

**MARXIST PRACTICE: COMMUNIST EXPERIENCE IN KERALA:
1957-2011**

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**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY



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To my Amma & Achan...

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
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This is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History, School of Social Sciences.


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**MARXIST PRACTICE: COMMUNIST EXPERIENCE IN KERALA:
1957-2011**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled “**Marxist Praxis: Communist Experience in Kerala: 1957-2011**” submitted to **Sikkim University** in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in the **Department of History**, embodies the result of bonafide research work carried out by **E.K. Santha** under my guidance and supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Association and fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by her.

I recommend this thesis to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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CONTENT

Introduction	1 - 18
Chapter 1: <i>Marxism as Praxis</i>	19 -79
Chapter 2: <i>Understanding the Context of the First Elected Communist Government in Kerala</i>	80 - 132
Chapter 3: <i>Communist Party in Power 1957- 1959: Theory and Practice</i>	133 - 197
Chapter 4: <i>The Spilt of 1964 and Aftermath</i>	198 - 273
Chapter 5: <i>Liberalisation and the Globalisation: Its Impact and Implications on the Communist Movement</i>	274 - 333
Chapter 6: <i>Culture, Ideology and the Communists</i>	334 - 387
Conclusion	388 - 398
Bibliography	399 - 410
Appendix	i-viii

INTRODUCTION

The Communist Party of India (CPI) won a majority in the State Assembly elections in Kerala and thus came to head the government in April 1957. This, in fact, was the first ever election to the Kerala state assembly after the formation of the state on linguistic basis on November 1, 1956. It may be noted here that the CPI had contested and won elections to the Madras Legislative Assembly from constituencies that fell in the Malabar district (which was later a part of the Kerala state as well as in the Andhra region that was part of the Madras state until 1956). However, it was in 1957 that a communist party would end up forming a government for the first time in the history of the World communist movement, winning a majority in a multi-party parliamentary democratic set up based on universal adult franchise under a constitutional framework. This was unique as it was the first democratically elected communist government in the world.

In a sense, every single revolution is unique; events in different times and space do not repeat exactly the same way. It is, however, possible to draw some broad similarities between events. Prior to Kerala's experience with communism, the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the protracted Chinese Revolution presented distinct blue prints. The Chinese revolution, perhaps, provided a roadmap to the national liberation movements for the Marxists; but beyond that, the communists of different countries had to lay their own road according to the concrete situation of their country. Both the revolutions referred above were armed revolutions against the existing system- whether it was against the Tsar in the case of Russia or against the warlords and the imperialist powers in the case of China. Socialism made an entry into the war ridden Eastern Europe in yet another way. In that sense, the Kerala

experience too constitutes a Marxist praxis. The Cuban, Vietnam and Korean experiences are to be mentioned in this context. Drawing parallels is difficult here. The experience of Chile and Nicaragua, many years after Kerala, where the communist party captured state power through elections, were one where the elected regimes were ousted; it was after a counter-revolutionary coup in Chile and a multi-party election in Nicaragua. In the context of the Structural Adjustment Programme (beginning 1970s) and then the advent of neoliberalism, we see a new set of Marxist praxis. Latin American countries showed the way. The highlight here is that the political praxis of the new Left has been distinct in each country, whether it was in Bolivia, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina or elsewhere. It takes different forms and shades; the indigenous movements, worker run factories, squatters' movement are few examples. The common thread of these movements, perhaps, is the space for democracy and participation. Therefore, the basic premise of this study is that there are a large number of Marxist praxis from all over the world and Kerala's experience with communism or the communist party's experience in the State, in a predominantly parliamentary set up guided by a Constitutional scheme qualifies as one of the Marxist praxis. In other words, this is a study of Kerala's experience with communism as one of the many Marxist Praxis.

The study looks into the experience of the communist party in control of the State Government from a theoretical, historical and strategic perspective. To place the communist experience in perspective, it is necessary to go into some details of the historical circumstances in which the CPI emerged into a political force in the Kerala society; the social reform movement in Kerala in the late 19th and early 20th century, the peasant struggles in Malabar beginning the 1920s, the organisation of the working class and the peasantry by the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) within the Indian

National Congress (INC) in the 1930s and the formation of the unit of the Communist Party in Kerala in the early 1940s and the active participation of the communists in the freedom struggle (here is meant those leaders who formed the Communist Party later but were active for many years before they launched the CPI), bringing the peasantry and workers in the forefront fighting against their social oppression and class exploitation that finally led to the formation of the communist ministry in the state.

The period between 1957 and 1959 (the formation of the ministry and its dismissal) is seen as a phase of learning and understanding as this exposed the limitations of functioning in a democratic set up and re-defined “radicalism” within the structure. Land reforms legislations for agrarian restructuring, administrative reforms and reforms in the education and police policy were the major initiatives by the government. Legislations that sought radical changes in the education system and agrarian relations provoked a violent reaction from the vested interests and eventually leading to the dismissal of the state government by the Centre in 1959, headed by Jawaharlal Nehru. And then there was a split in the CPI in 1964 leading to the formation of the CPI(M). The period that followed was marked by an ideological battle between the two communist parties with both the CPI and the CPI(M) seeking to hegemonise the Left space in Kerala; this, at times took a theological colour too and the CPI (M) won the fight with a robust cadre base. The CPI (M) suffered another split in 1969 with the emergence of the CPI(ML), also known as the Naxalite movement; this too did not affect its prospects in Kerala as such.

While the wounds of the split were still open, the CPI and the CPI(M) had an electoral arrangement and the coalition with other parties (a seven party bandwagon), including the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), formed a government, headed by

E M S Namboodiripad in 1967. This government, however, had a shorter life than the first communist government of 1957; it is also important to note that, this time, its fall was under its own weight rather than any force from outside as in 1959. Most of the coalition partners, led by the CPI, withdrew from the coalition in 1969. Interestingly, the CPI entered into an alliance with the Congress and a coalition government, headed by C Achuta Menon of the CPI came to power in 1970 and it continued until 1977. This continued even during the dark days of the National Emergency and even after it was withdrawn, in March 1977. This may be considered as a period of betrayal by the CPI. The Emergency was period of trial for the Left in India. However, as far as Kerala is concerned, the main resistance to the Emergency came from the Naxalites, who put up a fight during the Emergency along with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

It was during the 1960s and in the early 1970s that the CPI (M) reinvented itself through the various struggles and the party emerged as the mainstream Left platform in Kerala supplanting the CPI. In 1979, after almost a decade of alliance with the Congress party, the CPI had returned to the Left Democratic platform led by the CPI (M) and as a junior partner. And the Left Democratic Front (LDF), a formal pre-poll arrangement with a minimum programme, formed a government in 1980; this government too fell in just a couple of years and once again under its own weight; this time the ‘bourgeois’ democratic parties like Janata (S) and the Kerala Congress, who were part of the LDF, withdrew support to bring the CPI(M)-led government down.

In the late 1980s the CPI(M) indulged in what could be called the ‘purge’ for the first time. There was, indeed, an ideological gloss to it; a debate over the Muslim League and its nature was the ‘issue’. The political line adopted by the 12th Congress of the Party was that the Left and democratic forces shall fight against all ‘divisive’

and 'secessionist' forces that undermined national unity. This was in the context of the demand for a separate Khalistan (for the Sikh people) and the demand for an independent Kashmir and also the debate that arose on the rights of women in the Muslim community over maintenance after divorce, triggered by the Supreme Court judgment in the Shah Bano case and the subsequent amendment to the relevant law. The Kerala State committee, which was in favour of an electoral alliance with the IUML ahead of the 1987 elections to the state assembly, was persuaded against such an alliance keeping the all India concerns. And for the first time, the LDF contested an election without any communal parties including the Christian dominated Kerala Congress. The Party won the 1987 election. M V Raghavan, a top ranking leader from the Northern part of Kerala, was expelled from the party for pursuing a line in favour of an alliance with the IUML. Raghavan's line was more in tune with the rising tide of Hindu communalism across India in the 1980s, marked by anti-Muslim violence and the alienation of the community from the mainstream rather than an electoral tactic. This, however, was not accepted by the party and Raghavan was thrown out along with a large number of his supporters.

The 1990s was a period of crisis for the world communist movement as much as it was an opportunity for reconstruction of Marxist praxis. The collapse of Soviet Socialism and the subsequent collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the era of neo-liberalism sent ripples within the Left in India too. There were attempts from within to re-invent the movement in the context of post-cold war era. Interestingly, this was also the time when the CPI (M) led Government in the State initiated the 'People's Planning Programme' - a radical attempt in decentralization of power, more in the economic sense of the term - which had the potential for a re-invention of its base as did the campaign and struggles for agrarian reforms in the post-independence period.

This study deals with the experience of the People's Planning Campaign in detail. The thesis, titled *Nalaam Lokam*(The Fourth world) from within the CPI (M), led by M P Parameswaran, an ideologue at that time, also had the potential for a churning. However, this was put down with contempt and another purge followed. Parameswaran himself was expelled from the Party in 2003.

It is paradoxical that even while maintaining the dogmatism of the Stalinist era, the mainstream communist parties, especially the CPI (M), also slowly assimilated the culture of bourgeois parties, including pecuniary corruption and factionalism. The study looks into this trajectory in detail and with specific reference to the Kerala unit of the CPI (M). This period, incidentally, was one when the profile of the CPI (M) went up in the electoral-political discourse at the national level. This also includes a stage when the CPI (M)sustained a Congress-led coalition at the national level even while it remained the pivot of anti-Congressism in Kerala.

Definition of Praxis in the Context of the Study

It is important to explain the concept 'praxis' perceived in the context of the thesis in order to have a clear understanding of the term in the concept and practice of it in the thesis. In a simple definition, praxis is the *realisation of a theory*. It is a close correlation between the theory and practice which can even be expressed in terms of unity of the both. This can be easily explained by using the famous maxim of Karl Marx that 'philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it'¹(emphasis in original). There is no better way to describe Marxism itself as a philosophy of praxis; interpreting the world is the theory and how

¹ Theses On Feuerbach, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>, accessed on 15/6/2015. While critiquing on the interpretation of materialism of Feuerbach and others, Marx said that they conceived it only in the form of object and not contemplated as 'sensuous' human activity i.e. practice (praxis) which is the subjective factor.

to change the world being the praxis. In that sense, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* prepared by Marx and Engels, at the request of the Communist League in 1847, is the ultimate illustration of the philosophy of praxis; it is a synthesis of theory and practice. It not only analysed the trajectory of the history of dialectics but also made praxis available to realise the revolutionary act.

In short, a theory is a dead object divorced of praxis and praxis devoid of a theory will lead to mere action without any direction. Thus, the relationship between theory and practice is an organic one. While praxis will have to necessarily begin with theory, its importance is in the manner of its contribution to the further development of the theory. Hence, the relationship between the two is reciprocal. For Gramsci, through a philosophy of praxis one arrives at the ‘equation between the philosophy and politics, thought and action’.² This is what Lenin had stated earlier, in the context of the Russian Revolution - the importance of treating the theory and practice at an equal plane - without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement³. Here the historical value of Marxism is derived out of its practicality (not to be confused with pragmatism). Mao Tse-tung, presented the praxis more from a practitioner’s view point and said: “Knowledge begins with practice, and theoretical knowledge is acquired through practice and must then return to practice.”⁴

For Gramsci, who worked on the philosophy of praxis in some detail, the praxis are no way connected to a ‘mechanicist conception’ of the world; that is what

² Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), p. 356.

³V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (Peking: Foreign Language Press. 1976), p.29. He further said; “a person who is flabby and shaky in questions of theory, who has a narrow outlook, who pleads the spontaneity of the masses as an excuse for his own sluggishness, who resembles a trade union secretary more than a people’s tribune, who is unable to conceive of a broad and bold plan that would command the respect even of opponents, and who is inexperienced and clumsy in his own professional art – the art of combating the political police – such a man is not a revolutionary, but a wretched amateur.” Ibid, pp.156-157.

⁴ Mao Tse -tung, ‘On Practice’, *Selected Works of Mao Test-tung*, Vol. I, (Peking: Foreign Language Press. 1975), p.304.

religion does; but when a ‘theoretical anticipation’ becomes a ‘necessity of real life’, then it became a philosophy of praxis. At “moments in history in which a class or a group discovers its objective and subjective unity in action”⁵ and that is the moment of the unity of the philosophy of praxis. And these moments are not ‘instinctive and violent impulses’ or built on the inevitability factor, but it is a conscious effort to realise a theory into action. In that sense, praxis is the politics of philosophy. Here he places the organic link between the theory and praxis. Once the link has been established, that leads to the realisation of the praxis through practice or action. The link is established when the consciousness of being a revolutionary class has been achieved and this may be identified as the first stage for the realisation of praxis as this awareness will revolutionise the praxis. This will distinguish a man’s action from ‘predestined or the providence of confessional religions.’⁶ Gramsci then stressed that “one could say that the historical value of a philosophy can be calculated from the ‘practical efficacy’ it has acquired for itself. . .”⁷ This formulation explains the validity of Marxism even today.

At the outset, the term ‘Marxist Praxis’ used in the title of this thesis is to distinguish the diverse praxis that were practiced under the broader Marxist formulations and to place the historical communist experience of Kerala as one of the Marxist praxis available for reference. Secondly, the expression praxis is used in the text of the thesis in various places to indicate the different political praxis which were practiced at different historical junctures by the Communists in order to realise the theory- socialism. Indeed, this was a long term project. Hence, the political praxis, in the early stages were aimed at contributing to the building of a People’s Democratic Front, aligning the social forces of change - workers, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie and

⁵ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 327.

⁶ Ibid, p.336.

⁷ Ibid, p. 346.

the progressive section of the bourgeoisie- to realise the People's Democratic Republic, a transitional stage to socialism. This was formulated in the larger framework of the Marxism-Leninism adapted to the objective realities of India.

This study analyses the praxis of the Left, especially the CPI (M), being the prominent communist Party in India and Kerala as well, to see as to how far these contributed to the realisation of the theory. In this context, political praxis like the radical reforms - such as land reform aiming at the restructuring of land relations (that indeed, brought out qualitative changes in the social relations in the State), educational reforms which challenged the regressive practices prevalent in the private education sector and the radical changes brought out in the police policy and so on - by the communists during the 1957-59, its short stint in power in Kerala, has been analysed. These were 'radical praxis', if not revolutionary, that were realised within the Constitutional framework of the country. The significance of these praxis being that they challenged the status-quo which was predominantly socially oppressive and economically exploitative. Yet another important political praxis that has been analysed in the thesis is the People's Planning Campaign, which was presented as an alternative model of development in the context of the changed world and India in the 1990s. In the process, a critical analysis of its practice, especially by the CPI (M), 'contributing to the subjective factor to achieve the social revolution'⁸ also has been carried out in order to present the limitations and the weaknesses and the implications of it to the CPI (M) and its larger vision, socialism. This was also done to ascertain the gap between the theory and practice.

⁸Sitaram Yechuri, 'Philosophy of Praxis, in Left Alternative: Theory and Practice', in Muraleedharan *et al.*, (ed.), *Left Alternative: Theory and Practice*, (Thrissur: EMS Smriti Series, 2015), p.32.

Review of Literature

Victor M Fic's work⁹ is an attempt to apply a conceptual framework of 'theory of peaceful transition' that was developed by the author in his earlier work "Peaceful Transition of Communism in India: Strategy of Communist Party" (Fic: 1969). In "Kerala: The Yenan of India", the author describes the historical evolution of the Communist party from the 1930s and deals with the factors that "propelled" the communist party in power through the ballot. However, he attributes the victory of the communists to the changes among 'communal balance of forces' that evolved in favour of the communists and the exploitation of 'latent sub-nationalism' by the communists. This argument is devoid of a historical sense. Similarly, he blames the 'too rapid pace of transition imposed upon the society' for the fall of the government in 1959 and gives respectability to the reactionary communal liberation movement by calling it 'veritable'. Apart from these, the book deals with the split of the communist party 'under the impact of the Sino-Soviet schism and the Sino-Indian War'; and the united front strategy introduced by the Communist parties as having helped in the electoral victories in Kerala and West Bengal in 1967; the formation and strategies of the Naxalite movement and their 'exploitation of the agrarian unrest and tribal sentiments, according to him, was for the promotion of military strategy'. This book largely fits into the genre of anti-communist literature and is short on historical rigour.

T.J. Nossiter's book¹⁰ is an excellent exposition of the changing electoral profiles and governments in Kerala. Like Fic, he also deals with the evolution of the left, the communist party in power and the agrarian, education and administrative reforms, the communist Party split in 1964, etc. However, they differ a lot in their

⁹Victor M. Fic, *Kerala Yenan of India- Rise of Communist Power- 1937-1969*(Bombay: Nachiketa Publications Ltd, 1970).

¹⁰ T J Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala: A Study in Political Adaptation* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1982).

perspectives and treatment of the subject. For instance while Fic treats the ‘the liberation movement’ as veritable, Nossiter describes it as “the so called liberation movement”. They also differ in the analysis of the electoral victory of the communists; while Fic attributes the victory to a shift in the communal balances, Nossiter attributes it to the popular support that the Communist party enjoyed among the peasants and working class. He elaborately discusses the support base of the party from 1965-1980. However, ‘the political adaptation’ aspect of the communist movement to the existing socio-economic milieu of the State, by and large, is missing in the book. This is more a descriptive work on the electoral history of the Communists than an analysis of the communist movement.

P. Radhakrishnan’s book¹¹ is an excellent academic work that tracks the ‘cause-effect relationship’ between the peasant struggles in Malabar which led to the land reforms and the subsequent changes in the agrarian relations and further to social changes. He locates the epochal struggles of the peasants for over a century in historical perspective. In doing so, he analyses the land system and society which was ‘intrinsically and inextricably’ tied up with the caste system in the pre-British Malabar. He also analyse the impact of the Kerala Land reform (Amendment) Act of 1969. This book is a valuable source for the social background of the communist movement in Kerala.

Dilip M. Menon’s seminal work¹² traces the ‘transformation of rural politics’ in Malabar from a caste ridden society to a communist citadel in a social history framework. He analyses the historical background; existing agrarian relations and socio-economic and cultural interdependence among the landlords (mostly Nayar

¹¹P. Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change –Malabar 1836-1982* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989).

¹²Dilip M Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India, Malabar-1900-1948* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Tharavadus), tenants and the 'untouchable' agriculture workers. It also vividly talks about the transformation of the society in the period between 1934 and 1940, when the Congress Socialist Party and the communists were the dominant forces within the Congress who organised the peasants which ultimately led to the 'erosion of erstwhile rural authority'.

T.M. Thomas Isaac, *et al.*,(ed.) work¹³ on the evolution of Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers Cooperative by a group of impoverished workers in the unorganised sector is yet another important book. The book deals with the epochal struggles by these workers for better wages, against retrenchment and finally the formation of the Cooperative in 1969 when the communist government was in power for the second time. The book also discusses the dynamics of 'shop floor democracy'. It is a relevant reference as it provides an insight to the cooperative movement as such in a theoretical framework and to a new political culture arising out of it. This study is restricted to the cooperative movement, specifically to Kerala Dinesh Beedi cooperative and is not about the communist movement as such; but constitutes a small fragment of it.

There are few other books by Ross Mallick¹⁴ (which mainly deals with the Communist Parties in general and West Bengal in particular), Monobina Gupta¹⁵ (this is more or less a journalist and personal - being a communist activist herself for a considerable time - account of the evolution of the communist parties before her eyes in Delhi as well as in West Bengal), Bhabani Sen Gupta¹⁶ (a detailed study of the Communism in India since the split in 1964 to 1970. It also looks at the two

¹³T.M. Thomas Isaac, Richard W. Frank and Pyaralal Raghavan, *Democracy at Work in an Indian Industrial Cooperative: The Story of Kerala Dinesh Beedi*(London: Cornell University Press, 1998).

¹⁴Ross Mallick, *Indian Communism: Opposition, Collaboration and Institutionalisation*(Delhi:Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁵Monobina Gupta, *Left Politics in Bengal: Time Travels among Bhadrakol Marxists*(New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010).

¹⁶Bhabani Sen Gupta, *Communism in Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Young Asia Publication, 1978).

communists bastions- Kerala and West Bengal in detail), E. Balakrishnan¹⁷ (gives a partisan view of the historical background of the Communist Party in Kerala, that accounts from the 1920s to the formation of the first government in Kerala) and Utpal Ghosh¹⁸ (gives an objective account of the controversial role of the Communist Party of India during the freedom struggle, especially during the World War II).

While all these works are useful and substantive insofar as giving an account of the history of the communist movement, none except one (Monobina Gupta's *Left Politics in Bengal*) is about the communist parties and their experience in the period after 1991. The post-1991 context, the advent of the neo-liberal policy shift in India as well as the period when the Government of India accepted the Structural Adjustments Programme (to tide over a crisis manifested in May 1991) and the rising tide of Hindu-communalism marked by the emergence of the BJP as the largest opposition party in the elections in May-June 1991 and as head of the ruling coalition in 1998, are major concerns of this study.

