it. At Palaghat under the leadership of Arya Samajam, a group of Ezhava community of Palaghat decided to remove these restrictions by walking through the Kalpathi street. When they entered the road, the Tamil Brahmins unleashed a fierce attack on them. This created a wrath among the lower caste people. The angered Ezhavas decided to embrace Christianity. Some of the
Prominent Ezhava families of Palghat converted to Christianity. One of the grandfather’s of Vijayan was also among them.

Brahmananda Sivayogi was one of the major social reformers of Malabar. He was based at Alathoor a place near to Palghat. He was an ardent critic of traditional practice of religion. Vagbhathananda (1885-1934) was another great social reformer of Malabar. He fought against the social evils like caste system, untouchability and alcoholism.

Many other social reformers, including regional and national, have influenced the social spectrum of Malabar during the period of nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The social reformation movements in the neighbouring areas of Malabar also influenced the social conditions of the region in the early decades of twentieth century. Vaikom Satyagraha and Guruvayoor Satyagraha were among these kinds of social movements of this period. The Temple Entry Proclamation in Travancore by Sri Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma was also made some impact on the society.

The migration of peasants in large numbers from Travancore and Cochin into Malabar was a significant event in the history of Malabar. Peasants from south migrated to the upland regions of Malabar. The Syrian Catholic Christians were the largest section among them. The impact of migration on the economy of Malabar needs special mention. Besides importing into Malabar their distinct culture and habits, the migration
contributed largely to the educational and cultural development of Malabar. Large scale production of commercial crops like Rubber, Ginger, Pepper and Areacanut, and advanced methods of cultivation and the introduction of new agricultural crops are some of the aspects to be highlighted.

The social evils like untouchability and inapproachability continued to be a disgrace to Hindu society. The people from backward castes were denied access to temples, schools and places of public resort and there were restrictions even on their freedom to walk along the public roads. In these circumstances a large number of people from the backward castes of Hindu community converted to Christianity and Islam. “As a result of the caste evils many of the Hindus, mostly belonging to backward castes embraced other religions. Many Ezhavas were converted to Christianity and Islam”33

Thus the socio-religious renaissance movements, like in rest of India provided the foundation for nationalist activities in Malabar. The last decades of the nineteenth Century saw the emergence of nationalism in India. The Indian National Congress (INC) established in 1885. In 1904, a conference of INC was held in Kozhikode under the leadership of Nationalist leaders of the region. The most important event connected with the political movement during this period was the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. The Non-Co-Operation

Movement was in full swing during this period. It was particularly strong in Malabar, where the Mappilas of Valluvanad and Ernad Taluks agitated over the Khilafat issue. This struggle is known as Malabar Rebellion of 1921. The Rebellion began as a reaction against the British authority’s approach towards the Khilafat Movement. The colonial rulers tried to crack down the movement. At the beginning of the agitation, in Eranad and Valluvanad Taluk, a number of small conflicts took place between the Khilafat volunteers and the British police. But the movement was spread across the area soon. The Mappila agitators attacked and took control of police stations, British Government offices courts and government treasuries. The Mappila agitators mainly from the peasantry section attacked their oppressors, the high caste landlords. According to the renowned historian Dr. K.N. Panikker:

“In 1921, the clash of economic interest between Muslim peasantry and …. Feudal lords burst into open conflict, the grievances of the peasantry acquired a religious dimension, and ironically a class war against economic oppression took the form of a religio-communal conflict”.  

The British authority suppressed the revolt with an iron fist. British forces were sent to the revolting areas and martial law was imposed in the

Malabar Region. Malabar Special Police was formed for the purpose of cracking down the revolt. This was a very important period in the life of O.V. Vijayan and he has mentioned about this period in his novel *Thalamurakal*. An important feature of the Nationalist movement in Malabar in the early decades of twentieth century was the increasing involvement of peasant and workers. The peasant and workers movements of this period were to a great extent the cause as well as the consequence of the origin of a strong left wing movement. In 1934 the left wing nationalists joined together and formed a new organization Congress Socialist Party; and subsequently, the formation of Communist Party Cell in 1939. The origin and the later development of communist party have also been mentioned in the novel *Thalamurakal*.

The origin and growth of communist movement in Malabar has caused significant changes in the political spectrum of Malabar. Trade Union groups were formed in different parts of the region and they actively participated in the struggles against social evils and colonialism. Through these activities the communist movement made great impact on the people of Malabar. By 1940’s, the Quit India Movement started under the leadership of Indian National Congress. It was also the period of Second World War. At this crucial political juncture, Communist Party of India decided to withdraw its direct struggle against British Empire since Great Britain was an ally of Soviet Union in the war against Nazi Germany. Communists gave more importance to fight against fascism than British Imperialism. The
The controversial decision of Indian Communist Party had made great impact on the political spectrum of Malabar which is one of the discussions in the novel *Thalamurakal*.

The plot of the novel *Thalamurakal* is developed from the two hundred years socio-political history of Malabar. The character of Appukaranavar, who belongs to the eighteenth century generation of Ponmudi family and Chandran, one of the last links of the Ponmudi tharavadu are products of Malabar’s socio-cultural milieu. The character of Chamiyarappan also becomes part of the Malabar’s reform movements such as the national movement; the communist movement etc. is the best representative in this regard. The novel directly depicts Kalpathi Sathyagraha which is an important event in the history of reformist movements in Malabar.

The conversion from backward communities to Christianity and Islam is a major episode in the history of Malabar. The caste discrimination which led to this important social issue is also frequently appearing in the novel *Thalamurakal*. The migration of farmers from Travancore to Malabar was a deeply influenced social phenomenon in the history of twentieth century Malabar. This influential social phenomenon is directly marked in O V Vijayan’s novel. The Malabar rebellion of 1921, which is another major historical event of Malabar, is also presented in the novel Thalamurakal.
The origin and development of communist movement is yet another important historical event is best portrayed in the novel. The novelist clearly pointed out the deviations and falls in the political stances taken by of the communist movement at crucial political juncture.

The Second World War and the challenges faced by the communist movements of the Eastern Europe are also reflected in the course of the novel. The international figures like Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin are becoming part of the novel in different labels.

See... two historic persons ...

Sounds of rockets comes through wind, two heads with fire on tail...the faces which are familiar through the pages of news papers... One of them with a big trimmed moustache, the other one with a cutted moustache of a jocker.\(^\text{35}\)

In short, O V Vijayan’s novel *Thalamurakal* is based on the socio-cultural and political history of Malabar and presenting it in his own angle instead of merely copying the situation what it was.