

## **PROFESSOR JOSEPH MUNDASSERY: A CENTENARY EVALUATION AND HOMAGE**

**P.GOVINDA PILLAI**

**Professor Joseph Mundassery (1903-1977) was a versatile genius of modern Kerala who left his deep imprints in varied fields such as education, literature, journalism, politics, administration, teacher's trade unions and cooperative movement. A talented writer and stylist in Malayalam, a brilliant orator an accomplished agitator for peoples causes Mundassery's varied interests and expertise cast him in the mould of renaissance figure. But the future generations are likely to remember him mainly for the epoch making contributions he made to educational reform and literary criticism.**

**Controversies dogged him at every step where ever he chose to tread- whether it was the college lecture hall, highbrow academic cloister, public platform or ministerial chamber. Though a scholar of deep erudition and person of immense charm and affection Mundassery's demeanor was often seemed defiant and utterances strident. All these created an impression of his being over bearing and self centred which of course was not exactly true. From boyhood onwards, all through his career, he had to fight the conservative church to which he belonged, his literary peers against who he had to establish path-breaking norms of literary excellence to demolish conventional idols, his employer college to assert his rights and views, the entrenched forces of education vested interests who challenged his reforms. Either he consciously choose put up such a militant exterior or he consciously grew into that mould to suit his fighting career. His presence either physically or through ideas was resented, his views were challenged, his self-righteous posture disliked by many, but none could ignore or demean him. That was the quality of his standing, head and shoulders above his peers. All these peculiarities and idiosyncrasies which were all staple for media and clubs would in due course be forgotten, but his contribution in**

the field of education and literary criticism will for a long time be remembered and avidly studied by generations Malayalees for a long time to come

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Unlike many academics and men and women of letters Joseph Mundassery had the advantage of studying both science and literature to which he changed over after science graduation in physics and Chemistry. This unusual combination has stood him good stead both in his educational reforms and literary studies. The former was served from an unbalance weightage to humane his and the latter was enriched by a precision and logic derived from natural science.

Though he was highly competent and popular teacher the authorities of his St. Thomas College of Thrissur found his visit to communist China in the early 1950's when the Mac Arthurite cold war atmosphere was seeping into Kerala Politics and academia. His defense of China and leftwing politics along with his well known anti-pathy to exploitative school and college private managements were more than enough to demand the professors pound of flesh and he was out on the streets without job. Mundassery was not the first teacher of eminence to be thrown out from St. Thomas College. The same fate overtook Prof. M.P. Paul, a great teacher of literature and a name to reckon with in the history of Malayalam literature and criticism. Both Paul and Mundassery had many traits in common and later they were to cooperate in the building up the progressive literary organization and ideology in Kerala.