Works by communist party ideologues is another genre of the books available in the area. E.M.S. Namboodiripad had written extensively on the history of the Communist Movement in Kerala in Malayalam as well as in English and these span over a period from the formation of the Party to the 1990s. He also had written about the history of the First Communist Ministry. The main limitation of most of his works is that they were invariably written to convey the party's line to the cadres rather than studies in history. The first person account by him (*Communist Party Keralathil*) is partisan in the sense that it gives a one-sided history of the communists. While it can serve as a reference guide on events and has valuable information, it cannot be relied

¹⁷E. Balakrishnan, *History of the Communist Movement in Kerala*, (Ernakulam: Kurukshetra Prakashan, 1998).

¹⁸Utpal Ghosh, *The Communist Party in India and India's Freedom Struggle- 1937-1947* (Calcutta: Pearl Publishers, 1996).

upon as a stand-alone guide and especially on events concerning the CPI and the Naxalite movement.¹⁹ Autobiographies of the leaders are another genre of the literature available in the area of study and relied upon.

Objectives of the study

- The overall objective of the study is to analyse the contemporary history of the communist movement in Kerala from a historical perspective and from a Marxist approach. The communist experience in Kerala is studied as one of the Marxist Praxis in the world.
- The specific objectives are:
 - ✓ Make an in-depth study of the first communist government (1957-1959).
 - ✓ Make an analysis of the theoretical basis of the splits in the Communist Party and its implications in the communist movement in Kerala.

¹⁹Under this category comes EMS Namboodiripad's works such as: *Communist Party Keralathil* (Malayalam- Communist party In Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram: Chinta publishers,1987), *Keralathile Communist Prastanam, Udhbhavavum Valarchayum* (Malayalam- Communist Movement in Kerala, The Birth and Growth, Thiruvananthapuram: Chinta publishers,2008, What Really Happened in Kerala; The story of the Disruptive Game Played by Right-Wing, Communists, (1966), Kerala, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1967), *Mantrisaabha Charithravum Rastreeyavum* (Malayalam, Ministry, History and Politics, Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), *The Frontline Years*, New Delhi: LeftWord, 2010, *Nehru-Ideology and Practice*, New Delhi: National Book Centre, 1988 has been referred for the thesis. Mohit Sen (ed.), *G Adhikari, Communist Party and India's Path to National Regeneration and Socialism*, New Delhi: Communist Party Publication, 1964, N.E. Balam, Kerala, *Three Years of the United Front Government, Headed by C Achutha Menon*, Communist Party Publication,(1973), P. Sundarayya, *Why I resigned from G.S and P.B.*, (New Delhi: India Publishers and Distributors, 1991), P Govinda Pillai, *The History and Significance of the First Communist Ministry in Kerala*, (Thiruvananthapuram:2007) K. Venu's CPM, *Fascisathinte patahayil* (Malayalam- CPM on the path of Fascism, Kozhikode, Mathrubhumi, 2012), Dr. T.M. Thomas Isaac's *Vimochanasamrathinte Kannapurangal* (Malayalam- The Untold Story of the Liberation struggle, Thiruvanthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2011), AKG's *Manninuvendi* (Malayalam- For the Land, Thiruvanthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2011). These books, in general, give information on the evolution of the communist party in Kerala, detailed participatory accounts of the various peasants' struggles, labour organisations and the historical agitations, the split in the communist party of India and its aftermath. Among them the prominent ones are the books written by the party ideologue E.M.S. Namboodiripad. These are, in fact, detailed studies of the origin and development of the Communist party in Kerala located in the national and international context. Dr. Thomas Isaac's book gives an account of the liberation struggle in Kerala (1959) which ultimately brought down the first elected communist government in Kerala in the perspective of a communist. K. Venu's book is critical analysis on the changes in the policy of CPM in the last 3 decades and blames the Party for turning fascist.

- ✓ Study the impact of liberalisation and the globalisation on the Left in Kerala, and;
- ✓ Make an attempt to record a cogent overview of the culture and ideology as evident in the formative period of the communist movement and its retreat over a period of time.

Methodology

Part of this study has been carried out using primary sources such as Communist Party Documents and the contemporary issues of the CPI's newspaper, *Prabhatam*, collected from the Archives on Contemporary History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, the AKG Centre for Research and Studies, C.Achutha Menon Study and Research Centre, and Appan Thampuran Smaraka Vayanasala (Appan Thampuran Memorial Library) and C.Unniraja Smarala Library. Newspapers and journals in regional language (Malayalam) as well as in English were the other primary sources. Secondary sources – books, journals and other publications were also used for the study.

As the nature of the research is contemporary, open ended interviews/conversations with Left intellectuals and cadres of the movement and persons connected with it were carried out through field visits. The study also involved reading up theoretical works on Marxism, Leninism and Maoism as well as writings by the New Left.

A study of this nature, contemporary history as it is, is unlikely to escape contestations based on a set of postulations on Objectivity in History. It is likely to be condemned as subjective in that sense. But then, this study was never intended to be a mere narrative or a chronicle of events as Leopold van Ranke sought to define history. Instead, as someone who spent some years associating with the party and yet could not remain innocent of some of its 'deviations', the study is indeed an attempt to find

out where it went wrong (insisting that it did) and thus seek to explain its travails. This, hence, is an attempt grounded in ‘faith’ as much in a sense of ‘agony’. As British Marxist and communist, Richard Crossman explains in his introduction to a compilation of essays by men, whom he calls were ‘ex-communists’ and ‘fellow travellers’; this study should belong to the former category; and as Crossman holds, ‘will never escape from Communism’ because ‘their lives will always be lived inside its dialectic’.²⁰ This confession, in many ways, should explain the purpose of this study: It is neither a narrative of the glorious record of the communists in Kerala nor is it an attempt to present their history as an account of an experiment that failed. It is, instead, an attempt to record the attempts to transform the society in which they lived and which they continue to dominate in the present times. In that sense, this is an attempt at history in the sense that Benedetto Croce put that *all history is contemporary history*. This brief explanation is indeed in order.

Chapterization

Chapter I *Marxism as Praxis*: This chapter is an attempt to list out some of the Marxist Praxis such as Russian, Chinese Cuban revolutions and also was an attempt to develop a framework for the concept *reconstruction of Marxism* to locate the present research in a theoretical framework. While developing the framework for the study, the resurgence of the Left in Latin America against neo-liberalism is discussed in details.

Chapter II *Understanding the Background of the First Elected Communist Government in Kerala*: This chapter deals with the historical evolution of the communist movement in Kerala through epochal peasant struggles and the labour

²⁰See Richard Crossman’s Introduction to *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism*(London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950), pp. 15-16.

movements in the 1930s and 40s. This has also looked into the politics of Congress Socialist Party within the Congress and how it hegemonised the national liberation movement in Kerala. The formation of the Communist Party in 1940 and the historical evolution of the Communists in Travancore and Cochin are also narrated.

Chapter III *Communist Party in Power 1957- 1959: Theory and Practice:* This chapter deals with the first elected communist government in Kerala under the leadership of E.M.S. Namboodiripad and its transition within the democratic system. The chapter analyses the attempt of the CPI to restructure the agrarian relations through land reform initiatives, the reforms in the education sector and its consequences, changes in the police policy and its repercussions and reforms in administrative sector. The dismissal of the government by the Centre in the context of the ‘liberation struggle’ has also been looked into.

Chapter IV *The Split of 1964 and Aftermath:* This chapter deals with the split in the CPI and its implications on the electoral alliance and other fields. The emergence of the Naxalite group in 1969, Congress-CPI ministry (1970-77), the national Emergency and the Left are dealt with. The chapter also covers the period between the CPI’s return of the Left Front in 1979 and 1991.

Chapter V *Liberalisation and the Globalisation: Its impact and Implications on the Communist Movement:* This chapter looks into the challenges posed by the Liberalisation and the globalisation and the response of the communist parties in India to the new objective reality. In the specific context of Kerala, the chapter had looked into the socio-economic and political backdrop of Kerala in the early 1990s, the Peoples’ Planning Campaign of 1996, peoples’ movement for land for livelihood and

the environment movement in Kerala, and the changes in the Party programme in 2000.

Chapter VI *Culture, Ideology and the Communists*: This chapter looks into the concept of ‘talking back’ as it evolved in the cultural and ideological frame as foregrounded by the Communist movement as a catalytic agent to challenging the status-quo of fragmented and unequal social order in the formative period of the movement. The impact of the agit-props and *revolutionary* literature, reading room movement and so on has been looked into. An attempt has been made to trace the subordination of a culture, closer to a Gandhian framework that the Marxists had internalised into their praxis, to consumerism and its impact on the larger socio-political domain.

CHAPTER I

MARXISM AS PRACTICE

Karl Marx, according to Frederic Engels, was “the best hated and most calumniated man of his time. Governments, both absolutist and republican, deported him from their territories. Bourgeois, whether conservative or ultra-democratic, vied with one another in heaping slanders upon him. . . And he died beloved, revered and mourned by millions of revolutionary fellow workers - from the mines of Siberia to California, in all parts of Europe and America . . . His name will endure through the ages, and so also his work.”¹ Marxism has outlived Marx (since his death in 1883). Marxism, arguably, is one of the few socio-economic theories in the world that was subjected to such kind of criticism as well as celebrated as a revolutionary theory which can “burst into praxis” in an inevitable social context. Marxism after Marx brings before us a long line of political thinkers and theorists, who were and are still trying to solve “the riddle of history”² to “change the world” and also rousing the downtrodden to run “the locomotives of the history”³ in the era of finance capital. That praxis remained central

¹ Frederick Engel’s Speech at the Grave of Karl Marx, Highgate Cemetery, London, March 17, 1883, Frederick Engels, ‘Karl Marx’s Funeral’, in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, 1874-1883, p. 467.

² “*Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being – a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution*” (emphasis original). Karl Marx, Frederic Engels, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscript, Private Property and Communism’, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, 1843-1844, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), pp. 296-97.

³ “Revolutions are the locomotives of history”, Karl Marx, ‘Class Struggles in France’, 1848-1850, Part III, Consequences of June 13, 1849, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france. accessed on 14/6/2015

to Marx himself is evident from his statement that “the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”⁴

Many have written off ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ as obsolete and rhetoric. Then there were ex-communists, disillusioned with the existing socialist projects, who cried out to the world about “The God That Failed” to borrow from the title of what can be held as one of the seminal Marxist critiques of the Soviet Union and high Stalinism.⁵ Meanwhile, anti-communists like Francis Fukayama reached hasty conclusions, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, that it is now the “end of history”.⁶ And in another end of the spectrum, there is no dearth of Marxist clerics, dogmatic and persuasive, in their approach and application. The column extends from fossil Marxists to hibernating Marxists. These apart, Eduard Bernstein’s predecessors - social democrats -too constitute a large category.

A lot has been written about the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc since they happened in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The inability of socialism to sustain as an alternative system to capitalism was celebrated; the horrors of the McCarthy era where communists were hounded by the US state, the long war in Vietnam that the US lost in the end, the enormous amount of dollars that the US spent over a long period of time in the name of containing communism in the world, the insidious propaganda machinery and the cold war and the dumping of arms and ammunition by the two blocs have all been put to rest in peace for the time being. The moment of triumph of capitalism led to the invention of new and even vulgar

⁴ Karl Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach, German Ideology’, 1845, Karl Marx, Frederic Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, 1845-47(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 8.

⁵ Arthur Koestler *et al.*, edited book ‘God that Failed’, written by a group of ex-communists and fellow travellers. It contains very touchy and beautiful narrations. Arthur Koestler *et al.*, *God that Failed’: Six Studies in Communism* (London:Hamish Hamilton, 1954).

⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster; Reissue edition, 2006).

theories such as the one by Fukayama or by Thomas Friedman.⁷ A large chunk of the intelligentsia and the academia shifted their research concerns to less problematic and more convenient positions. However, victory processions of liberal democracy were interrupted by the unprecedented economic recession, a backlash of capitalism. In this context of the crisis of capitalism, pronounced since 2008, the debate about socialism as an alternative system has returned, once again, in the discourses, both in the academia and elsewhere. At present, capitalism, even if is not exactly ‘digging its grave’ as Marx prophesised, it “appears more like a nervous disease than the triumphal, over-confident system generating unchallengeable ideologies to buttress further its victories--*democratism, free-marketism, human rightism*”⁸(emphasis in original). Herein lies the importance of the analysis of Marxist praxis, as beyond the Soviet or the Chinese models (read experiments) and put the relevance of Marxism in perspective.

This study is set on the premise that Marxism is still relevant; but not in the orthodox sense; more or less as Brecht conceived it. It is “neither ‘stupid’ nor ‘squalid’. It’s against squalor and against stupidity.”⁹ The plurality of Marxist praxis has necessarily to be acknowledged in the changed/changing context of the world since Marx and Engels premised Marxism upon in their theory. Relying on the concept of plurality of the praxis of Marxism, deriving out of historical necessity (in the context of existing social formations and production relations), the failure of socialism in the Soviet Union is, analytically, the failure of a particular form of

⁷Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat*(New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

⁸ Tariq Ali, *The Idea of Communism*(Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2009), p. 3.

⁹ Brecht stated on communism: “Its sensible, anyone can understand it. It’s easy, You’re not an exploiter, so you can grasp it. It’s a good thing for you, find out more about it. The stupid can call it stupid and the squalid can call it squalid. It’s against squalor and against stupidity. The exploiters can call it a crime but we know: it is the end of the crime. It is not madness, but the end of maddens. It is not the riddle but the solution. It is the simplest thing so hard to achieve. Bertold Brecht, <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-7/new-len.htm>. Accessed on 15/7/2015.

socialism not of socialism itself. We have to analyse socialism as a theory and praxis detaching it from the enmeshment of the Soviet experience of Leninist model and should begin from a benign conviction that nothing is shameful about the past experience of socialism(s); rather they enriched the process of learning. As Randhir Singh perceives it:

Marxism as a social theory and political practice that seeks to understand and change the world is not exhausted with the exhaustion of 'actually existing socialism' of the Soviet Union. Marxism retains its validity and viability as a tradition of social theory within which it is possible not only to do social science - that is, identify real causal mechanisms and understand their consequences - but also do it as an emancipatory project of our times, which remains a socialist project. The collapse in the Soviet Union is a defeat for but not of Marxism. Even as we seek to understand it as one outcome of Marxism, rather of a certain Marxist political practice, we must do so in Marxist terms and recognise its historical specificity, which leaves open the possibility of other, better and more successful outcomes of Marxism...¹⁰

Certainly, the 'spectre of communism' continues to haunt the world; may be wearing new robes tailored to a specific concrete reality in another historical milieu. It is true that some such attempts to interpret contemporary events from a Marxist point of view have invited harsh criticism from the Marxist 'theologists' as being un-Marxist and a lot of labour has been spent debating these time and again. However, this study is an attempt, based on a framework that recognises the plurality of Marxism and Marxist praxis. Here, the question as to who is interpreting Marx or representing him more accurately does not arise. On the contrary, the enquiry lies on the basic premise, as Prabhat Patnaik, one of the eminent Marxists of our times, puts it:

Marxian theory, (in other words), represents not a 'closed system', but a phenomenon that is a continuous process of reconstruction. Even this continuous process of reconstruction does not necessarily make the theory complete at every moment of time. Significant incompleteness remain and may do so for long stretches of time . . . This continuous reconstruction of Marxism, both for overcoming existing incompleteness and for comprehending unfolding

¹⁰Randhir Singh, *Marxism, Socialism, Indian Politics: A View from the Left*(Delhi:Aakar Books, 2008), p. 40.

history, is not only necessary, but is in fact what is occurring all the time, for otherwise Marxism would have been dead by now.¹¹

Thus, Marxist thinkers after Marx, just as Marx did to communism that prevailed before he arrived, interpreted and filled up the unfilled or incomplete space left by Marx and Engels in their works - least treating them as canonical - or essentially, they reinterpreted Marx in the historical context of the time and space of their own rather than in the times of Marx or Engels. This, is in no way, diluting Marxism but enriching it by establishing, time and again, that Marxism is not a dormant, monotonous theory but something live and hence is open to such interpretations; and such an attempt is not to be done as a pedantic exercise but with a view to change the existing unequal world. It ensues on the constructive premise that 'another world is possible', and necessarily negate the contemptuous conjecture that 'there is no alternative' (TINA). Interestingly the following passage from Lenin remains close to our argument on Marxism. In a discussion on *Certain Features of the Historical Development of Marxism*' in 1910, he quoted Engels:

Our doctrine, said Engels, is not a dogma, but a guide to action. This classical statement stresses with remarkable force and expressiveness that aspect of Marxism which is very often lost sight of. And by losing sight of it, we turn Marxism into something one-sided, distorted and lifeless. We deprived it of its life blood....we undermine its connection with the definite practical tasks of the epoch, which may change with every new turn of the history.¹²

In order to develop the framework further, a succinct illustration of the trajectory of the expansion of Marxist theories and perception of praxis may be essential. When Lenin wrote *What is to be Done?* in 1902, he was laying down the basic principles of the foundation of Bolshevism in Russia and thus contributing to the revolutionary praxis, the much debated 'vanguard' role of the proletariat in

¹¹ Prabhat Patnaik, 'The Communist Manifesto After 150 Years', in Prakash Karat (ed.), *A World to Win: Essays on the Communist Manifesto*, (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 1999), pp. 76-78.

¹² V. I. Lenin, 'Certain Features of the Historical Development of Marxism', in *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, December 1910-April 1912, (Moscow:Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 39.

socialism. An essential criticism of that, perhaps, was that Lenin overemphasised the role of the vanguard to an *exclusivism*, even at the cost of democracy, when he says,

*We must take up on ourselves the task of organising an all-round political struggle under the leadership of our Party in such a manner as to obtain all the support possible of all opposition strata for the struggle and for our Party. We must develop our Social- Democratic practical workers into political leaders able to guide all manifestations of this all-round struggle, able at the right time to 'dictate a positive programme of action' for the restless students, the discontented Zemstvo Councillors, the licensed religious sects, the offended elementary teachers, etc., etc*¹³ (emphasis in original).

In his study on the *Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899) or in his thesis *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), Lenin was not only analysing the industrially backward and predominantly agriculture Russia or analysing and locating capitalism in the context of his time, but he was contributing immensely to Marxism that became another *ism*-Leninism later. Controversies that loomed around his contribution is beyond the scope of this work.

The contributions of Georgi Plekhanov, a contemporary of Lenin, and more loyal to Marxism than Marx himself (Marx confessed once that “if anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a Marxist”¹⁴) was an important face of Marxism in the late 19th century. Though Lenin and Plekhanov parted ways in the early 1900s¹⁵ itself, Plekhanov’s influence on Lenin and other revolutionaries of his time is undeniable. Plekhanov’s long treatise on the History of Materialism and the Materialist understanding of History draws attention to “the superiority of materialism over other philosophical system and dialectical materialism over all other forms of materialism...for Plekhanov, Lenin and others, the commitment to materialism meant

¹³ Lenin, ‘What is to be Done?’, pp.106-07.

¹⁴Marx to Lafargue: ‘*Ce qu’il y a de certain c’est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste.*’ ‘if anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a Marxist. This quote is taken from Frederick Engels Letter to Eduard Bernstein in 1882, Marx/Engels Archives, https://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1882/letters/82_11_02.htm, accessed 29/4/2015.

¹⁵ In his article “Political Considerations And Tactical Questions of the Agrarian Programme written in 1907, in a debate with Plekhanov’s on “restoration” Lenin said: “When Plekhanov speaks he is brilliant and witty, he crackles, twirls and sparkles like a Catherine-wheel. The trouble starts when the speech is taken down verbatim and later subjected to logical examination”. V I Lenin, *Collected Works* Vol. 13, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), pp. 326-7.

assigning clear priority to the external order of nature over the internal order of spirit, mind or consciousness.”¹⁶

There were always divergent perceptions that existed on Marxist Praxis. An interesting one was presented by Rosa Luxemburg, Marxist theorist and activist of Germany, in the early twentieth century. If one reads her *Junius Pamphlet*, and her work on *Russian Revolution* together, her strong views on revolutionary praxis (she insisted on ‘larger participation of the masses with revolutionary spirits, in an organic relationship’ that should lead the revolution and the transition “not of a little leading minority in the name of the class”) and also her criticism on Russian organisation of the party - the vanguard - that the kind of organisation ‘will not help to build a socialist society’. It is another matter that it took almost 75 years for her conclusions about the bureaucratization of party in the Socialist Soviet Union to be proved right.

It is pertinent to cite what Rosa Luxemburg had said:

Revolutions are not ‘made’ and great movements of the people are not produced according to technical recipes that repose in the pockets of the party leaders. Small circles of conspirators may organize a riot for a certain day and a certain hour, can give their small group of supporters the signal to begin. Mass movements in great historical crises cannot be initiated by such primitive measures ... The existing degree of tension between the classes, the degree of intelligence of the masses and the degree or ripeness of their spirit of resistance – all these factors, which are incalculable are premises that cannot be artificially created by any party... The great historical hour itself creates the forms that will carry the revolutionary movements to a successful outcome, creates and improvises new weapons, enriches the arsenal of the people unknown and unheard of by the party and its leaders ...¹⁷

In the pamphlet the *Russian Revolution*, Rosa Luxemburg had pre-empted the problems of dictatorship of proletariat, the theoretical base of Bolshevism for it does not provide any space for dissidence. She emphasises the significance of the dynamic of democratic institutions and warns that its absence could be destructive and an influential group of managers will reach to prominence which might lead to

¹⁶ Andre Beteille, *Marxism and Class Analysis* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 33-34.

¹⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, ‘The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis of German Social Democracy’, 1915, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/junius/> .accessed on 25/5/2015.

bureaucratisation. In a way, she could foresee what was coming after almost seven decades. She said:

The tacit assumption underlying the Lenin-Trotsky theory of dictatorship is this: that the socialist transformation is something for which a ready-made formula lies completed in the pocket of the revolutionary party, which needs only to be carried out energetically in practice. This is, unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately – not the case. Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realization of socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future. . . Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconian penalties, rule by terror – all these things are but palliatives. The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion.¹⁸

Democracy is a non-negotiable element of socialist transformation. While establishing an organic link between the two she said that,

Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins.¹⁹

Among the others who contributed to the Marxist lexicon, Georg Lukacs is a name that needs mention for his understanding of the concept of “class consciousness” in theory and practice in the context of class struggle. The years of his ‘apprenticeship’ with Marxism along with his experience of working with the Communist Party in Hungary in difficult times (during the World War I) and his ‘unresolved conflict’ with Bela Kun, another prominent leader of the Communist Party known for his sectarian politics were behind Lukacs’s theoretical exposition of “History and Class Consciousness”. Development of the concept “humanconsciousness as an active agent in social transformation”²⁰ is considered as his significant contribution to Marxist ontology.

¹⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, ‘The problems of Dictatorship’, *The Russian Revolution* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch06.htm> accessed on 25/5/2015.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Beteille, *Marxism and Class Analysis*, p. 37.

Antonio Gramsci, Italian communist and a well-known philosopher of Marxist praxis, invoked great respect in academic circles all over the world, especially in the third world countries (though his writings remain the most misused and abused too). His discourse on the importance of politics (*Modern Prince, State and Civil Society*, etc.) is central to his thesis, thanks to the tumultuous situation in Mussolini's Italy. Gramsci's concepts such as *passive revolution*,²¹ *war of position* and *war of manoeuvre* and that of *hegemony* (Gramsci is most often identified with this) are some of his major additions to the Marxist lexicon and more importantly to Marxist discourse. In the words of Eric Hobsbawm,

Gramsci's writings and examples have helped above all, to crack open the hard shell of doctrine which had grown up round the living body of Marxist thought, concealing even strategies and observations as original as Lenin's behind appeals to textual orthodoxy. Gramsci has helped Marxists to liberate themselves from vulgar Marxism, and in turn made it more difficult for the opponents of the left to dismiss Marxism as a variant of determinist positivism.²²

Similarly, Louis Althusser's concept of *Overdetermination of Contradictions*, which he derived after a thorough analysis of the dialectics of Hegel and Marx, the section beginning with Marx's famous metaphor on Hegel's concept of dialectic, "with (Hegel) it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."²³ He also analyses the existing contradictions - internal and external - as in pre-revolutionary Russia to determine the "accumulation of the effective determinations (deriving from superstructures and from special national and international circumstances)" that made

²¹ Interestingly he gives examples of Gandhism in India and Tolstoyism for "naive theorisations of the passive revolution with religious overtones" since both have "so much in common with the first phase of Christianity (before the Edict of Milan)." Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p.107.

²² Eric Hobsbawm, *How to Change the World; Tales of Marx and Marxism*, (London: Abacus, 2011), p. 341.

²³ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, (London: Verso, 1977), p. 87. Interestingly Althusser says that the idea of inverting Hegel suited to Feuerbach perfectly than Marx. 'When Marx writes *we must discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell* he means that the *rational kernel* is the dialectic itself, while the *'mystical shell is speculative philosophy* (emphasis original). Ibid, p. 90.

the revolution possible in an industrially backward Russia. According to Althusser, “*overdetermination* is inevitable and thinkable as soon as the real existence of the forms of superstructure and the national and international conjuncture has been recognised - an existence largely specific and autonomous, and therefore irreducible to a pure *phenomenon*(emphasis original).”²⁴ His remarks on the concept of ‘survivals’ ‘that cling tenaciously to life’,²⁵ while discussing about the structures (economic and non-economic) that may survive the revolution, need to be explored further, especially in the context of present day Russia; the return to the capitalist system and the survival of the superstructure there.

In the historical context of war ridden China (civil war as well as the inter-imperialist wars), Mao Tse-tung’s endeavour was a difficult one indeed; to theorise the United Front strategy - an alliance with social forces other than the working class and the peasantry - especially the debacle after the termination of the first United Front of the Communists and Kuomintang by the latter unilaterally; and the consequent massive extermination of the communists by the Kuomintang forces in the mid-1920s. He theorised the existing contradictions in the Chinese society and interpreted the universality and particularity of contradiction. Thus the *Principal contradiction* (Althusser’s *overdetermination of contradictions* formed the basis to this) existing among all contradictions was explained (the principal contradiction at that historical point of time was between the Chinese people and the Japanese imperialism) and in turn a revolutionary theory was forged to associate this with

²⁴ Ibid, p. 113.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 114.

the United Front strategy. Indeed the ‘foolish old man could successfully move the mountain’.²⁶

His other major contribution was the stratification of peasantry and placing the peasant question as central by indicating that peasant uprisings are ‘colossal events’.²⁷ Mao understood the potential of the peasantry and the importance of converting them into a revolutionary class in the China of the times that was predominantly an agricultural and rural society. Yet another contribution of Mao to Marxist praxis was his elaborate strategies on guerrilla warfare and the concept of ‘peoples’ protracted war’ (from the very own Chinese experience from the Long March and the war against Japanese imperialism). While debating about the peasantry, the United Front strategy and the role of the communist party in the national war, he was interpreting Marxism to the reality of China then; which was semi colonial, semi feudal, according to Mao.

The grey areas of Marx’s theoretical understanding on the transformation from feudalism to capitalism that were debated over a period of time, particularly between Maurice Dobb and Paul Sweezy²⁸ are also an illustration that Marx’s writings are not etched in rock. Though Dobb and Sweezy held very different interpretations and understanding on the transformation, this does not make one of them less Marxist; the fact is that they applied the Marxist method of Historical Materialism, of which negation of negation is one central element and one of the important aspects that Marx

²⁶ It is a Chinese folklore, Mao used often to inspire the cadres to carry on with the protracted struggle. It is indeed, a very difficult task to move a mountain but an old man could do it with his patience and perseverance

²⁷ ‘On the Importance of the Peasant Problem’ Mao presents three alternatives before the Communist Party. “To march at their head and lead them, to trail behind them, gesticulating and criticising or stand in their way and oppose them”. Mao Tse-tung, ‘On the Importance of the Peasant Problem’, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol.I, (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1975), p.24.

Transforming peasantry into a revolutionary class was his biggest achievement.

²⁸ See, Rodney Hilton, *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, (New Delhi: Aakar Books, 2006).

drew from Hegel only iterate the quest for Marxism as a praxis rather than a doctrinaire.²⁹

The discussion, hitherto, is only indicative but the selection of theorists are not indicative but rather casual. Here the intention is not to summate the texts of each and every interpretation on Marxism which is enormous, but to reiterate the plurality of Marxist theory, to emphasise that Marxism is not a redundant theory, as is held most often (and reflecting in such positions as that of Fukayama for instance), but to demonstrate that the space that Marxism makes available for interpretation and the future possibilities of ‘reconstruction’, renewals and expansion. And also establish the continuity of the Marxist tradition. It is important to clarify, at this stage, that nowhere, does this framework argue that these Marxist theories and praxis were/are infallible or universal or ever try to draw inferences and make generalisations.

With this background notes on the theatrical addition to the Marxist philosophy, it makes sense to study few of the Marxist praxis available for reference. The Russian Revolution of 1917 is presented as the earliest Marxist praxis. There were many setbacks and disillusionment since then. However, it did not stop the world from experimenting revolutionary praxis on and off. The Prague Spring and the march of the Soviet Army into Hungary, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere, did send Marxists such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre into an existentialist dilemma; but they remained Marxists nevertheless! However, such instances that led to the ‘disillusionment’ did not prevent the “storming of the Moncada” by a young group of guerrillas under the leadership of Fidel Castro on July 26, 1953. The failure of the

²⁹ Marx says: “The capitalist mode of appropriation, the result of the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of negation. This does not re-establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property, based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era, i.e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production. Karl Marx, *Capital*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), Vol. I, Chapter 33, p. 763.

attempt did not stop those further endeavours and subsequent establishment of a revolutionary government in Cuba in 1959. All that happened in Cuba, in many ways, did not constitute a class struggle in the strict sense of classical Marxism; their strategy, in fact, defied the orthodox Marxism. The concrete realities of the pre-revolutionary Cuba and the physical size of the country made it possible. The Cuban Revolution will be dealt with later in this chapter.

Likewise, the revelation of explosive information on the excesses of the Stalin era and the experimental reforms of the Khrushchev era did not prevent a Marxist revolution in Vietnam and the long war against US occupation there. Finally the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the biggest blow to world socialism hitherto, did not prevent the Latin American and the Caribbean countries to experiment with Marxist praxis: *Socialism in twenty-first century* is one such idea that we have seen in the post-Soviet Marxist praxis. Failures of the past were learning experiences; not to repeat it. After all, capitalism too learnt from the bitter experiences of fascism, to internalise such forums as the Brettonwoods institutions and the sanctity of the nations' right to erect non-trade barriers (as opposed to the gospel of free trade) and the Keynesian principles and welfare economics.

Thirdly, this study treats the emergence of the New Left in the Asian and Latin American countries –struggles against imperialism – that emerged in the context of finance capital and the neo-liberal onslaught (where transnational capital emerged to shape political institutions across the world) as an expression of renewal or reconstruction of Marxism in a broader sense; this, notwithstanding the fact that these movements, at times, question certain tenets of Marxism.

A broader canvas is prepared to accommodate a large number of Left experiments under Marxist praxis. When “on the one hand, capitalist relations are

expanding to subsume all aspects of social production and reproduction, the entire realm of life; on the other hand, cultural relations were redefining production process and economic structure of value,³⁰ it is natural that new forms of struggle emerge to resist it. The struggles for human rights and gender rights, indigenous movements, movements for land rights and so on largely can be placed under this. Though these movements seem to have no direct economic implications, in reality, they have profound economic and political connotations.

This chapter will look into the major events of revolutions beginning from the Russian Revolution of 1917 to the Chinese revolution of 1949, the Cuban revolution of 1959 that set in motion in different historical context. And this will be looked in the larger framework of Marxist praxis. The chapter will also look into the ‘renewals’ from Latin American countries in the context of neo-liberal policies of the west, especially the United States. And then locate the experience in Kerala as essentially a part of this larger process. It will help us locate the communist experience in Kerala - Communism in a multi-party parliamentary democracy - in the larger trajectory of Marxist Praxis. This will be dealt with in following chapters.

The chapter is divided into four sections and each section will deal with one of the Marxist Praxis; section I is the Russian Revolution as Marxist Praxis; section II is about the Chinese Revolution; section III is on the Cuban Revolution; and section IV is about the Latin American Marxist Praxis.

³⁰Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 2001), p.275.

I

Engels writes with contempt and cynicism about the probability of a socialist revolution in Russia; that was in 1875.³¹ However, only seven years since then³² this outburst was revised, in their preface of the Russian edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1882, Marx and Engels with regard to the possibilities of a socialist revolution in Russia. While admitting that the condition of the peasants deteriorated due to excessive tax burden and repayment of government loans after the emancipation of serfs by Tsar Alexander II in 1861, and for that reason they hold that the ‘revolution is in the offing in Russia’, and according to them the impending revolution will be characteristically a bourgeois led one: “A revolution that started by upper classes of capital, perhaps even by the government itself, must be rapidly carried further beyond the first constitutional phase, by the peasants: of a revolution that will be of greatest importance for the whole of Europe, if only because it will destroy at one blow the last, so far intact, reserve of the entire European reaction.”³³

While critiquing Peter Nikitich Tkatchov’s exposition of a socialist revolution in Russia, Engels says:

This is pure tautology. Every real revolution is a social one, in that it brings a new class to power and allows it to remodel society in its own image. But he [Tkatchov] wants to say it will be a socialist one; it will introduce into Russia the form of society, at which West

³¹ In the Introduction to Social Relations in Russia, Frederick Engels says that “no revolution can achieve ultimate success in western Europe whilst the present Russian state exists alongside with it.” Frederick Engels, ‘Introduction to the Pamphlet on Social Relations in Russia’, Karl Marx, Frederick Engels *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 103.

³² The Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto raises certain questions: “The Communist Manifesto as its object the proclamation of the inevitability impending dissolution of modern bourgeois property. But in Russia we find, face to face with the rapidly developing capitalist swindle and bourgeois landed property, just beginning to develop, more than half the land owned in common by the peasants. Now the question is: can the Russian *obshchina* [village community] though greatly undermined, yet a form of a primeval common ownership of land, pass directly to the higher form of communist common ownership? Or on the contrary, must it first pass through the same process of dissolution as constitutes the historical evolution of the West? Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, ‘Preface to the Russian Edition of Communist Manifesto’, in *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 11-12.

³³ Frederick Engels, ‘On Social Relations in Russia’, in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p.50. This was written on July 1875.

European socialism aims, even before *we* in the West succeed in doing so- and that under the conditions of a society in which both proletariat and bourgeoisie appear only sporadically and at a low stage of development. And this is supposed to be possible because the Russians are, so to speak, the chosen people of socialism, and have artels [here Engels means the village communes that existed in Russia] and communal ownership of the land.³⁴

Engels was, indeed, vary of the possibilities of a socialist revolution in Russia as much he said that revolutions cannot be “made to order just one make a piece of flowered calico or tea kettle.”³⁵ According to him, agricultural production and the social conditions in the countryside were much undeveloped. Only a proletarian revolution in Western Europe, he argued, can save the Russian communes, as it will provide the material needs of the Commune during the transition period.³⁶ For that matter, even the revolutionaries in Russia were not so much optimistic about a socialist revolution in Russia with a huge preponderance of peasants and a large part of the peasants still under the clutches of the landlords and tied to their land. Consequently, the process of their transformation into the proletariat was too slow to determine them as a major force. Traditional means of production and subsistence co-existed with the capitalist development in Russia then. In short the ‘nascent proletariat’ in Russia, according to the Russian socialists, was not ready for a social revolution. For them, like what Engels too believed, ‘their revolution had to spread elsewhere.’³⁷ In the words of Eric Hobsbawm, while weighing up the situation in Russia, a few weeks before the February Revolution of 1917, Lenin in his Swiss exile still wondered whether he would live to see it.³⁸

For the *early* Marx and Engels (in the 1860s), Russia was too immature to bring an imminent socialist revolution as the class conflicts between the capitalists and the proletariat were not pronounced enough for a matured revolution; similar

³⁴Ibid, pp. 43-45.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 49.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes 1914-1991*(London:Abacus, 1994), p. 58.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 60.

to the social conditions that existed in the Western European countries, especially in England and Germany. Yet, the socialist revolution happened in the industrially backward Russian soil and not in England or in Germany. The point is that revolutions did not happen in laboratory conditions. It was the making of the people who find their lives miserable and when and where they cannot carry on with that any longer; that creates the momentum. Russia was going through such extreme complicated circumstances and there existed a large number of contradictions -- between the nobles and the monarch, between the landlords and the peasants, between the workers and the capitalists, between the countryside and the urban area and so on. Moreover, the concept of 'The Great Russian Nation' that emerged in the 19th century was failing its masses in war after war. The defeat in the Crimean War (1853-55) and the humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese war (1905), in the hands of a small nation like Japan³⁹ had shattered the notion of the invincibility of The Great Russian Nation which led to the abdication of Tsar Nicholas. The concept of failing the nation as an important cause for a socialist revolution may not appeal to orthodox Marxists who hold nationalism as essentially bourgeois and hence condemn it.⁴⁰ However, the Russian revolution proved that it is no way *antithetical* to Marxism. A sense of nation and national pride, instead, immensely contributed to the making of a revolutionary situation in Russia. It may be added here, with the benefit of historical hindsight, that

³⁹See Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia*, (London: Penguin, 2013) for an interesting treatment of the importance of the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905 in the emergence of Japanese nationalism and the larger context of Asian nationalism as a whole.

⁴⁰As for instance, Eric Hobsbawm, treats nations and nationalism with contempt. It is perceptible, when he says, "whether there was a genuine upsurge of national sentiment on the left, or whether it was simply that traditional revolutionary patriotism of the Jacobin kind was allowed once again to appear centre stage, having been banished into the wings for so long by the official anti-nationalism and anti-militarism of the left, is hard to decide... What is evident is that the remarriage of social revolution and patriotic sentiment was an extremely complex phenomenon". Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* Cambridge University Press, Delhi, 2013, p. 146.

this feature had led to the rise of fascism in Germany in the post-World War I context.

This, however, is not the subject matter of this study.

On the nature of the Russian socialist revolution, highlighting its peculiarities,

Gramsci said:

This is a revolution against Karl Marx's *Capital*. In Russia Marx's *Capital* was more the book of the bourgeoisie than of the proletariat. It stood as a critical demonstration of how events should follow a determined course; how in Russia a bourgeoisie had to develop, and a capitalist era had to be open, with the setting up of western type civilization, before the proletariat could even think in terms of its own revolt, its own class demands, its own revolution. But events have overcome ideologies. Events had exploded the critical schema determining how the history of Russia would unfold, according to the canons of historical materialism... Why would they wait for the history of England to be repeated in Russia, for the bourgeoisie to arise, for the class struggle to begin, so that class consciousness may be formed and the final catastrophe of the capitalist world eventually hit them?⁴¹

Three aspects - peasant unrest (though not as a uniform class) due to the changes in the agrarian relations in the mid and late 19th century, including the so called reforms of Stolypin, the emergence of a strong working class caused by the industrial development in the same period and the emergence of an intellectual class (that originated from the rich, noble and professional background, broadly left and anarchical in their outlook and were ready to sacrifice their lives for a cause) compassionate to the cause of the exploited classes - constituted the major forces behind the revolutions in Russia in the early twentieth century. The final rupture was the World War I, the endless sufferings that it brought about in the lives of the masses established the fact that the people will not live in 'ahistorical torpor'⁴² forever.

In short, the peculiar social, economic and political conditions in Russia made the socialist revolution in Russia distinct and in a sense was anti-Marx but not anti-

⁴¹ Antonio Gramsci, 'The Revolution against Capital', in *Selections from Political Writings, 1910-1920*, Quintin Hoare (ed.), (London:Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), pp.34-36.

⁴² Engels uses this term to describe the lives of the peasantry in Russia, "the mass of the Russian peoples, the peasants, have gone on for centuries, from generation to Generation, living their dull, unimaginative lives in a sort of ahistorical torpor; and the only changes that occurred to interrupt the resolute condition were isolated and fruitless uprisings and new waves of repression carried out by nobility and government"., Frederick Engels, Karl Marx, 'Introduction to the Pamphlet on Social Relations in Russia', *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 100.

Marxist. The agrarian question was central to them. When we locate the Russian revolution as a Marxist praxis, an analysis of the historical condition of the peasantry - “the most ignorant, undeveloped politically virgin, unorganised *muzhik*”⁴³ - in Russia is inevitable. The agrarian classes in Russia, historically, belonged to various categories - very poor landless farm labourers, poor peasants who had little land but not at subsistence level and so the farm implements; there were the middle peasants and the rich peasants and above all the nobles. The nobles and the rich peasants owned greater part of the most fertile lands among themselves. In a critique of M. Shanin’s analysis on the agrarian question, which did not consider ‘the peculiar forms in which feudalist and capitalist features are interwoven in Russian agriculture’, Lenin said:

The main and fundamental obstacle to the development of the productive forces in Russian agriculture is the survivals of serfdom, ie, primary labour services and bondage, then feudalist taxes, the peasants’ inequality in the matter of civic rights, his degraded status in relation to the higher estate of the society. The process of emancipating Russia from medievalism has been dragging out too long because labour service and bondage has dragged too long.⁴⁴

Even in the end of the nineteenth century, strong currents of medieval landlordism were evident in the social relations in Russia. Peasant unrest and massive migration, in the middle of the 19th century, forced Alexander II to the ‘emancipation of the serfs’ in 1861 as he thought ‘it is better to abolish serfdom from above than wait for it to abolish itself from below’.⁴⁵ However, such emancipation-from-above, rather than bringing any relief to the peasants, only furthered their sufferings and their expropriation. Lenin discusses about the deplorable condition of the peasants as follows:

⁴³ V I Lenin, ‘On the Nature of Russian Revolution’, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.136. Lenin was critiquing the pamphlet of M Shanin *Municipalisation or Division for Private Property* (Vilna, 1907).

⁴⁵ Richard Overy, *Complete History of the World* (London: Harper Collins, 2007), p.55. This reform was followed by a series of reforms- the local government (Zemstro) reform in 1864, overhauling the legal system in the Western lines in the same year and revamping the army followed by industrialization.

Actually the peasants emancipated *from* the land, inasmuch as the plot they had tilled for centuries were ruthlessly cut down and hundreds of thousands of peasants were deprived of all their land and settled on a quarter or beggars' allotment. In point of fact, the peasants were doubly robbed: not only were their plots of land cut down, but they have to pay 'redemption' money for the land left to them, and which had always been there in their possession; the redemption price was far above the actual value of the land.⁴⁶

Lack of subsistence level lands, implements and the further dependency of the peasants on the landlords through the practice of labour service system which were followed subsequently by the notorious agrarian policies of Stolypin and the government's new settlement policy,⁴⁷ along with the extreme exploitation by the usurers forced the peasants into a situation where there was no going back to the old system. Their loyalty to the Monarchy had also become a thing in the past.

Meanwhile in the urban centres, the industrial reforms in the mid and the late nineteenth century under Sergi Witte, witnessed the emergence of large number of workers, though still nascent and yet to emerge as a class for itself in Max's terms. The metal and textile industry were the largest, but the living and working conditions of the workmen was too poor compared with that of their counterparts in the Western European countries. This was in spite of the emergence of trade unions to ventilate the grievance which was a need of the bourgeoisies too. As Karl Marx and Frederick Engels rightly pointed out:

At this stage the labourers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition. If anywhere they unite to form more compact bodies, this is not yet the consequences of their own active union, but the union of the bourgeoisie, which class in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the whole proletariat in motion, and is moreover yet, for a time, able to do so.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ V I Lenin, 'The Workers' Party and Peasantry', *Collected Works*, Vol.4, 1898-April 1901, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) p. 420.

⁴⁷ New settlement policy [Resettlement policy] of the Government and the subsequent high level of migration to places like Siberia." the number of settlers increased after 1905 to an average of half a million a year. Yes, by 1908, the migration wave reached its highest point—665,000 settlers in one year. . . This gigantic wave of returning settlers reveals the desperate suffering, ruin and destitution of the peasants who sold everything at home in order to go to Siberia, and who are now forced to come back from Siberia completely ruined and pauperised." V I Lenin, 'The agrarian policy of the present government', *Collected works*, vol. 19, p. 184.

⁴⁸ Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 54.

Finally, when the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was founded in 1898, workers began to rally around it, however incoherent the idea was.

Gradually, the workers developed a shared consciousness and this began to show in the increased number of strikes for political demands.⁴⁹ The point is that the incoherent and scattered working class and the ignorant peasantry, together, could pull out a revolution in 1905 which was a dress rehearsal for the 1917 revolution; the ones who participated in it did not attempt to theorise it or debate over the nature of the revolution - bourgeois or otherwise. It was a culmination of so many factors, which rendered the situation overdue for a revolutionary outburst - the political autocracy of the Tsars, the revolt of the 'Decemberists'⁵⁰ in 1825 and the consequent formation of secret police services such as 'Third Department' set up in 1826 and the large scale oppression that followed, the defeat in the Crimean war of 1853-55, the repercussions of the agricultural reforms of Alexander II, the emergence of radical groups such as People's Will (that assassinated Alexander II in 1881) and the men hounded by the Okhrana Secret Police that was set up in 1881, the famine of 1891-92 which affected 30 million peasants, Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 and the endless misery that ensued, exiles, prisons, executions, protests against excessive taxation, the endless exploitation by the usurers, oppression of the peasants; accumulation of all these historically objective conditions culminated in the "bloody Sunday".⁵¹ A clearer picture of these was provided by Maxim Gorky when he

⁴⁹Number of Striking workers in 1911 and 1912 were 105,110 and 1,062,720 (More than half of the workers-51.7%) respectively. Out of these strikes, 41.6 % for political reasons and 10.1% for economic reasons. V I Lenin, 'Factory Owners on Workers strike', *Collected works* Vol. 19, p. 128.

⁵⁰ The Decemberists were a group of people, mainly from the army, influenced by the western ideas of liberalism revolted against the Tsar Nicholas I in 1825; however, this was suppressed brutally. The political oppression continued and in 1826, a secret police department the "Third Department", was set up for this purpose.

⁵¹ The reference is about the 9th January police firing at peaceful demonstrators at Winter Palace at St.Petersburg.

spoke about the cruelty of the State on the striking masses in a letter to Count Lev Nikolayevich (Lev Tolstoy) on March 5, 1905, and in his own words:

In these grim times when blood is flowing on the soil of your country, and when hundreds and thousands of decent, honest people are dying for the right to live like human beings instead of cattle, you whose word is heeded by the whole world, you find it possible merely to repeat once again the fundamental idea behind your philosophy: "Moral perfection of individuals- this is the aim and meaning of all people- this is the aim and meaning of life for all people". . . is it possible for a man to occupy himself with morally perfecting his character at a time when man and women were being shot down in the streets and when for some time after the shooting, no one is permitted to pick up the wounded.⁵²

The fact is that the 1905 revolution shed enough blood for the October revolution of 1917 too.

Yet another factor was the emergence of an intelligentsia who were pro-poor and hence pro-left during the 19th century and their paramount influence on the lives of the concerned people. They contributed immensely to the revolutionary perceptions of praxis in Russia, irrespective of the fact that they belonged to different schools of thought - anarchism, populism or orthodox Marxism. Universities, especially, the St. Petersburg University and Moscow University were the breeding ground for their ideas. A line of political thinkers as well as activists such as Alexander Herzen, Bakunin (Mikhail Alexandrovich) and Nikolai Chernyshevsky⁵³ influenced the thought process of the people.

It was those who belonged to the populist school of thought (*narodnichestvo*), described as the 'romantic utopia' by Lenin, who were 'the first to pose the question of the economic contradictions of capitalism in Russia ... it was the first intellectual

⁵² Maxim Gorki, 'Letter to Lev Tolstoy, March 5, 1905', in *Letters* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), p.13.

⁵³, Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Golden Age*, Vol. 2, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 314. Alexander Herzen, believed that the Russia will transform/transcend to socialism through village communes, emancipation of peasants with land, peasant self -government and traditional rights of the peasants to land), Bakunin (Mikhail Alexandrovich (1814-1876) was the founder of Russian populism. He was a revolutionary and anarchist and his *State and Anarchy* (1873) had a great influence of the Russians radicals. Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) was a role model to a generation of youth in Russia. Influenced by western liberalism, Chernyshevsky believed in the "Europeanization of Russia, the overthrow of autocracy, political freedom, universal education and the emancipation of peasants." His famous work is *What is to be Done?* Published in 1862.

movement in Russia to be infiltrated by Marxism⁵⁴ and this school had a major role in instilling revolutionary ideas among the youth. They were all inherently against the exploitative and oppressive Tsardom, the Orthodox Church and most of them romanticised the village commune of the rural people.⁵⁵ They did not consider the development of capitalism in Russia as an inevitable step towards progress; nor were they of the view that only such a development will ripen the situation for a socialist revolution. They viewed capitalism as evil which will destroy the village commune, affect the small scale industries and the division of labour and held that such development essentially “leads to the spiritual degradation and destroys the possibilities of the all-round development of individual.”⁵⁶ Whether or not these thoughts were Marxist (or even un-Marxist and Bohemian), the fact is that they contributed immensely to the revolutionary consciousness of the intelligentsia in Russia and thus prepared the soil ready for action.⁵⁷

This was the historical context of the Russian Revolution and Lenin theorised these objective realities from within the framework of Marxism and the revolutionary theory burst into a revolutionary practice when the concrete situation demanded a social revolution.

To conclude, the nature of the limited edition of the Russian revolution was that Russia had accumulated the largest sum of the historical contradictions then possible; for it was at the same time the most backward and most advanced nation in Europe, a gigantic contradiction which its divided ruling classes could neither avoid

⁵⁴ Lenin on the importance of narodniki, cited in Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol.2,p.317. Pyotr Lavrov, Bakuin, N.K. Mikhailovsky, P.N.Tkachov, V.P. Vorontsov in the mid and late 19th century belonged to this school.

⁵⁵ Even the Communist Manifesto (1882) reiterates the importance of village communes (obshchina) in the event of Russian revolution.

⁵⁶ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 2, p. 321.

⁵⁷ In 1881, The People's Will party (Narodnaya Volya), a radical group, which was formed in 1879 had assassinated the Tsar Alexander II in 1881 to liberate the people from the dictatorship of the Tsars. Consequently, A.I Zhelyabov and Sofya Perovskya were hanged on March 1, 1881.

nor solve. Russia was overdue with its bourgeois revolution on the eve of its proletarian revolution; pregnant with two revolutions it could not withhold a second even by delaying the first.’⁵⁸ And then the October Revolution could not wait any longer than November 7, 1917.

In other words, the Russian Revolution was just one of experiments of the Marxist Praxis. There were a large number of revolutionary groups working legally and illegally in Russia at the time of the October revolution – the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, social revolutionary groups and so on. Several strands of Marxism existed in Russia and the Bolsheviks hegemonised the process of transformation to socialism and eventually other groups lost their space or were eliminated. The process through which the revolution transformed Russia and the Socialism as it was to put into practice, the efficacy of the system in the transition that Marx had talked about and the collapse in the early 1990s, however, are important questions. Nevertheless, these do not come under the concerns of this study.

II

In one of his seminal works reflecting on the discipline of history, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx remarked, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”⁵⁹ In China, it was the large mass of the peasantry who made their own history and certainly not of their own free will; they were dragged into a revolutionary situation by the existing historical realities. Nor did they have a choice; under the

⁵⁸Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 97.

⁵⁹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>, accessed on 15/6/2015.

given and inherited circumstances they fought alongside the communists and under their leadership. This, indeed, constituted the distinct character of the Chinese revolution.

The Chinese revolution, perhaps, the most prolonged and complex one, was one which was entwined with resistance against the occupation of Japan in China, fight against the imperialist powers who reduced China into a semi-colony status, fight against the ‘White terror of the Kuomintang’ along with the warlords and was a fight against the rapacious landlords who preserved the age old feudal order. Mao Tse-tung outlined the historical context of the Chinese revolution which is complex situation as follows: in the sense that China was semi colonial, colonial, feudal and semi feudal country where, Mao elaborated:

A weak capitalist economy coexisted with a preponderant semi –feudal economy; a few modern industrial and commercial cities co-exist with a vast stagnant countryside; several million industrial workers coexist with several hundred millions of peasants and handicraftsmen labouring under the old system; big warlords controlling the central government co-exist with small warlords controlling the provinces; two kind of reactionary armies, the so called Central Army under Chiang Kai-shek and ‘miscellaneous troops’ under the warlords in the provinces, exist side by side; a few railways, steamship lines and motor roads exist side by side with a vast number of wheelbarrow paths and foot-paths many of which are difficult to negotiate even on foot.⁶⁰

The Communist Party of China had to adopt a combination of strategies, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes adopting pronounced shifts from one to another, according to the changing contexts since its inception in 1921. This does not deny though, at certain points, it did try to emulate the experience from Soviet Union, the only successful example that was available for reference at that time. The Chinese revolution, however, evolved around its indigenous character, primarily as a national liberation movement. The major milestones being the alliance with Sun Yat-sen in

⁶⁰Mao Tse-tung, ‘Characteristics of China’s Revolutionary War’, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, p.196. Railways, mining, maritime transport, textiles and shipbuilding were the main modern industries in China then.

the early 1920s, facing the extermination of communist cadres in the hands of the Kuomintang forces under Chiang Kai-shek in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the 6000 mile *Long March*, adopting a protracted war format with the peasantry as its backbone, the United Front strategy with Kuomintang against Japan in the late 1930s, and the New Democratic Revolution under the leadership of the Communist Party subsequently. In a nutshell, the epoch making liberation movement in China had established a new kind of praxis and thus contributed to Marxist epistemology.

Peasant insurgency against the state, the nobles and the feudal landlords were by no means new to China. The age old exploitation of the peasants by them caused outbursts during the times of famine or drought or other agriculture disasters; such insurgencies were also provoked by the atrocities unleashed by the corrupt officials or the imposition, from time to time, of unjustified taxes. These ‘primitive’ and ‘archaic’ forms of revolt, manifested in the *yamen* raids⁶¹, burning of records, attacking the officials, looting the landlords and distributing the booty among the poor and so on. They resorted to riots and their slogan did contain a rudimentary sense of class character, or one may call it class anger as manifest in the slogan such as ‘attack-the-rich-and-help-the-poor’. The major peasant rebellions with the support of secret societies⁶² (the mandate” from Heaven) had ended in establishing a new dynasty, a new order replacing the corroded ones.⁶³ However, a large number of peasant insurgencies - localised, sporadic and violent - were crushed with ruthless repression.

⁶¹ *Yamen* represented the state power in the village. They have all administrative, revenue (mainly tax collection) even judicial powers. Hence it was a symbol of power.

⁶² China has a long history of organisation of secret societies. The famous ones were “White Lotus, Triad System, Elder Brother Society etc.

⁶³ Han dynasty in the second century, Sung dynasty in the thirteenth century, Ming Dynasty in seventeenth century and Manchu dynasty in the nineteenth century were ended similarly. For instance, the Han dynasty was overthrown by a peasant war under the leadership of Yellow Turbans (a secret society) and the peasant rebellions of Fang la and Wang Hsiao -Po ended the Sung dynasty.

These spontaneous and ephemeral revolts⁶⁴ could not pulverize the existing exploitative social structures in rural China. Herein lay the important role of the Chinese Communist Party in organising them into a revolutionary force that liberated them from the archaic forms of struggles and prepared them for a protracted war.

Since the mid-19th century, China was living through an epoch of exceptional circumstances when it was forced to open up to the imperialist powers - Great Britain, France and the United States - as a result of the first and the second Opium Wars in 1842 and 1860 respectively. This had further given entry to other imperialist powers like Russia, Belgium, Norway and Sweden.⁶⁵ China was forced into granting huge concessions to these imperial powers. While they put China in a position of a semi colony, the Japanese invasion made it a full blown colony. The frequent peasant unrests and that too under foreign penetration together ensured the fall of the dynasty and shove china into chaos. In the words of Chesneaux, in his seminal work on Chinese history and the revolution:

The collapse of Manchu dynasty in 1911 was not a result of an ordinary dynastic crisis, such as which has put an end to the Ming dynasty in the seventeenth century or the Yuan in the fourteenth. For the first time in the history of China, the imperial system itself foundered with the falling dynasty... Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the traditional equilibrium of the Chinese society had been increasingly disturbed. It had shaken by the consequences of the unequal treaties, by capitalist economic penetration and, since, 1885-1900, by the effect of what was called the 'break-up' of China... The Ancient Chinese empire succumbed to a threefold pressure: foreign penetration, the traditional mechanism of social and political crisis, and the activities of Modern revolutionaries. The peasants forming the mass of Chinese population, were directly concerned in these processes.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ The major peasants rebellions in the nineteenth century- the Tai ping rebellion of 1851-64 established a "Heavenly Kingdom" for a short while, however it was crushed by the Ching government with the help of British, US and French forces in 1864, the peasant revolt of Nien (1853-1868) in North China, the great Moslem rebellion of Yunan (1853-73), the rebellion of Miao minority in Kweichow (1854-72), and the Yi Ho Tuan War (Boxer Rebellion) of 1897-1900. The Yi Ho Tuan War, again, was a spontaneous movement of peasants and handicrafts men in Northern China against the imperialist forces which was met the same fate as the Tai-pong rebellion at the hands of joint forces of eight imperialist forces. Though ended in suppression and sufferings, it along with 115 peasants rebellions spreading across 18 provinces in China ended the Manchu rule and led the country into warlordism and disorder.

⁶⁵ The Anglo-French allied forces launched war in 1857, the Sino-French war of 1888, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, the war launched by the allied powers of eight nations (Britain, US, Germany, France, Russia, Japan, Italy and Austria) in 1900 had ensured that China became a semi colony.

⁶⁶ Jean Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts in China-1840-1949*(London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), pp. 44-45

The bourgeois democratic revolution of 1911, under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen, which had overthrown the dynasty rule in China, was, however, an incomplete one. That was the context in which the Chinese Communist Party was operating; in a milieu of semi-colonial, semi feudal and warlords ridden China and with Chiang Kai-shek unleashing his programme of extermination of the Communists. The Japanese attack on China and the further colonisation created a new revolutionary situation and strategies had to be changed to face the new challenge. The major contributions of the Chinese revolution, in its long course, to the Marxist praxis, are threefold:

1. Understanding the revolutionary nature of the peasantry and organisation of them into a revolutionary force;
2. Understating the existing contradictions in the Chinese society to have a clear strategy for the national liberation movement (New Democratic Revolution); and
3. The National Liberation Movement.

The peasantry as a revolutionary force is the most important factor to be figured out from the Chinese revolutionary experience. In his outstanding essay titled *From One China to Another*, Jean Paul Sartre held:

The masses of Peking or Shanghai are not making History; they are subjected to it ...Those who are making History have never seen the great imperial cities; they only know mountains and the fields; in the fields and in the mountains destiny of China has been decided. For the first time, a capital awaits the pleasure of the country. History will appear in the form of a procession of peasants.⁶⁷

The distinct characteristic of the Chinese revolution lies in the colossal contribution by the peasantry to it and the role of the Chinese Communist Party, under Mao, in organising them into a revolutionary force that liberated them as a class.

⁶⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neo-colonialism: From One China to Another*(London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 27.

Mao Tse-tung's 32 days visit, to prepare a report on the peasant movement in Hunan, the epicentre of the peasant movement (*Investigation of Peasant Movement in Hunan*), in 1927, highlighted the importance of the peasantry (middle and poor) as a revolutionary class. Mao wrote; "they [peasantry] will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants, and evil gentry into their graves."⁶⁸ Mao then laid down three options before the communist party: To either march with the peasantry and lead them; or trail behind them; or stand on their way and oppose them. This was, by and large, in reply to the Chen Tu-hsiu line within the Chinese Communist Party.⁶⁹

Mao's major contribution to Marxist praxis was by way of establishing and theorising on the stratification of peasantry (as distinct from Marx's approach that considered the peasantry as a monolith) to explain 'who are the enemies and who are the friends of revolution'⁷⁰. He realised the immense revolutionary potentialities of the peasantry in an underdeveloped country like China. Subsequently, he analysed their role in the anti-imperialist struggle as well as their potential role in a revolution of the Marxist nature. The rich peasants, he held, 'make some contributions to the anti-imperialist struggle of the peasant masses and stay neutral in the agrarian

⁶⁸"For the present upsurge of the peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back." Mao Tse-tung, 'Investigation of Peasant Movement in Hunan, 1927', *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 1, pp.23-24.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.24. Chen Tu-hsiu supported a revolution leading by the working class in the urban areas and tried to organise a general strike in Shanghai which failed to evoke a proper response.

⁷⁰ In an 'Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society, written in 1926, Mao describes the friends and foes of the revolution "Our enemies are all those in league with imperialism - the warlords, the bureaucrats, the comprador class, the big landlord class and the reactionary section of the intelligentsia attached to them. The leading force in our revolution is the industrial proletariat. Our closest friends are the entire semi-proletariat and petty bourgeoisie. As for the vacillating middle bourgeoisie, their right-wing may become our enemy and their left-wing may become our friend but we must be constantly on our guard and not let them create confusion within our ranks."*Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. I, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1975, p. 19.

revolutionary struggle against the landlords'.⁷¹ Hence he cautioned the party members against the 'policy of liquidating' the rich peasantry prematurely. The middle peasantry, who constituted 20 per cent of rural population, and were subjected to the exploitation by the landlord and the gentry, will, according to him, join the anti-imperialist struggle and the agrarian revolutionary struggle willingly; hence a reliable ally of the proletariat. And finally the poor peasants, who constitute 70 per cent of rural population, were the 'biggest motive force' and the 'most reliable' ally of the proletariat. He used the term peasantry to refer to the middle and poor peasants – the most reliable and most numerous ally of the revolution. This stratification helped the Chinese Communist Party to adopt different strategies at different points of time. While reiterating the integral role of the peasantry in the Chinese revolution, Mao wrote in 1939:

. . . victory in the Chinese revolution can be won first in the rural areas and this is possible because China's economic development is uneven (her economy not being a unified capitalist economy), because her territory is extensive (which gives the revolutionary forces room to manoeuvre), because the counter-revolutionary camp is disunited and full of contradictions, and because the struggle of the peasants who are the main force in the revolution is led by the Communist Party, the party of the proletariat. ... Therefore, it is wrong to ignore the necessity of using rural districts as revolutionary base areas, to neglect painstaking work among the peasants, and to neglect guerrilla warfare.⁷²

For Mao, the peasantry was no longer another social force; certainly not just another ally of the revolutionary forces as Lenin had seen it - an ally continually to be led, supervised and kept in a subordinate role. For Mao the peasantry was to be an integral part of the revolutionary movement and a vital part of the movement - the armed struggle - was entrusted to them.⁷³

⁷¹ Mao Tse-tung, 'The Chinese Revolution and Chinese Communist Party(1939)', *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. II, p.323.

⁷² *Ibid*, pp. 316-17.

⁷³ Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts in China*, p.89. The spectacular growth of peasants associations in the middle of 1920s, their brave resistance to White terror, the unbelievable daring 6000 miles Long March showed that the main social force were the peasants.

The anti-colonial movements developed distinct revolutionary praxis. The *National Liberation Movement* in China should be understood from this point of view. The reality of the resistance against the colonial apparatus and the imperial powers, with whom the feudal forces in China had entered into a coalition, warranted a new format of struggles. Throughout the revolutionary period, the contradiction between feudalism and the peasantry and the contradiction between imperialism and the Chinese nation were basic contradictions that the communist party had to fight along with the masses. In the agrarian revolution in China (1927-1937), more precisely since the first Peasant Associations were formed in the middle of 1920s in Hunan, the landlords and their hatchet men (the local tyrants) of the 'evil' gentry were the principal enemies against whom the peasants took the form of a 'mighty storm' that hit the landlords politically and economically.

In the later stage, the national liberation movement took a new shape as colonialism and imperialism became the principal enemy, especially after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and further into other regions in 1937. This altered the social relations in China. Mao theorised this by holding that the principal contradiction determines or influences the existence and development of other contradiction.⁷⁴ (Louis Althusser's *overdetermination of contradictions* on was not significantly different) and herein lay the importance of the National United Front strategy in the national liberation movement. In simple terms, Mao's essay titled 'On Contradiction' explained the various strategies the Chinese Communist Party adopted

⁷⁴ According to Mao the relationship between the principle contradiction and non-principle contradictions presents a complicated picture. Thus he explains the different strategies adopted in different point of times such as the first United Front 1924-27, the civil war and the second National United Front in 1937 in terms of the principle contradiction of that time (for instance during the United Front, the main contradiction is between the imperialism and people of China, other contradictions such as the feudalism and peasantry, between bourgeoisie and working class being relegated to a secondary or subordinate position) and also the defeat explains in terms of want for understanding of the two sides of particular contradiction. Mao Tse-tung, 'On contradiction', *Mao Tse-tung's Selected Works*, January 1940, Vol. I, p.331.

since its inception - the first United Front between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party during 1924-27, the Northern Expedition of 1927, the agrarian revolution of 1927-1937 and the second United Front against Japanese imperialism in 1937.

In this context, Mao developed a new concept - the New Democratic Revolution. This is different from the bourgeois democratic revolution which had happened under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen in 1911. The New Democratic Revolution was a new form of political structure, different from a bourgeois democratic revolution or from a socialist revolution. It was imperative, in the historical context, for China to have a broad based alliance of 'four revolutionary classes- the proletariat, the poor and middle peasants, the petty bourgeoisie (including intellectuals and so on) and the national capitalists associated together in the same historical mission: to defeat imperialism- by fighting the Japanese- and to destroy feudalism'.⁷⁵

In the words of Mao Tse-tung:

The New-Democratic revolution also differs from a socialist revolution in that it overthrows the rule of imperialists, traitors and reactionaries in China but does not destroy any section of capitalism which is capable of contributing to the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle.⁷⁶

The fundamental characteristic of the New Democratic Revolution was that the proletariat will lead the revolution and the peasantry will be the main force. This was the culmination of two ongoing revolutions - the national revolution (against the Japanese imperialism) and the democratic revolution (against the feudal landlords and noble gentry). However, this was not intended to be socialist revolution as it was not meant to overthrow the bourgeoisie as a class⁷⁷ (in that sense this was not a class

⁷⁵ Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts in China*, p. 126.

⁷⁶ Mao, 'Chinese Revolution and Chinese communist Party', Vol. II, p.327.

⁷⁷ The Chinese national bourgeoisie has a revolutionary quality at certain periods and to a certain degree because China is a colonial and semi colonial country which is a victim of aggression. Here the

struggle too) and the national bourgeoisie, though were to be part of the revolution.

Mao spelt this out:

It (the New Democratic Revolution) belongs to a new type of revolution, led by the proletariat with the aim, in the first stage, of establishing a new- democratic society and a state under the joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes. Thus this revolution actually serves the purpose of clearing a still wider path for the development of socialism.⁷⁸

According to Mao such a revolution will shake the roots of the imperialism. This, he stressed, is transitional stage and the second stage will be the socialist revolution. He also clearly outlines on the nature of politics, economy and the new national culture under the new democracy. The Chinese new democratic republic will be the joint dictatorship of all ‘revolutionary classes’ headed by the proletariat.⁷⁹

Such concepts as *On Contradiction* and the *New Democratic Revolution* and the United Front strategy were the major contributions of the Chinese revolution to Marxist praxis. Mao was right when he said, “knowledge begins with practice, and theoretical knowledge is acquired through practice and must then return to practice.”⁸⁰The Chinese revolution is a typical cast where theories burst into praxis and the praxis made to excel new theories to the challenging contexts.

III

The revolutionary tradition in Cuba goes back to the early 19th century when leaders like José Martí, Antonio Maceo, Maximo Gomez, Gualberto Gomez, Carlos Balino,

task of proletariat is to form a united front with the national bourgeoisie against imperialism and the bureaucrat and warlord governments without overlooking its revolutionary quality, Mao Tse-tung, ‘On New Democracy’, January 1940, *Mao Tse-tung, Selected Works*, Vol. II, pp. 348-49.

⁷⁸Ibid, p. 344.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 347.

⁸⁰*On Practice* Mao states that “the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism has two outstanding characteristics. One is its class nature: it openly avows that dialectical materialism is in the service of the proletariat. The other is its practicality: it emphasizes the dependence of theory on practice, emphasizes that theory is based on practice and in turn serves practice. The truth of any knowledge or theory is determined not by subjective feelings, but by objective results in social practice. Only social practice can be the criterion of truth. The standpoint of practice is the primary and basic standpoint in the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge” Mao Tse Tung, ‘On Practice’, pp.297 -304.

etc., led the liberation struggle with the support of peasants and workers and other patriots. Creole nationalism, indeed; but then, Jose Marti turned into a legend to be invoked by the revolutionary movements to raise the spirit of the people. The Communist Party of Cuba (PCC- *Partido Comunista Cubano*) was born, as late as in 1925, during the repressive regime Gerardo Machado. In a few years, the PCC gained strength, mainly from workers and students; a general strike in 1930, the sugar mill workers strike in 1933 and yet another general strike in 1933, which saw the flight of Machado are examples that demonstrate the growing popularity of the Party.

However, these revolts did not bring any structural changes in Cuba. As far as the country was concerned, the economy, land ownership pattern and the social relations continued as it was. Meanwhile, Batista, an army officer led a coup in 1934 with US support, and repressed the Communist Party; subsequently, the Party decided to support Batista in 1937 and later on became a part of the Batista regime in 1940. A large section of the youth, disappointed with the decision of the PCC, laid the foundation to the birth of a number of revolutionary groups. Fidel Castro, who led the successful revolt against the Batista regime in 1959, belonged to one of those revolutionary groups.

As for the pre-revolutionary class structure in Cuba, it was as follows: The agricultural labourers constituted a large category in Cuba thanks to the large tracts of land under sugar cane plantations and these were a monopoly of American companies like the Cuba Company and its subsidiaries. Yet another section of agricultural workers and poor peasants were working for the Cuban landlords. There was a clear-cut distinction between those who worked for the big landlords and that of the agricultural proletariat who worked for the US corporations. The latter category had been ‘progressively *proletarianized*’ due to the needs of large scale, semi-mechanised

capitalist agriculture. They had reached a new level of organisation and therefore attained a greater level of class consciousness and as for the former, their social and cultural roots were different from those farmers found in the area of large scale semi-mechanized Cuban agriculture.⁸¹ There were small peasants with little land, hence tied up with the *latifundistas* (landed gentry) for their subsistence. The urban mill (sugar) workers were the main proletarian class. They, along with agricultural workers and the petty bourgeoisie such as students, teachers were the backbone of the revolutionary groups. The consortium of the US corporations (monstrous landholders), and the sugar and cattle magnates controlled the economy and the state apparatus was mostly controlled by the army. The bourgeoisie, by and large, sided with US imperialism and in that sense a comprador class in classical Marxist parlance.

Let us have a look at the so called material and social conditions in pre-revolutionary Cuba to perceive whether it was geared for a revolution, in the orthodox Marxist sense, that had happened in 1959. Cuba was mainly a producer of raw material and depended on the West for necessary consumer items; Cuban industries were in shambles. In other words,

Cuba bought not only automobiles, machinery, chemical products, paper and clothing, but also rice and beans, garlic and onions, fats meats and cotton, all from the United States. Ice cream came from Miami, bread from Atlanta, and even luxury suppers from Paris. The country of sugar imported nearly half the fruit and vegetables it consumed, although only a third of its population had regular jobs and half of the sugar estate lands were idle acres were nothing was produced. Thirteen US sugar producers owned more than 47 percent of total area planted to cane and garnered some \$180 million from each harvest. The sub-soil wealth-nickel, iron, copper, manganese, chrome, tungsten- formed part of United States' strategic reserves and were exploited in accordance with the various priorities of US defense and industry. In 1958, Cuba had more registered prostitutes than mine workers and a million and half Cubans were wholly or partly unemployed.⁸²

⁸¹ David Deutschmann (ed.), *Che Guevara Reader, Writings on Politics and Revolution*, (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2012), p.133.

⁸² Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America, Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: Monthly Press, 1977), p.72.

The Platt amendment⁸³ to the Cuban Constitution granted the US the unrestricted right to interfere in the internal matters of Cuba and this pushed Cuba into political servility. Though this changed with the advent of the ‘Good Neighbour Policy for Latin America’, the political and economic domination of this Caribbean island continued and in fact it permeated deeper into the society. Since the World War II, the US controlled the whole economy; as the sole authority of the sugar production, their monopoly of the railways, communications, electrical power supply, banks and so on. US corporations such as Cuban –American Sugar Company and United Fruit Company and its subsidiary the Nipe Bay Company, held large chunks of fertile land bought at throw away prices. They exploited the peasants and workers even by denying them minimum wage for subsistence. ‘Thousands and thousands of cane-cutters and mill workers had lived with their families in miserable *bohios* (shacks) on the estates during the four months of annual *zafra* (harvest), usually earning less than a dollar a day (sometimes only forty or fifty cents, without food). In the year’s remaining months-the sinister *dead time*, in Cuba- there was simply no work, and the *guajiro* (peasant) families tried to survive the best they could.’⁸⁴ The number of days when work was available depended on the markets. As for the small peasants, they often faced eviction from their land by the *latifundistas*. A general unrest among the students and workers prevailed over a period of time.

Politically, Cuba was volatile as governments came and went; sometimes change of governments were effected through military coups supported by the US and more often through ‘peaceful’ games. As for instance, Batista was installed after a stage-managed coup in 1934, with the support of US, to topple the first Ramón Grau

⁸³ This amendment was called after Senator Orville H Platt who formulated it. Though this was removed during the ‘Good Neighbour Policy for Latin America’, the political and economic domination on this Caribbean Island continued.

⁸⁴ Tad Szulc, *Fidel a Critical Portrait*, (London: William Morrow and Company, 1986), p.95.

San Martin government which was in power for few months. The Grau government tried to bring some positive changes in the labour and agrarian sector and more importantly had taken few steps to repudiate Cuba's foreign debt which irked the US. Batista engineered a coup again in 1952. In between, Cuba had a series of corrupt governments, including a second term of Grau who represented the Cuban Revolutionary Party. This was a period of trial for the Cuban Communist Party which was rechristened as Popular Socialist Party in the 1940s. Grau's notorious hunt against the communists made the Popular Socialist Party and its trade union organisation – the Cuban Confederation of Workers (CTC) – to almost abandon its functions.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, in the 1950s, the Havana University campus was haven for revolutionary activities. Various revolutionary groups such as Youth of the Centenary (Fidel Castro was active in this group), Revolutionary Movement (MNR) of Rafael García Bárcena, a university professor, Revolutionary Directorate led by José Antonio Echevarría (who carried out an attack on the presidential palace in March 1957), were leading lights and organisations in the campus.⁸⁶ This was the concrete situation of Cuba before the attack on the Moncada Army barracks at Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953, the first attempt to capture power by Fidel Castro and his revolutionary group. This was the dress rehearsal of the armed resistance against the Batista regime which began in 1957 culminating in the revolution in 1959.

While analysing the character of the Cuban revolution, Che Guevara rightly wrote in 1960, during the transition years, that Cuban revolution was a 'unique revolution, which for some does not fit in with one of the most orthodox premises of the revolutionary movement ... one can make a revolution if historical reality is

⁸⁵ Also see, Chris Slee, *Cuba-How the Workers and Peasants Made the Revolution*, (Chippendale (Australia): Resistance Books, 2008).

⁸⁶ Slee, *Cuba-How the Workers and Peasants Made the Revolution*, p. 10.

interpreted correctly and if the forces involved are utilized correctly, even without knowing the theory.⁸⁷ Cuba, ‘an island stuck on the side of America’⁸⁸ surprised everyone with a revolution in 1959, which was described as an ‘aberration’ to a socialist revolution in many occasions; it was as if some vital ingredients were missing from a good recipe. For some, it was a ‘genuine socialist revolution that had been made by non-communists.’⁸⁹ For the official Communist Party of Cuba (rechristened as Popular Socialist Party since 1944)⁹⁰ Fidel Castro was a ‘putschist’ and the abortive attempt of storming of Moncada Army garrison in 1953, which led to the death of 50 revolutionaries and many more landing behind bars, was nothing but ‘adventurist’. The mistrust was mutual and both sides had waited till the last stages of the revolution to put up a united front to protect and expand the revolutionary agenda from the counter revolutionaries and from US imperialism. It was the outcome of a realisation that the transition of Cuba into socialist society will remain a dream without the help of other radical political forces of Cuba.

It was, indeed, a revolution, ‘even without knowing the theory’; a revolution without mass mobilisation on class lines and a revolution that was begun by a group

⁸⁷ Deutschmann (ed.), *Che Guevara Reader*, p.121.

⁸⁸ Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, p. 199.

⁸⁹ While analysing the Cuban revolution in their book “Cuba Anatomy of a Revolution” (1960), Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman states that “All the charges and accusations concerning the alleged Communist character of the Cuban government and/or Revolution tend to hide what may turn out to be historically one of the most important facts about Cuban Revolution: this is the first time- ever, anywhere - that a genuine socialist revolution has been made by non-Communists.” Cited in Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman (ed.), *Regis Debray and the Latin American Revolution*, (London: Monthly Review Press, 1968), p.3.

⁹⁰ The political resolution of the Cuban Communist Party, adopted at the 1934 Congress states: “We must convince the masses that there is no other way out except the agrarian anti-imperialist revolution, that, is, the overthrow of power of the exploiters, the complete independence of Cuba, the immediate withdrawal of armed Yankee forces from Cuban waters and from Guantanamo naval base; the confiscation and nationalization of all the means of economic power in the hands of foreign capitalists; the confiscation of the land of the *latifundistas* and their delivery without cost to the peasants; the establishment of a government based on soviets (councils) of delegates of workers, peasants, soldiers, and sailors; the arming of broad masses and the formation of a Red Army of Workers and Peasants”. Cited in W. Raymond Duncan and James Nelson Goodsell, *The Quest for Change in Latin America: Sources for a Twentieth Century Analysis*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 141. It was before PCC vacillating its stand. Interestingly, most of these are implemented in the post-revolutionary Cuba under Fidel Castro.

of guerrilla fighters who were not theoretically oriented, whose only intention was to throw away a corrupt and autocratic regime and bring in a democratic and just society. It was indeed adventurous to take on a regime which had 'at its disposal a fifty thousand-man army with cannon and armour, an air force and a navy and a murderously efficient uniformed and secret police. Besides, president Batista also enjoyed full United States support, including access to American arms'.⁹¹ Hence this attempt with very little arms and ammunitions and by men without proper training was nothing short of suicidal. The failure of the Moncada attack on 26 July 1953, in which 50 young rebels were murdered at the hands of the military, was fresh in their memory. Fidel's disagreement with the 'official' communist party meant that the Communist Party even refused to "endorse Castro's call for a revolutionary general strike in January 1958, just before the fall of the Batista government."⁹²

However, even a cursory reading of the *Sierra Maestra Manifesto* of July 12, 1957⁹³, which was a call for unity of all revolutionary and civic forces to fight against the Batista regime, one can only disagree with the argument that Fidel Castro was only thinking about toppling the dictatorship of Batista and establish a democratic and just government with the help of all revolutionary groups and civic associations. Four years before that, in October 1953, while deposing before the court of Justice as an accused in the Moncada attack, Castro delivered his historic speech "*History will*

⁹¹ Tad Szulc, *Fidel a Critical Portrait*, op cit., p. 13.

⁹² Jorge I Dominquez, 'Socialism in Cuba', in Helen Desfosses and Jacques Levesque(ed.), *Socialism in the Third World*(New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), p. 32.

⁹³The Sierra Maestra Manifesto was sort of Manifesto/declaration issued by Fidel Castro from Sierra Maestra, the liberated area on July 12, 1957. It had given a call or a revolutionary united front against the tyrannical regime. It criticise the election call of the regime and says; "Do the Sierra Maestra rebels not want free elections, a democratic regime, a constitutional government? It is because they deprived us of those rights that we have fought since March 10. We are here because we want them more than anyone else. To demonstrate it, there are our fighters dead in the mountains and our comrades murdered in the streets or secluded in prison dungeons. We are fighting for the beautiful ideal of a *free, democratic, and just Cuba* We want elections, but with one condition: truly free, democratic, and impartial elections. Ask the government of the United States that as long as the present regime of terror and dictatorship persists to suspend all arms shipments to Cuba" (emphasis added).
<http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/cuban-rebels/manifesto.htm> accessed on 15/6/2015.

Absolve Me”; and in this, he had clearly outlined a radical programme for a liberated Cuba. In the speech he proposed radical agrarian reforms, labour reforms, revamping of educational system to give access to the poor, a revolutionary housing project, ‘by tearing down hovels and replacing them with modern multiple dwelling buildings’, and comprehensive industrial development, outlawing the large estates, nationalization, confiscation of ‘ill-gotten gains of those who committed fraud during the last regimes and gains of all their legatees and heirs’.⁹⁴ These indeed were indicative of his socialist credentials.

However, when the transition to socialism began, immediately after the revolutionary takeover (restructuring the existing state apparatuses, introducing rapid agrarian and labour reforms, large scale nationalisation initiative, expropriation of large landowners and so on), Che Guevara wrote in 1960:

The principal actors of this revolution had no coherent view point. But it cannot be said that they were ignorant of the various concepts of history, society, economics and revolution being discussed in the world today. A profound knowledge of reality, a close relationship with people, the firmness of the objective being sought, and the experience of the revolutionary practice gave those leaders the opportunity to form a more complete theoretical conception . . . In fact the Cuban revolution must be separated into two absolutely different stages: that of armed action up to January 1, 1959; and political, economic and social transformations from then.⁹⁵

Che held that Marxism was quite a natural attribute in the thinking of these revolutionaries as ‘one is a Newtonian in physics or a Pasteurian in biology.’

However, for Fidel Castro, it took another year to declare the nature of revolution. It is very significant that Castro used the word socialist revolution, for the first time, only after his regime repulsed the US backed attack on the *Bay of Pigs*, in April 1961. While speaking at the funeral ceremony of one of the young army man who was killed during the resistance, he said that the imperialists cannot forgive them

⁹⁴History Will Absolve Me, Fidel Castro, Castro Internet Archive (marxists.org). <https://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1953/10/16.htm>. accessed on 15/6/2015.

⁹⁵Che Guevara Reader, pp. 121-122.

for the fact that they have made a socialist revolution under the nose of the United States and that they should defend the revolution at any cost.⁹⁶ For him, revolutions are not exported but they are made by the people and the ‘revolutionaries cannot sit in the doorways on their homes to watch the corpse of the imperialism pass by’. They have to work for it. In the Second declaration of Havana in 1962, Fidel Castro explicitly communicated the nature of the Cuban revolution in explicitly Marxist terms, when he said:

The subjective conditions in each country, the factors of consciousness, of organisation, of leadership, can accelerate or delay the revolution, depending on the state of their development. Sooner or later, in each historic epoch, as subjective conditions ripen, consciousness is acquired, organisation is achieved, leadership arises, and revolution is produced.... It happens inevitably that in those countries where Yankee monopolist control is strongest, where exploitation by reigning few is most unrestrained and where the conditions of the masses of workers and peasants are most unbearable, the political power became more vicious, state of siege become habitual, all expression of mass discontent is suppressed by force, and the democratic channels are closed off thereby revealing more plainly than ever the kind of brutal dictatorship assumed by the dominating classes. That is when the people’s revolutionary breakthrough becomes inevitable.⁹⁷

If the character of a revolution is determined by the social forces that accompanied the revolution, then Cuban revolution cannot be called a socialist revolution; not even a bourgeoisie democratic revolution. It was neither of them and as a matter of fact can be called a *Blanquian revolution*.⁹⁸ The Cuban revolution, necessarily, was built on Cuban nationalism. It was a national liberation movement to free the country from US imperialism and the comprador bourgeoisie at home. The national character of the revolution was emphasised while the revolutionaries invoked

⁹⁶Tad Szulc, *Fidel a Critical Portrait*, p. 605.

⁹⁷This quote is from Castro’s Second declaration in Havana delivered on February 4, 1962, cited in W. Raymond Duncan and James Nelson Goodsell (ed), *The Quest for Change in Latin America*, op cit., pp. 297, 300.

⁹⁸Engels defines a Blanquist as: “in his political activity he was mainly a ‘man of action’, believing that a small and well organised minority, who would attempt a political stroke of force at the opportune moment, could carry the mass of the people with them by a few successes at the start and thus make a victorious revolution ... Since Blanqui regards every revolution as a coup de main by a small revolutionary minority, it automatically follows that its victory must inevitably be succeeded by the establishment of a dictatorship-not, it should be well noted, of the entire revolutionary class, the proletariat, but of the small number of those who accomplished the coup and who themselves are, at first, organised under the dictatorship of one or several individuals.” F. Engels, ‘Programme of the Blanquist Commune Refugees’, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p.13.

the legend of Jose Marti, the leader of the Cuban revolutionary party who was killed in the battle against Spanish troops in Dos Rios battlefield in 1895. The fact that the July 26 Movement (J26M) of Castro did not attempt to make an alliance with the traditional Communist Party of Cuba lies in the trajectory of the PCC in Cuba. The traditional Communist Party, which blindly adopted the Comintern's instructions on the United Front strategy, became a part of the Batista regime. The fact is that in 1937, the Communist Party considered Batista a fascist; but it changed its stand just a year later in 1938 and went on to support Batista in the presidential election in 1940.

All these, however, does not imply that a small group of revolutionaries made the revolution possible. Workers support in the urban areas, with men and material, and the involvement of the peasants in the rural areas were pronounced and this made a difference. Meanwhile, in Cuba itself the July 26 Movement was being built as an underground organisation throughout the country. Armando Hart, a key leader of this work, stresses that "all over the country, the organisation of the Movement continued to advance. In the weeks preceding the *Granma* [which reached Cuba on December 2, 1956] there was no municipality or corner of the island without its underground leadership and cell."⁹⁹

The J26 M in the Urban areas strengthen their base and it "continued to build a strong urban underground network, which sent supplies, money, and recruits for guerrillas; carried out propaganda in the cities; organised strikes and protests; and carried out acts of sabotage and armed attacks on Batista's police and army in urban areas."¹⁰⁰

However, the weakness of the July 26 Movement among the workers was visible when they called a general strike in 1958; the response was poor. The ground

⁹⁹ Cited in Slee, *Cuba-How the Workers and Peasants Made the Revolution*, p.14.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 17.

reality was that PSP (the erstwhile Communist Party in Cuba) still held control over the workers and particularly the trade unions. The official leadership of the Communist Party and the trade unions, however, 'rectified' their position after the capture of power in 1959. The fact is that Castro could reach a broad alliance with PSP and trade unions and subsequently the January 2, 1959 strike turned out to be a success.

The ideological differences between the Right and the Left within the July 26 Movement was evident even in the early stages of the revolution. The fact clearly indicates that both the elements were present in the party from its formation itself; and there was no check on that. The movement indeed had a multi class character and once the 'imminent threat' of a revolutionary programme unfolded, there was very little space for the Right. It is true that there was mounting pressure from the peasantry and agricultural workers to expropriate the large estates and go ahead with radical agrarian programme. This along with the experience of living among the peasants during the guerrilla revolt made Castro and a section of his associates, including Che Guevara, to stand for radical reforms in the agrarian sector. However, once it became clear that the party is moving strongly towards the Left with a close association with the PSP and the radical policies declared in the labour and agrarian sector, the differences between the Left and Right in the J26M became widely apparent. The realisation that this was no longer a *bourgeois democratic revolution*, a revolt was attempted against the Left in J26M by a group under the leadership of rebel army officer Hubert Matos in late 1959. This was one of the open instances. This confirms the lack of clarity of an ideology among the members of J26M as accused by many. A revolutionary theory, indeed, is needed for a revolutionary practice.

The right and left wing division was apparent in the trade union front also; though many of the right trade union leaders were removed from their position between 1959 and 1961. This even went to the extent of blowing up of five power terminals by saboteurs (supported by right wing leader Amaury Fraginals), resulting a major black-out. “The CTC called a meeting of electrical workers on December 9 to discuss the sabotage. Fraginals boycotted the meeting and called a demonstration of his supporters, who marched through the streets shouting “*Cuba si, Rusia no*” (Cuba yes, Russia no).”¹⁰¹ Apart from the influence of the PSP, this connotes that the Cuban revolution was taking an obvious socialist turn.

The existing socio-economic and political climate was matured for a revolution in Cuba. The Moncada garrison attack created a revolutionary momentum which was already simmering in the island nation. When Fidel and his group, consisting of 81 men, landed on the Southern Coast of Cuba, in the province Oriente in an old boat –Granma- from their exile of Mexico, revolution seemed to be an unfeasible option for some. The fact is that the masses- the workers and peasants and other revolutionary classes were not organised into it as the lab conditions of orthodox Marxist premises; they joined later on and acted as responsible revolutionaries. This was yet one another Marxist praxis. As Sartre said “And let us make no mistake: Castro’s victory was due precisely to the fact that he took the leadership of a socialist revolution.”¹⁰²

IV

This section will look into the characteristics of the resurgence or the renewal of the Left in the Latin American countries, in the post 1990s, in order to place these

¹⁰¹ Slee, *Cuba-How the Workers and Peasants Made the Revolution*, p. 40.

¹⁰² Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, p.199.

experiments under the broad framework of Marxist praxis. At the outset, it should be clarified that a comprehensive theoretical framework of Left resurgence in Latin America is yet to be available for a critical analysis. This, however, is not to undermine the assortment of perspectives/approaches put out by Marxist scholars, activists and others such as Marta Harnecker, James Petras, Néstor Kohan, Michael A Lebowitz and Jorge Castaneda.¹⁰³ The approaches vary from extreme left to left of centre - from a strong anti-imperialist and anti-United States position to what can be described as ‘soft left’ that advocates an issue-wise approach to the US.

But then, it is possible to argue that the ‘21st century socialism’¹⁰⁴ in Latin American countries has to be read from the perspective of a national liberation struggle in the specific context of attempts to restore the sovereignty and identity of a nation-state from the clutches of global finance capital. In the era of ‘new (free) market ideology’, any resistance to this called for new social and political formations and it warranted a paradigm shift from the existing modes of struggles. A search for alternative forms of struggle -- contemporary and devoid of bureaucratic structures and rigid strategies – led itself to novel expressions of resistance. Consequently, the regimes too acted differently from their predecessors; there emerged a new kind of socialism - ‘socialism with human face’, ‘participatory socialism’, ‘21st century socialism’, ‘renewals’, and ‘reconstruction of Marxism’ and so on.

¹⁰³Marta Harnecker’s *Rebuilding the Left* (2007), *A World to Build: New Paths Toward Twenty-first Century Socialism* (2015), Michael A. Lebowitz, *Build it Now* (2006), *The Path to Human Development: Capitalism Or Socialism?* (2009), *The Socialist Alternative: Real Human Development* (2010), *The Socialist Imperative: From Gotha to Now*, (2015), James Petras’s *Dynamics of Social Change in Latin America* (2000), *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21st Century* 2001, *What’s Left in Latin America?: Regime Change in New Times* (2009), Jorge Castaneda’s, *Utopia Unarmed* (1993) are few examples for the new Marxist perspectives and approaches.

¹⁰⁴ A concept developed by Heinz Dieterich in 1996 in his Book called *21st Century Socialism* (more to do with decentralisation and participatory planning and decision making where people will have decision-making power in the economic, political, cultural, and military institutions etc), and Hugo Chavez the former president of Venezuela used the term 21st century socialism to describe the new radical political system in the country.

This manifested in newer modes of resistance and protests where the agencies (or the revolutionary forces in this region and in the times) emancipating the language of agitations and protests from the narrow conventional strategies. In that sense, the domain of the new Left broadened into such forms as the ‘Neighbourhood organisations, ‘Peoples’ Assembly’, ‘workers’ run factory’, ‘landless squatters’ and so on, adding these to the lexicon of socialism. The new left was built up on a mixed basket of concerns ranging from the protection of the mineral and other resources of a nation, saving the environment, concerns over protecting the rights of the indigenous people, their economic organisation, their culture and their identity to such struggles to establish the rights of peasants over their land or workers over their work place. And ‘participation’ and ‘decentralization’ are the cardinal principles of this new discourse in Marxism.

In order to understand the features of this phenomenon - the resurgence of the new Left - a brief narrative of the historical context of the struggles will be in order. The ‘royal’ arrival of Christopher Columbus and his sailors on the beaches of the Bahamas, in 1492, marked the era of plunder and pillage by Spain, Portugal and Britain. The manner in which the three magnificent civilizations – the Inca, the Aztec and the Mayan - were destroyed and erased from the face of the earth and extermination of the Indians and the arrival of the blacks (as slave labour in the plantations), the excessive exploitation of the metals - gold and silver - to build capitalism in Western Europe had left a lasting impact on the land and its people.¹⁰⁵ The search for the historical roots of the indigenous movements should start from here. It took centuries. But then, the shared and transmitted memories of their own history led the indigenous communities to organise for “*allpamanda, kawsaymanda,*

¹⁰⁵ See Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*.

jatarisun” (For our land, for our life, we shall arise - Quichua words)¹⁰⁶ and raise the *huipala* (The rainbow flag – symbol of indigenous movement) in their own land. The United States carried on with this ‘saga’ after these countries attained freedom from the Western European colonial masters, the Creole nationalism, in the nineteenth century.

Like in the other continents, the Russian Revolution of 1917 created ripples in Latin America too and as a result the Communist parties began to emerge in the various countries in the 1920s; these were guided and controlled, as elsewhere, by the COMINTERN. Needless to say that they strictly followed the Marxist-Leninist structure of the party, even in those countries where the peasantry was predominant and the working class was still in a rudimentary stage. This conglomeration of parties, came to be known as ‘traditional left’, ‘orthodox communists’ and so on. They had nothing much in common with the new left configurations that have since emerged in the post-1990s context. However, this is without meaning to undermine the significance of the resistance they offered against the military juntas, even at the cost of their existence, in the long decades of turmoil in Latin America.¹⁰⁷ There were many instances of ‘killing squads’ on the prowl to exterminate the communists. In fact, the military coups in Brazil in 1964, Bolivia in 1971, Uruguay in 1972, Chile in 1973 and Argentina in 1976 destroyed the mass organisations, particularly of this genre of the left considerably. The war years of Argentina (1976-1982) also left thousands dead. The notorious military coup led by Pinochet against the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile, with the

¹⁰⁶Guillermo Delgado, ‘The Making of Transnational Movement’, in Vijay Prashad, Teo Ballvé (ed.), *Dispatches From Latin America- Experimenting Against Neoliberalism*(New Delhi: LeftWord, 2006), p. 59.

¹⁰⁷The 1970s were also the period of resistance. In Bolivia, the urban mobilization of workers and affected middle class- national popular forces overthrow the dictatorship of Col. Alberto Natusch Busch and brought the democratic Popular Unity government in power.

support of US and the subsequent assassination of Allende, changed the political map of Chile.¹⁰⁸

The 1980s witnessed the fall of such military regimes in many countries in Latin America¹⁰⁹ including in Argentina in 1983, Uruguay and Brazil in 1985. Most of these fallen dictators ran where they belonged to and ‘welcome arches’ were raised in Miami and in Florida where their money was stacked up. Thus began the ‘celebrated’ return of democracy in fresh clothes - and it was famously graded as ‘democracy in transition’. The “emerging new world order brought about an arranged marriage between capitalism and democracy and facilitated by a neoliberal programme of ‘structural reform’ and ‘good governance’...”¹¹⁰ These ‘democratic’ regimes, essentially foisted by the US establishment, continued with the economic policies of the authoritarian military rule; none are known to have attempted any structural change in the system. And more importantly, the military played a significant role and were often invited to intervene in the matters of states. As a rule, the newly elected ‘democratic’ governments had carried out the neoliberal agenda wholeheartedly.

The Latin American nations were the immediate victims of the neo-liberal consensus ever since the beginning of this economic model in the late 1970s. Neoliberal policies (through the prescription of Structural Adjustments Programme handed out by the Brettonwoods institutions) were introduced in Latin America in the mid-1980s; while India had a ‘long rope’ of at least a decade since then to dismantle

¹⁰⁸ See also W. Raymond Duncan, ‘Allende’s Chile’, in Helen Desfosses and Jacques Levesque (ed.), *Socialism in the Third World* and Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*.

¹⁰⁹ US shift (of military intervention) to West Asia since the oust of Shah of Iran in 1979, perhaps contributed to emergence of democratic governments in Latin America. There was a scare that “traditional oligarchies’ who ruled the countries and ‘whose privileges and mistakes provoked revolutions’ in the region. The Nelson Rockefeller Mission Report, “Quality of the Life in America” in 1969 advises that “revolutions could be curtailed by serious reforms, including altering the traditional terms of trade and independence “cited in Ali, *Pirates of Caribbean*, p. 84.

¹¹⁰ James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, *What is Left in Latin America? Regime Change in New Times* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publications, 2009), p. 39.

its proud Nehruvian economy in July 1991 - when its public sector that helped build a self-sufficient economy and thus saved India from landing in the dependency trap - began to come under attack.

As for the concerns of this chapter, the democratic regimes that came into existence in Latin America during the 1980s delegitimized themselves by implementing the neoliberal policies enthusiastically and by competing with each other to please the Trans National Corporations at the cost of their own countries' minerals, resources and environment; they were unmindful of the misery and the worsening poverty that alienated them from the masses. As for the traditional left, their inability to confront the problems brought about by neo-liberalism led to their weakening too. The existing canonical rules were insufficient to address the new problems raised by globalization and liberalisation. Moreover, capitalism had, by this time, travelled far from where Lenin had sought to canonise the stages of capitalism and held 'imperialism' to be 'the highest stage of capitalism'. In the context of the realignment of the world, what is needed is new vistas and praxis from a realistic understanding. New problems needed new remedies; the orthodox communist parties in the respective countries could not get out their old frames and search for contemporary solutions. This, in the words of Petras implied:

The dual developments of working class disarticulation and deepening social polarisation usually means that the traditional political controls exercised by the electoral party machines and bureaucratized trade unions cease to be effective. Mass spontaneous protests, sacking of stores, street mobilisations, unauthorised strikes, begin to merge as the class identity of the electoral regimes becomes transparent . . . In part, the defensive and fragmented structure of the popular classes reflects the post-Stalinist crisis affecting the traditional left in Latin America as well as the repressive content of the state in most of the 'redemocratised' countries. Profound divisions have emerged within the region's communist parties stemming from the disorienting impact of the breakup of the socialist bloc governments, criticism of previous political practices (too accommodating in its relations with the Argentine military dictatorship, too intransigent regarding participation in the Chilean political process), and/or disagreements over the continuing viability of centralised organisational forms (party democracy). The resultant fracturing of these parties in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and elsewhere has severely limited their capacity to intervene in current political struggles.¹¹¹

¹¹¹James Petras Morris Morley, 'Latin America: Poverty of Democracy and Democracy of Poverty', *Economic and Political Weekly* 27 July 1991, 106-107.

Neo-liberalism, however, brought untold miseries to the people of Latin America. With the economy deregulated - privatization, austerity measures like wage cuts and wage freeze, layoffs, closing down of small and medium industries - the living standard of millions simply worsened. The unprecedented increase in levels of unemployment and under-employment¹¹², large scale displacement of the indigenous people, deforestation and so on added to the miseries.

The 1980s, thus was the lost- decade for Latin America; the sub-continent turned out to be the experimental lab for the neoliberal policies which “pushed vast masses into accentuated poverty and underdevelopment, into political subservience to the metropolis brokered by authoritarian domestic governments, and into internal chaos ...”¹¹³ This, however, also marked the beginning of new left’s arrival in Latin America¹¹⁴ and it happened with the further intensification of the financial crisis of 1990s.¹¹⁵ The disillusionment with the pro-neoliberal policies of the elected governments pushed the masses to search for alternatives and thus was born the new left movements. “By the turn of the millennium, peasant and indigenous movements were playing a major role in some countries in Latin America. In Bolivia, Ecuador,

¹¹² “In Argentina, Raul Zibechi writes, beginning in 1990, financial and economic deregulation, privatization and shedding of protective tariffs and subsidies, caused many factories to close. These policies led to unemployment for many workers and more precarious working conditions for those who still had their job” Raul Zibechi, *Worker Run Factories: From Survival to Economic Solidarity*, Teo Ballve and Vjay Prasad (ed.) *Despatches from Latin America*, p. 340. Also see Ali, *Pirates of the Caribbean*. This was true with every Latin American country since the implementation of neoliberal policies.

¹¹³ Prabhat Patnaik, ‘The Future of Marxism’ in Romila Thaper(ed.), *India, Another Millennium?* (New Delhi: Viking Books, 2000), p.187.

¹¹⁴ Protest organised by the Community in Ecuador against the decision of neoliberal government to licence millions of acres of New Amazon territory to private companies for exploitation of resources, Caracazo Uprising against the neo-liberal president Carlos Andres Perez in Venezuela in 1989 were few examples for the unrest in Latin America in the 1980s. And 1980s was the period, CONFENAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon), the predecessor of the famous CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuador) was formed. In Brazil, the Movimento Serra Tem (Movement of Landless People-MST) was formed in 1984.

¹¹⁵ For instance National-wide uprising of indigenous people in Ecuador in 1990, Armed Uprising of Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico in 1994, Amazon Alliance, the network of Indigenous people, formation of National Association of Worker Managed enterprises (ANTEAG) in Argentina in 1994, ‘New Social Revolution of Venezuela’ in 1999, formation of National Indigenous Council (ENI) in Mexico, formation of Pachakutik, the political arm of CONAIE in 1995 and so on.

Columbia, Mexico, Peru, Brazil and Central America and Paraguay peasant and indigenous people played a major role in either overthrowing the neoliberal regimes or building powerful regionally –based movements with an impact on national policy, helping elect centre-left presidents, and in few cases, providing mass support for guerrilla movements.”¹¹⁶

An analysis of some of the basic characteristics of the new Left is warranted here in order to see how far these fit into the broad framework of Marxist praxis. First and foremost, the New Left in Latin America is not a homogeneous category; though they have one thing in common and it is that they do not acknowledge any existing models. To be more specific, developing as they did in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc on the one hand and China’s turn to state capitalism on the other, these movements were denied of any readymade model available before them. In the 1990s, the ‘transition economists’ hovered around the ex-socialist and remaining socialist countries like vultures with free advice to transition to free-market capitalism. And Cuba, affected in the extreme manner, by the fall of Soviet Union, had to search elsewhere for fuel and food, external credit and other necessities to stay afloat in the context of the US imposed economic blockade. This crisis forced the country to experiment with alternatives. ‘Democratization’ of the socialist rule by picking up the new trend was a Cuban response.¹¹⁷ National Debates in Cuba was one of the devices for people’s participation in policy matters.

¹¹⁶Petras and Veltmeyer, *What is Left in Latin America?* p. 8.

¹¹⁷Cuba adopted a number of measures to overcome the crisis. It adopted a New Policy Framework that “reiterated a commitment to the core principles of sovereignty and social protection, and retained an overall framework of state ownership; but beyond that, it included a mixture of liberalizing and state-led approaches. Some items—‘develop tourism’, ‘promote exports’, ‘minimize imports’, ‘seek new forms of foreign investment’, ‘control state spending and money supply’—suggested partial liberalization in response to new international conditions, while others—‘continue the food programme’, ‘give priority to health, education and scientific work’, ‘centralize planning for public benefit’, ‘protect the revolution’s achievements’—indicated the state’s still extensive role. Emily Morris, ‘Unexpected Cuba’, *New Left Review*, 88, July- August, 2014, p.20. The government organised

What was common in Latin America was that people forming as collectives, shaped by different approaches that suited their cause. At times, local participatory microcosms are connected to a larger movement. Neighbourhood organisations and Peoples' Assemblies are the best examples of this.¹¹⁸ Heuristics make every movement distinct.

While acknowledging the diversity of these movements, certain factors are found in common in the resurgence of the Left in Latin America. The fact that these nations share a common past and more importantly a common 'present', necessarily is basis of a universal feature, in a sense. The inherent sentiment out of a shared experience of its people against neo-liberalism and the US is one of them. The United States is the most tangible enemy, hovering over the hemisphere, since the days of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823; and the fact that this part of the world happened to be treated as its backyard by the US regimes since 1865 contributed to a certain association of the US as its enemy, over the years. A series of hegemonic strategic plans¹¹⁹ of the US subjugated the countries to a point of no return. Latin America being treated as the first human lab for the global capitalist restructuring that began in the late 1970s (in the guise of the Structural Adjustments Programme), felt the ultimate financial shove in the 1990s, with the imposition of the 'Washington Consensus' in 1994. Hence the fight against neo-liberalism has been synonymous with the fight against pro-neoliberal governments in these nations. This is one of the major characteristics of the New Left. Efforts were made to redefine the relationship

national debates over all the major issues such as fiscal and monetary stabilization, thus decentralised the power centres.

¹¹⁸See Ballve and Prasad (ed.), *despatches from Latin America*.

¹¹⁹ US consolidated absolute control of Latin American countries through a series of trade agreements and unequal partnerships. Organisation of American States (OAS), North American Congress on Latin America, 1967, Washington Consensus, Central American Free Trade Association (CAFTA), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA-1995), Proposal for Free Trade Areas of Americas (FTAA-1994), Plan Columbia, Plan Mexico, Andean Initiatives, School of the Americas-- trained military officers of the region in counter-insurgency, and fight against the progressive elements, International Law Enforcement Agency which replaced School of Americas

between the core and the periphery; the writing on the wall is very clear - they no longer want to remain as the periphery of the west.¹²⁰

Another prominent feature of the left resurgence in Latin America, as it happened in the neo-colonial phase, is its nationalistic character while creating spaces for regional networks¹²¹ (defending the nations do not happen in isolation, when the enemy is stronger), without overlooking the identity of the nations. This makes these movements different from the 'non sovereign alternative for globalization' movements such as Seattle, Genoa and so on; this distinction is crucial apart from the fact that the campaigns against globalisation, as witnessed elsewhere in the same time, were anarchist in nature. Some aspects of the New Left distinctly resemble the liberation movements in the two decades spanning over the 1940s and the 1960s.

Like Marx said in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, while men make their own history, they make it under the circumstances already existing and these are transmitted from the past. In Marx's words:

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language.¹²²

This is true with Latin American too. The New Left in Latin America often evoked the past to stir the innate national feelings; they did not consider this inimical to their ideology. Symbols from the past like the rainbow flag of the indigenous

¹²⁰See also Ali, *Pirates of Caribbean*, Prashad and Ballvé (ed.), *Dispatches From Latin America*.

¹²¹ For instance the Rio Group is an organisation comprising 25 Latin American nations, Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) is an organisation that strives for meaningful economic integration among the states of the region. ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) was established for regional cooperation, economic integration and financial restructuring of the region and MERCOSUR. The CELA Community of Latin America and Caribbean States is the successor of Rio groups which have 33 member countries. See also Deepak Bhojwani, 'The Left in Latin America and the Caribbean', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 22 December, 2012, pp.31-38.

¹²² Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>, accessed on 15/6/2015

people, were used. Indigenous languages were reinvented. The name of Simon Bolivar, the Liberator, was invoked often to raise the patriotic-national sentiments of the people. It surely worked in many places including in Venezuela like Jose Marti's name in Cuba. Argentina's Juan Perón, Ecuador's José Velasco Ibarra, Mexico's Lázaro Cárdenas and Brazil's Getúlio Vargas were the few other heroes¹²³ of yesteryears and invoking their names certainly appealed to patriotism. Collective memories of the past, in fact, do wonders.¹²⁴

There are many instances where the cumulative anger against the stooges of neo-liberalism, who were responsible for the sale of the country, burst asunder into protests. The new century saw many such massive protests capable of overthrowing governments. For instance, the Argentinean president Fernando De la Rúa was overthrown after the massive protests in 2001; the indigenous rebellion in Bolivia in early 2000 sent two presidents packing. Demonstrations, road blockades and occupation of the gas fields forced the neo-liberal president, Carlos Mesa (of Bolivia) to resign in 2005.¹²⁵ Most of these movements were built on strong nationalist sentiments; these were in defence of national sovereignty from the onslaught of neoliberal policies.

¹²³ Their pro-poor and radical policies became legendary.

¹²⁴ <http://www.globalresearch.ca/latin-america-s-new-left-in-power/28838> accessed on 7/8/2016.

¹²⁵ "Between 2000 and 2003, Latin American politics took a decidedly left turn as the United States' most prominent supporters were defeated or ousted and/ or fled from office. Angry majorities, badly hit by a combination of financial and economic crises, the pillage of resources, enterprises, and bank accounts, and the emptying of public treasuries, took to the streets. The fallen U.S. clients (or would-be clients) included the presidents of various countries in the region: De la Rúa in Argentina, Sanchez de Losada in Bolivia, Noboa in Ecuador, the 48-hour civil military coup-plotters in Venezuela, and Cardoso in Brazil. The driving force behind these political revolutions was powerful social movements, in particular those representing the urban poor, Indians, peasants, unemployed workers, and downwardly mobile public employees. Organized urban trade unions and students played a secondary role. In contrast to the past, organized urban trade unions and students played a secondary role. As in all empires, US dominance depended on the capacity of the local ruling class to maintain political control either through force, fraud or corrupt electoral procedures. Once the client ruling electoral class was ousted, US influence over the countries sharply diminished." James Petras, Latin America: Perspectives for Socialism in a Time of a World Capitalist Recession/Depression, December 2008.p. 8 <http://petras.lahaine.org>. accessed on 11/11/2016.

It is pertinent here to talk about another distinct aspect of the Latin American resurgence: Street as a metaphor!¹²⁶ Another common character of the New Left movement is the space they used for their protest. Street was an essential part of this new pedagogy of the oppressed. The street here does not mean literally the street; but street as a strategy. In the broader sense, this means occupation of large estates, public land and other unused land as the cadres of Movimento Serra Tem did in Brazil, or the occupation of the streets by the people of Bolivia against privatization of water (water war 2000) or the occupation by the people of the gas fields against privatisation of country's energy resources¹²⁷ (Gas war 2003) or the Argentinean workers entering the closed factories and work places, with the support of popular Assemblies, to take over the production,¹²⁸ the march of the indigenous people in Ecuador for the inclusion of indigenous people in the country's political process, mass peasant, trade union and Indian protests challenging the neo-liberal Pastrana regime (1998-2002) in Columbia and so on. Street as a metaphor also means the heuristics of the movements which is participatory (including in the gender sense).

Guerrilla warfare which was the celebrated tactics once upon a time, is history now. Though there have been exceptions such as the armed uprisings of Zapatista Army of National Liberation -EZLN, guerrilla movements FARC/ELN, etc. Most of these movements are open, democratic and participatory. Integral to these were the interesting slogans that were pronouncedly voicing ideas of self-determination added colour to the street struggle. As for instance, 'None of us alone is as good as all of us

¹²⁶ The concept street as a metaphor is used by Atilio A Boron. Atilio A Boron, 'Strategy and Tactics in Popular Struggles in Latin America' in Leo Panitch, Greg Albo and Vivek Chibber (ed.), *The Question of Strategy Socialist Register* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2013), p. 245.

¹²⁷ President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada initiative to sell the energy field led to the Gas War in Bolivia in 2003

¹²⁸ About 200 factories and work places in Argentina, some 100 in Brazil and around 20 in Uruguay are run by the workers. Raul Zibechi, 'Worker – Run Factories: From Survival to Economic Solidarity', cited in Ballve and Prasad (ed.), *despatches from Latin America*, p.339.

together' (by the Neighbourhood associations in Bolivia), 'Another world is possible' [the famous slogan of World Social Forum from Porto Alegre in Brazil], *Que se vayan todos!*' ('Out with all politicians!' A slogan from Argentina), *El agua es del pueblo, carajo* (the water belongs to the people, damn it-the water war slogan in Bolivia), *El Alto de pie, nunca de rodillas* (on your feet El Alto; never on your knees-the gas war slogan), 'the south also exists' (Uruguay's Poet Mario Benedetti). While in all these, the Street is the new battle ground; and occupation is THE slogan. The enormous gravitational pull¹²⁹ of the street is what made the difference and continues to make in Latin America today.

Classes are not the remnants of archaic times, as some of the 'post Marxists' lament. What is happening in Latin America, is indeed, a class war in the context of neo-liberalism. A close look at the people who were involved in these movements and the programmes and strategies of the New Left governments demonstrate the class characteristics of the new social revolution in Latin America. Workers who suffered wage cuts and wage freeze and were laid-off, landless people, the small and medium local producers, mine workers, unorganised workers, the displaced indigenous people, the middle class that suffered due to the austerity measures, whose savings were defrauded by financial institutions (an integral feature of the neo-liberal era) and the cuts in social spending (post-Keynes capitalism) were the context of these movements. The *Movimento Serra Tem*¹³⁰ (MST), as the name indicates, for instance, represented the struggle of the landless workers and they squatted in the unused land and settled themselves there through peaceful methods. As a class, they represented the landless agriculture workers and the small peasants. They stood for radical land

¹²⁹ Atilio A Boron, 'Strategy and Tactics in Popular Struggles in Latin America, Leo Panitch, *et al.*, (ed.), in *The Question of Strategy: Socialist Register*, p. 245.

¹³⁰ Between 1984 and 2002, approximately 1600 people have been killed in agrarian conflicts. Joao Pedro Stedile, interviewed by Francisco de Oliverira, 'Landless Battalions', *New Left Review*, 15 May/June 2002, p.97.

reforms and reclaimed land from the *latifundistas*. The CONAIE- Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador is a network organisation of the indigenous people, a social force who no longer can be ‘tricked with mirrors and trinkets’¹³¹ the victims of displacement, and environmental degradation due to the excessive exploitation of natural resources and whose economic and cultural survival came under threat. They fought for land rights, clean environment and the ecology, for indigenous peoples’ rights and opposed the transnational exploitation of their resources.¹³²

The indigenous movements, these new social formations, are blended with ethnic and class based identities. In the gas war, in Bolivia in 2003, the “turnout of progressive students, intellectuals and professionals from mestizo and creole middle classes was low, while the ranks of urban and rural labourers of Aymara descent swelled downtown streets.”¹³³ The ANTEAG- National Association of Worker Managed Enterprises, formed in 1994, was the workers’ organisation in Argentina, the victims of closure of factories and work places due to the economic crisis triggered by Neo-liberalism in the 1990s. They “essayed a new venture in the history of class struggle”¹³⁴ and added a new praxis to Marxism. The basic class character of the New Left can be derived from these examples.

These New Left movements placed the Left and Left of Centre governments in power in countries like Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, and Brazil and that was the beginning of the slogan: ‘21st Century Socialism.’ And nationalisation of

¹³¹ Ali, *Pirates of Caribbean*, p 102, “Like the fire Spanish conquerors, who exchanged mirrors and trinkets with the Indians for silver and gold, so the United States trades with Latin America.”

¹³² Though, they detested politics until 1995, since 1995, Pachakutik, the political arm of CONAIE, has been actively participating in the political process of the country.

¹³³ Ali, *Pirates of Caribbean*, p.94.

¹³⁴ Petras and Veltmeyer, *What is Left in Latin America?* p. 8.

natural resources and manufacturing activities¹³⁵ was one of the major thrust areas of these governments. This socialism, indeed, stayed within the framework of their constitution; and wherever, the existing legal and constitutional structure of the state apparatus were inadequate to carry out the radical reforms, the constitutions were amended or replaced by a new constitution. As most of these governments are a consequence of popular movements (that overthrew the neoliberal governments), the new constitutions were distinct; safeguarding the rights to people - rights of the indigenous people in the political process, human rights, specific women rights, educational and health rights and political rights such as referendum and recall. In other words, renewal of democracy and democratic institutions was a common thrust. National self-determination, civil society, social justice, participation, democratization, gender equity, human rights, clean environment are the few aspects that were added to the socialist agenda in this context.

Another interesting feature is that religion was not considered inimical to socialism in some of these nations in Latin America. The New Left did not hold it to be the 'opium of the mankind'¹³⁶ as the Left in another time and space did. It became part of the liberation movement. Though "in the sixties, the catholic Church had largely supported the military dictatorship, but with the growing ferment of liberation theology there was a change of orientation, the emergence of CPT (*Comissao Pastoral da Terra* – Pastoral Land Commission)¹³⁷ and layer of progressive bishops. Before the line had been: 'No need to worry, you will have your land in heaven...'

¹³⁵ For instance nationalization of oil companies in Venezuela, nationalization and renegotiation of mining and energy companies in Bolivia and so on.

¹³⁶ "Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people (emphasis original), Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction*, December 1843-January 1844. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm> . accessed on 15/6/2015.

¹³⁷ CPT was formed in 1975 by the progressive Bishops in Brazil. This became a well-known entity when they began to take up the issue of the landless.

Now it was: ‘Since you have already got your land in heaven, lets us struggle for it here as well.’ The friars played a good role in stirring up the farmers and getting them organised.’¹³⁸ In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas have combined Christian faith with Left ideology; in Ecuador, President Rafael Correa openly admits that his political thinking is influenced by the Catholic Church and liberation theology; and the pro-poor ex-president of Paraguay, Fernando Lugo, (2008-2012)¹³⁹ was a former priest. In Brazil, the Catholic church inspired by liberation theology, had a significant role in organising the community, especially the peasants, (the Church also funds peasant programmes here); in Mexico too, liberation theology played an important role in bringing the women in the forefront of the struggles. No wonder, the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero¹⁴⁰ in El Salvador created a huge furore in Latin America.

Seen through the prism of classical Marxist praxis, the resurgence of the Left in Latin America raises many questions and also several limitations. It showcases the weakness in the form of lack of institutional strategy to capture power in the cases of movements and as in many cases, they are reluctant to capture power too.¹⁴¹ The constructive dismissal of the ‘old vanguards’ and replacing them with loosely organised unstructured or semi structured networks and organisations is yet another criticism. The issues that the left radical governments are not radical enough when it

¹³⁸ Joao Pedro Stedile, ‘Landless Battalions’, p. 79.

¹³⁹ He was impeached in 2013 by the right wing. When in power he and his Patriotic Alliance for Change had carried out land and tax reform, reforms in judiciary, health and anti- poverty programmes. He gained his main support from the peasantry,

¹⁴⁰ Every Sunday, Romero used to conduct Mass in front of the dozens of bodies found on the streets of the capital, San Salvador. Those carrying out these massacres were trained by the U.S. Special Forces and intelligence agencies. Romero was a votary of “liberation theology” and was sympathetic to the FMLN’s egalitarian goals. Before his killing by state-sponsored assassins, he had denounced from the pulpit “the war of extermination and genocide against a defenceless civilian population. A United Nations-supported Truth Commission set up after the peace accord in El Salvador concluded that the order for Romero’s killing and the separate killings of six Jesuit priests and four American churchwomen came from the highest echelons of the U.S.-backed government of the time. The U.S. had funnelled \$6 billion at the height of the FMLN struggle to prop up the right-wing government.” source, John Cherian, ‘Turning left’, *Frontline*, Vol. 26, Issue 8 April 2009.

¹⁴¹ rather they prefer to support a party in power from outside through electoral support as in the case of MST in Brazil which always support PT during the elections even though they have some differences politically

comes to go ahead with structural changes and that they compromise, at times, with the elite are heard often. But then, this is the New Left. It is yet another experiment with socialism and be that as it may, ‘indigenous socialism’ or ‘the citizen’s revolution’ or a ‘socialism for 21st century’ or ‘Movement Towards Socialism’.

The fact is that the Left, by shaping the indigenous movements, succeeded in ousting the unrepresentative neoliberal regimes in this region and placed more democratic and participatory governments. The New Left governments in power, in many instances, succeeded in nationalizing the nations’ resources and could bring radical reforms in the agrarian and labour sectors. They also could carry out redistribution of income to a certain extent under the new radical constitutions. Even while not denying that the commodity import boom during the 2004-08, played a vital role in stabilizing the economy, it is necessary to take note of the change that began blowing in the early years of the 21st Century and that it happened in just about a decade after the Soviet Union and the Socialist block in Eastern Europe collapsed. In short, the characteristics of the New Left demonstrate that “Marxism entails a continuous process of theoretical reconstruction, around a core (i.e. using certain categories, seen in their interrelationships, and the spontaneous tendencies immanent in these categories), for providing the basis for praxis in a changing world.”¹⁴²

If one agrees with this perception, then the new Left resurgence in Latin America is well within the framework of Marxist praxis. In the words of James Petras, “We are not in a period of end of ideology, but in the ideology linked to popular participation. Class politics have not been replaced by ‘modernization’. It has been reinvigorated and found new sites for struggle; new forms of organisation.”¹⁴³

¹⁴² Patnaik, ‘The Future of Marxism’, p.181.

¹⁴³ James Petras, ‘Retreat of Intellectuals’, *Economic and Political weekly*, 22 September 1996, p.1990.

The distinct Marxist praxis narrated above will constitute the larger framework of this study. The communist experience in Kerala will be placed and studied as one of the Marxist Praxis. While doing so, parallels are drawn from the Latin American narratives while looking into the transformation of the Communist parties in Kerala in the context of the liberalization and globalisation. Next Chapter will place the first democratically elected communist government in the world in its historical context.

CHAPTER II

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF THE FIRST ELECTED COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT IN KERALA

Marx's approach to history and the stress he made on the objective conditions that guide men in the making of history in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (discussed in some detail in the previous chapter) is relevant to the communist movement in Kerala too. The task of revolutionising the masses in the already existing circumstances while appropriating the radical movements from the past necessarily made a history hitherto unknown to Kerala. This chapter will look into the historical context of the evolution of the communist movement in Kerala in order to locate the emergence of the first elected communist government in the State and to make an enquiry into the ideology that guided the government in its short span of existence. It will look into how far the inherited legacy of the national liberation movement influenced the Communists as the early communists originally belonged to the Indian National Congress (INC) and also formed the Kerala unit of the Congress Socialist Party, acting essentially as a ginger group within the INC long before transforming into communists. It is also pertinent to look into the social reform movement in Kerala, as this was another trajectory for the communists in the physical and metaphorical sense of the term.

Section I, hence, will present a brief narrative of the social reform movements and the Left in Kerala; Section II will deal with the Congress Socialist Party and emergence of the Left in Malabar; Section III is about the genesis of the communist

movement in Travancore and Cochin; and Section IV will explain the developments with regard to the CPI in Kerala during 1946 to 1952.

I

The genesis of the Communist movement in Kerala can be traced back to the era of social reform movements including those reform movements that were carried out within the castes against the loathsome and unfair practices in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In a historical sense, this churning, indeed, initiated the democratization process of Kerala society.¹ In other words, this reconfiguration was characterised by the struggles for fundamental democratic and civil rights of the people. The reform movements were set in the historical context of colonial India and their implications in the structure of relations of production - in the areas of agriculture and industries - and inference to the social relations. The socio-economic formations, consequential to colonialism, sought changes in the pre-capital social relations.

By and large, these movements pulverised and prepared the soil for the larger socio- political movements which shaped the contours of political democracy in the state which is unique. The transition was, indeed, radical in the sense that it challenged the hitherto existing medieval abhorrent precepts, derived from the scriptures that determined the characteristics of the social and economic relations in pre-independent Kerala (erstwhile Malabar, Cochin and Travancore) over many centuries. Land ownership decided the economic and the social relations and a caste hierarchy where every caste treated the one lower than itself with contempt. The relations of production and the consequent social structure based on caste hierarchy

¹It may be noted that Kerala, in this context, is used to denote the Malabar district of the Madras Presidency as well as the kingdoms of Travancore and Cochin, all of which were brought together to make the Kerala State in 1956.

had ensured the complete enslavement of the Dalits and other lower caste people. The eclectic reform movements touched upon an assortment of issues – from the gender question (the Namboodiri reform movement-*Yogakshema Sabha*-1908) to resetting the matrilineal system (prevalent among the Nair community)² to defying the caste system (the campaign steered by Sree Narayanaguru)³ to fighting caste based oppression (the Ayyankali movement) and so on; economic concerns were expressed, but far and few.⁴

The educated middle class that emerged in the colonial context and the victims of the prevailing customs, belonging to these communities, were the torchbearers of this modernisation. Their urge to challenge the detestable practices that prevailed within communities and modernise them led to a social change which was unparalleled. It may be added here that there is no such evidence of similar movements of such holistic nature and seeking reforms from within communities and equality between communities from anywhere in India; this, however, is not the central concern of this study. Educational institutions set up by the missionaries and the various proclamations by the Kings in Travancore on the land system and so on were other factors that contributed to the process. The social fabric of the society was changing and the stage was set for further radical political movements in Kerala.

²The Nair Service Society was formed among the Nair community in 1914.

³Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928) and Ayyankali (1863-1941) were the harbingers of the process radical social reform movement in late nineteenth and in the early twentieth century in Kerala. Sree Narayana Guru was well-known for his unconventional approaches. He opposed the caste system vehemently and for him there were ‘only two *jatis* among the human species- man and women. There is only one caste-humanity, one religion-Humanism and one God-the Universal Spirit’. His sublime humanism encompassed all the castes and his concern was not to interpret the imprudent world around him but to change it. The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam-(SNDP Yogam) was established in 1903 to propagate these ideals. It is an unfortunate fact that Sri Narayana Guru was not much known as radical social reformer outside the Kerala Society. Mostly, he would be mentioned as a spiritual guru of Tiyya/Ezhavas, which indeed is a misrepresentation. His philosophy was deeply egalitarian and radical. Ayyankali established the Sadhuparipalana Sangam in 1907 in the line of SNDP to emancipate the Pulaya community, which was a major Dalit community in Travancore, socially and economically. Let us here acknowledge the contributions of other reformers like Vagbadananda, Yohanan, Chattambi Swamikal and others to complete the list.

⁴ Social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru and Ayyankali had also advocated industrial and educational development for the emancipation of the lower caste people.

The Left radicals were the ones who had inherited this tradition and carried over the transformation to a higher level. By internalising the nature of the existing parochial social relations and the parasitic feudal order, the Left in Kerala fought the reactionary forces relentlessly by providing an organic leadership to the peasants and workers and also by organising them in the larger struggle for National Liberation. In short, they understood the “close nexus between the economic and social conditions and the difficulty of improving the former without alterations in the latter and vice-versa”.⁵ The Left had treated the social oppression at par with the economic exploitation and successfully linked these into the fight against colonialism. The most relevant factor to be noted here is that the legacy of the reform movements in Kerala society was carried on, initially by the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) and subsequently by the Communist Party of India. A close look at the activities of the radicals and then the communists will indicate that the early communists in Kerala did not consider Gandhi as antithetical to Marx as did those elsewhere in colonial India. While they organised the workers and peasants on class lines (which was unlike Gandhi), the agitation mode adopted to was mostly Gandhian. We shall discuss the historical evolution of the Congress in Malabar as the genes of the communists in Kerala can be traced there in its historical sense.

II

Kerala’s tryst with political parties began with the setting up of the Provincial unit of the Congress Party in Malabar in 1908. A look into the trajectory of the Congress in Malabar will establish the fact that it had never been a homogeneous entity. As it was in that time elsewhere, there existed two distinct strands - moderates and radicals - and eventually the radicals came to hegemonize the whole national liberation

⁵Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change*, p. 89.

movement in the region in a short span of time. The story of the Congress in the Madras presidency (aside of Malabar) was indeed part of the larger trajectory of the movement since 1885 and many of the founders happened to be from Madras. The Malabar region, unlike Travancore and Cochin - two princely States - was also the scene of an array of political activities, associated with the national liberation movement; this, notwithstanding that the Malabar District Congress Committee came into existence only in 1908; however, the integration of this unit with that of the national platform was fast. In 1916, a branch of the Home Rule League was established in Calicut in the presence of Annie Besant.

It may be noted that in the initial years, the agenda of the Congress was restricted to demanding constitutional reforms. The leadership mainly came from the educated middle class - caste Hindus - and a chunk of them happened to be lawyers, a lucrative profession then. Another set of leaders belonged to the landlord class. A look at the nature of the resolutions of the District Congress since the first Annual Political Conference in 1916 to the fourth Political Conference in 1919 clearly confirms the nature of the Congress in Malabar then.

These Political Conferences were dominated by the landlords and the rich people of the District. The resolutions passed at the Conferences conformed in their tone and spirit to the policy of political mendicancy followed by the Congress leadership of those days. Thus they took the form of appeals to the British Government for the introduction of such reforms as increased representation in Legislative Councils, expansion of Local self-governments, provision for better educational facilities, withdrawal of repressive laws like the Mappila Act, etc. The Calicut Conference even appealed to make generous contributions to the War Fund, while the Badagara Conference hastened to affirm loyalty to the British Crown.⁶

However, gradually the mendicant petitioning format transformed into a radical one with the 5th Political Conference of the Malabar District Congress which was held in Manjeri in 1919. For the first time, the existence of two strands – moderates and extremists – came to the fore openly. Incidentally, the Conference was

⁶ Sreedhara Menon, *Political History of Modern Kerala*, (Kottayam: DC Books, 2007), p. 63.

chaired by Kasturi Ranga Iyenger, then the editor of *The Hindu*, and clearly a spokesperson of the moderate opinion with the INC. However, two major resolutions were passed in the Manjeri political conference, in the midst of disagreements between the moderates and the extremists. The first being the rejection of the proposed Montague-Chelmsford reforms of 1919 and the second and more important from the scope of this study, being the demand for tenancy reforms; first of that kind in the history of the INC.⁷The Conference [read majority] supported the tenants' cause and demanded legislation to regulate landlord-tenant relations. It was quite natural for the peasants and the workers to support the 'extremists' and the landlords the 'moderates'. The change was significant because earlier the landlords had successfully prevented the INC from committing itself to the tenants cause.⁸

The victory of the radicals ensued a new era and the "tenant leaders gradually captured the control of Malabar Congress by ousting the *Janmis* who dominated it till then...and practically in every regional political conference since 1920, in any significant political activity began to take place in Malabar, tenancy reform figured as a major demand."⁹

However, the first Tenants Union of Malabar (*Malabar Kudian Sangham*) that was formed at Pattambi by a group of Lawyers in 1922 had nothing to do with the INC but was politically closer to Justice Party.

Following the Nagpur resolution of the INC in 1920 on the reorganisation of the Congress units on linguistic basis, the Malabar District Congress came to be known as the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) in 1920. As the name indicates, this broadened the purview of the INC and now its annual conferences were

⁷It may be noted here that it took at least a couple of decades since then for the Indian National Congress to formulate a similar line with regard to the tenancy question for the first time in its Lucknow session in 1936.

⁸See 'Malabar District Congress', *The Hindu*, 29/4/1920

⁹Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change*, pp. 77-78.

attended by delegates from not only the Malabar district of the Madras Presidency but also from the Travancore and Cochin states. However, the movement for *Aikya Keralam* (unified Kerala) came much later.

The freedom movement was gaining momentum in Malabar with the participation of people in the Khilafat and the Non Cooperation movement. However, the Moplah Rebellion of 1921¹⁰ and the brutal suppression of it by the government had driven the region into turbulence and it also led to communal polemics with far reaching implications. The mistrust was so deep that the KPCC was forced to suspend its activities for some time. The zeal of the people in the region, meanwhile, melted down and the movement too waned, partly due to the severe repression and for no less reason due to the nature of the movement.¹¹ In the words of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, a Congressman turned ideologue of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) later, the context was:

The Malabar part, a district of 'British' India, became a strong centre of the Non-cooperation-Khilafat movement and it could be compared to any other part of the country in respect of the sweep of the movement and popular participation. However, after the movement was given a communal disruptive twist in 1921, it suffered heavily. The intense repression that followed and the bitterness that was generated by the diversion of the movement along communal lines made it difficult for the mass movement to rise again for almost a decade.¹²

The only exception at that point of time was the activities of the Malabar peasant organisation of the tenants that continued its struggle for a comprehensive tenancy protection legislation and they organised meetings at various parts of Malabar

¹⁰This study is completely in agreement with the views of those scholars like K N Panikkar, Conrad Wood who argued that the Moplah Rebellion of 1921 was primarily a peasant revolt which "occurred because the Ernad Moplah, with grievances unresolved, because the administration was prepared to take his subordination granted, had long been waiting for a sign of the collapse of the power which sustained the *Jenmi*..." Conrad Wood, *The Moplah Rebellion and Its Genesis*, (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1987), p. 238.

¹¹ Despite Bipan Chandra's favourable argument on S-T-S, Struggle- Truce - Struggle, was a necessary strategy and that had helped to build up mass organisation, it affected the movement in Malabar adversely. Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, K.N. Panikkar, Sucheta Mahajan (ed.), *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989), p.313.

¹² E. M. S. Namboodiripad, 'The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony: A Short Note on Freedom Struggle in Kerala', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 12, No. 9 September, 1984, pp. 25- 34.

as part of the campaign. Not surprisingly, a major demand of the All *Kudiaan* (Tenants) Conference held at Ernakulum in April 1928 was also for the enactment of tenancy protection legislation. However, the agitation of this phase was not a ‘mass movement’ in the real sense of the term, inasmuch as the overwhelming majority of *verumpattakkar* (the actual cultivator under the tenants- some sort of subletting) were kept out of its purview and the demands were mainly confined to those of that concerned to the *kanakkar* (tenants). Nevertheless, according to E.M.S. Namboodiripad, it was this agitation which gave the Malabar peasants’ the first elements of class consciousness – a consciousness that they should unite as a class and fight their enemy, the *janmi*.¹³ Other than the activities of the peasant organisation, there was a brief interlude in the political front. In short, when “the wave of communism was sweeping the country”¹⁴ through trade union activities in the late 1920s, Malabar and the two Princely states of Travancore and Cochin were relatively inactive.¹⁵ The second phase of the national liberation movement in Malabar began with the Civil Disobedience Movement. Before entering into a discussion on this active phase, it is pertinent to view the national scene and its implications on Malabar.

The early 1920s witnessed the emergence of a number of Communist groups in the national scene and the Communist Party of India (CPI) was formed in Tashkent, Soviet Union in 1920. Here, it is intended to restrict the analysis only on the activities of the CPI which comes under the purview of this study. A series of conspiracy cases slapped against the communists since the formation of the CPI, such as Peshawar Conspiracy cases (three cases) 1922-23, Cawnpore (Kanpur)

¹³ EMS Namboodiripad, *Kerala, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1967), p. 112.

¹⁴ Bipan Chandra *et al.*, *India's Struggle for Independence*, p.219.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 219.

Conspiracy case 1923-24 and later on the famous Meerut Conspiracy case that lasted between 1929 and 1933 adversely affected this young Party. “The conspiracy cases and innumerable other forms of repression against militant mass actions did of course slowdown the process of consolidating the scattered communist groups into a unified all-India party.”¹⁶

However, in spite of the repressive environment, an attempt was made to organise the first All India Conference of the Communist Party of India in Cawnpore in 1925. A notable activity of the CPI at this point of time was the distribution of the Manifesto of the Communist Party in the Conference of the INC in Ahmadabad in 1921 and at the Gaya session in 1922. The Manifesto appraised the situation and appreciated the ‘mighty revolutionary upheavals and the awakening of the peasantry and working class’¹⁷ in India. It criticised the bourgeois leadership of the INC for lacking understanding on the awakening of the people and thus failing the people’s movement. In yet another development, various communist groups came together to form the Workers’ and Peasants’ Parties (WPP) in 1927 and the first All India Conference of the WPP was held in Calcutta in December 1928. It should be mentioned here that these developments, however, did not create any ripple in Malabar, Travancore or Cochin.

In the 1920s, the INC recognised the imperative for alliances with other social forces such as the peasantry and the workers in order to strengthen the national movement. It began in the context of the incipient unrest since the withdrawal of the Non Cooperation Movement after the Chauri Chaura incident. Concurrently, at the provincial level, peasants groups were springing up; mostly from independent initiatives. Looming unrest among the workers in Madras, Calcutta, Bombay and

¹⁶ EMS Namboodiripad, *Nehru-Ideology and Practice*, (New Delhi:National Book Centre, 1988), p.15.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 29.

Cawnpore and unrest among the peasantry in general forced the INC to rethink its agenda. In his presidential address to the Gaya session of INC in 1922, C.R. Das stated:

The Congress must take labour and peasantry in hand . . . and organise them both from the point of view of their own special interests and also from the point of view of higher ideal which demands satisfaction of their special interests and the devotion of such interests to the cause of *Swaraj*.¹⁸

If this was not done, he warned that the organisations of workers and peasants might drift away from the cause of *Swaraj* and he feared that these social forces might pursue class struggle or other forms of violent means to achieve their end. Though, the people in Kerala were blissfully unaware of the activities of the CPI,¹⁹ it should be noted that even before the Gaya session of the INC carried out the persuasive analysis on the role of peasantry and workers in the freedom struggle, the peasant question was central to the 5th Political Conference of the Malabar District Congress in Manjeri in 1919. The fact being that a majority of the members in the Congress in Malabar, by this time, were peasants, the meeting could pass a resolution for the legislation of a comprehensive law to address the problems faced by the tenants effortlessly. And the Malabar *Kudian Sangam* was formed in 1922. However, except for the activities of the tenants' organisation, Malabar suffered from political inertia.

It was the magic wand of the *Salt Satyagraha*, in 1930 that shook off the torpor of the Malabar people; Malabar plunged into action once again. The Salt Satyagraha was officially announced when a group of volunteers took off on their first leg of journey from Kozhikode to Payyanur beach to manufacture salt, under the leadership

¹⁸ Bipan Chandra, *et al.*, *India's Struggle for Independence*, p. 216.

¹⁹ In Travancore a small communist group was formed in 1920; but it was more or less a discussion group of few intellectuals. Even though the activities of the Communist Party of India spread over to Madras, and to parts of Andhra under the leaders like Amir Hyder Khan and student activists like P Sundarayya, "the people in Kerala were not aware of the existence of the CPI or its activities", EMS Namboodiripad, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam; Udhbhavavum Valarchayayum* [Malayalam], (Thiruvananthapuram: Chinta Publishers, 1995), p.17.

of K. Kelappan, on 12 April 1930 to break the salt law. Interestingly, the district administration did not treat it as a threat or violation. That was the beginning of small *Jathas* (processions). Later on, more people joined the movement. However, this lacked the representative character of a mass movement as the Satyagrahis, mostly, belonged to the upper castes, from well-known *tharavudus* of the region. “They [Satyagrahis] stayed in the houses of the local landlords and village officials and rarely worked within the villages. By providing accommodation for the marchers in the houses of the locally powerful, the Congress had effectively restricted participation to either Nayars or Nambudiris, as those of lower caste would be denied entry to their homes. In a sense Congress activity in Payyanur often assumed the nature of a spectacle or performance.”²⁰ This picture is a typical representation of the nature of the congress in Malabar then.

However, the significance of these marches lies in that fact that it broke the silence after a period of interval from agitations. The actual changes began with the large scale participation of youth in the Civil Disobedience Movement. A.K. Gopalan²¹ and E.M.S. Namboodiripad were two such examples, the former was a teacher in an elementary school and left his job and the latter was a student who had discontinued his education to join the movement; many such young people had taken the plunge. Subsequent arrests and repression by the Government brought more to the fore. The movement became intense in Malabar with the midnight arrest of Gandhi on 4th May 1930. An instance when P. Krishna Pillai (who became the most charismatic leader of Communist Party and died due to snake bite at a young age while he was

²⁰ Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, p. 95.

²¹ A. K. Gopalan writes in his autobiography, ‘In the Cause of the People’ that he was not the only one who jumped into the Civil Disobedience movement from his extended family. From his *Tharavad* half a dozen of his relatives like A K Padmanabhan Nambiar, A K Kunhi Kannan Nambiar, K Damu were also active in the movement. A. K. Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1973), p. 16.

working underground) dared *lathi* blows while protecting the National Flag would soon become a legend in the region. Robin Jeffrey gives the statistics of the Satyagrahis from Malabar which indicates the revival of the activities of the INC in the region. Interestingly most of the volunteers incarcerated were youngsters and the leadership of CSP arrived from these sections later. Jeffrey states:

By the time of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, nearly 600 satyagrahis had been convicted in Malabar, and '95 percent of those who (were) in jail (were) below the age of thirty. Of 497 civil disobedience prisoners under twenty-one years of age in the Presidency in December 1930, ninety-nine were from Malabar . . . By August 1932, [in the second phase of the Civil Disobedience movement] there had been another 1700 arrests, and 400 convictions in Malabar. When the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) tacitly ended civil disobedience in May 1933, there were public outcries against the decision from the young Kerala volunteers still at liberty, and picketing continued into September.²²

The conjuncture of events - the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in 1931 and the truce and finally the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1933 - had a lasting impact on the people in Malabar too. This frustrated the people to the core; especially it had a devastating effect on the youth. In 1933, out of jail, most of them did not have a clear direction to their activities. In jail, they had met few radicals who were interned there from other parts of the country, and for the first time these Malabar youth were exposed to radical socialist politics. They were confused to the core in identifying their path of struggle. Congress was the only available platform; but these youngsters were disillusioned with the vacillation of the Congress leadership. In fact, P. Krishna Pillai and K.P. Gopalan, two important leaders of this period, had briefly toyed with the idea of joining the *Anushilan Samiti* upon their release from jail. By then, stories of the October Revolution in Russia and the transition of Russia into the Soviet Union were in circulation; the rosy picture that there is no exploitation, classes, no unemployment and no gender inequity was indeed alluring. "A large section of those who participated in the nationalist struggles in India from 1930 to 1934 decided

²² Robin Jeffrey, 'Matriliney, Marxism, and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 November 1978, p. 86.

to examine this and to adopt a similar programme, modified to suit the different conditions in India.”²³

Still Communist Party did not hold any influence in the region. One known exception was N. P. Kurukkal who considered himself a communist, had published documents on the Meerut Conspiracy Case as early as in 1931 in Travancore, under the authority of ‘The Indian Communist Party (Kerala Provincial Organization).’²⁴ However, this was an exception and individuals who would become important leaders of the CPI were oblivious of the debates and the discourse within the world communist movement at this stage. As for instance, in 1935, Namboodiripad published in Malayalam one of the manuscripts he wrote in prison: based on Trotsky's history of the Russian Revolution. “The preface expressed deep admiration for the work of the ‘world hero’, Trotsky. This, he did, when Trotsky was already anathema in orthodox communist circles. It is clear that Namboodiripad was still unsure of his own ideological position.”²⁵

Of course, Namboodiripad, who would emerge as the foremost ideologue of the communist movement in India in a few years, could not be blamed for this. First of all, the Left radicals in Kerala were yet to get connected to the CPI leadership in Bombay and elsewhere. There is no evidence to believe that they were aware of the existence of even such an important document as the Manifesto of the Anti-Imperialist Conference of 1934 prepared by the CPI.²⁶ It was for sure that the various documents such as the Manifesto of 1934 and the articles that appeared in the International Press Correspondence (INPRECOR) such as ‘Problems of the Anti-imperialist Struggle in India’ had never reached Malabar Coast then. Socialist

²³ Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p. 52.

²⁴ Jeffrey, ‘Matriliny, Marxism’, p. 87.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See the document in Subodh Roy (ed.), *Communism in India Unpublished Documents 1935-45*, (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1985), p.17.

literature that were available to the early communists in Malabar were far and few even in the late 1930s. This unavailability of the communist literature in the country was a serious concern of the CPI then.²⁷

The radicals in Malabar were more in line with the Left wing of the Congress. More precisely such leaders as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose inspired them effectively. Interestingly, Nehru was getting closer ‘inevitably with good-will towards Communism’ for it was not ‘hypocritical and imperialistic’. He was attracted by the tremendous changes taking place in Russia though he was ‘irritated’ with the ‘dictatorial, aggressive and vulgar methods’²⁸ of the Communists. The radical section in Malabar decided to stick with the Congress Left wing for the time being.

This section attributed the failure of the Civil Disobedience Movement to its inability to bring the workers and peasants to the forefront of the struggles; it was yet another middle class movement, in their view. This had to be remedied by organising workers and peasants, first and foremost to fight for their rights; then for the country. This was the beginning of the organisation of these classes in a large scale in Malabar. When they came to know about the formation of an All India Congress Socialist Party in Patna in 1935, they did not seem to be worried about the ideological moorings of its leadership; rather they were just longing for action apart from the ‘construction programme’ of Gandhi. These radicals came together and formed themselves into a ginger group of ‘Kerala Congress Socialists’ just before the founding Conference of

²⁷ Z. A. Ahmed, a CSP leader along with other socialist leaders²⁷ started a ‘Socialist Book Club’ in December 1938. In doing so, Ahmed declared: “Even though socialist ideals are spreading among the people in India unprecedentedly, only few socialist literatures are available in India due to the customs duties and also due to the selective ban of the British authority on socialist literature; hardly any book is available to understand the ideological basis of Indian socialism. Even most of the socialist leaders lack a thorough understanding on socialism. Hence the proposed book club will address this question and the socialist literature will be made available in three languages initially- English, Hind and Urdu and later on this may be extended to other languages if interest persists. The patrons of the Book Club were Subhas Chandra Bose, Acharya Narendra Dev, Jayaprakash Narayan, M.R. Masani, P.C Joshi, Ram Manohar Lohia, Mulk Raj Anand.*Prabhatam*, 12December 1938, Issue 35.

²⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 163.

All India Congress Socialist Party and sent E.M.S. Namboodiripad as their representative to the Conference. It is evident that it was not the United Front strategy (penetration of communists into the mass organisations as formulated by the CPI in line with the COMINTERN's prescription then) that brought the Malabar radicals to the CSP. As a matter of fact, the Communist Party was non-existent in Malabar at that time.

Jayaprakash Narayan, among the founding leaders of the AICSP (along with the Nashik group as they were known at that time), visited Malabar and met these radical leaders in 1934. He caught the attention of the Malabar radicals immensely. As a matter of fact, the initial exposure to Marxism among the left in Kerala began with the understanding of the book '*Why Socialism?*' by Jayaprakash Narayan, which became the bible of the movement in Kerala for some time. Jayaprakash Narayan who was a member of Communist Party of United States as a student in the 1920s, had "explicitly adopted a Marxist and a Leninist programme and framework of analysis, claiming that the CSP remained part of the Congress as a matter of strategy and sought to win over those of its members who are 'objectively anti-imperialist-petty-bourgeoisie elements and peasants. The only force capable of fighting imperialism was the masses 'because they are not dependent on it'; while the Indian bourgeoisie was 'not in position to play a revolutionary role' due to its close ties with and dependence up on imperialism."²⁹

The point is that the radical sections of the INC in Kerala, though they joined the Communist Party of India in 1940 *enmasse*, were influenced by the Left wing of the Congress and the Socialist leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan rather than steered

²⁹Benjamin Zacharia, *Nehru*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2004),p.80. He quoted Jayaprakash Narayan from his book *why Socialism* (All India congress Socialist Party, 1936).

by the Communist Party of India.³⁰To substantiate this argument, a number of instances may be presented in perspective. Unlike the Communist Party of India, they never had criticised the Left leadership of the INC even while they were at loggerheads with the Right wing in the Party constantly since the formation of KCSP. This was at variance with the CPI's programme that held that the Left wing of the Congress appeared as 'pseudo-oppositional group within the Congress which is hiding behind the left phrases'³¹ and they engaged in mere 'pseudo radical criticism of the policy of the INC'³² and 'in reality these oppositional group as a matter of fact is against the growing mass revolutionary struggle of workers and peasants'³³. This view was expressed in 1934 prior to their entry into the CSP. However, they continued in their own way even during their active phase in the United Front as CSP members. For instance, the 'Statement of the Polit Bureau on CPI Policy and Tasks in the Period of War' in 1939 was severely critical of the compromising policy of the national leadership of the Congress. It said:

Representing the national bourgeoisie the dominant leadership of the Congress wants to utilise the war crisis for securing concession from imperialism... The national leadership, however, does not want to use the weapon of mass struggle to secure its objective. It is conscious of its weakness, conscious of the 'dangerous' turn that the mass movement may take...It knows the influence of Gandhism has dwindled among the Congress masses. It knows that once unleashed, the force of struggle will tend to break through the reformist framework of Gandhian non-violence.³⁴

While advocating the need for maintaining the unity of the Congress, it called the rank and file of the Congress to 'break through the shackles of Gandhian

³⁰EMS says in his autobiography that he had become a member of CPI in 1936 itself, when S. V.Ghate visited him at his house in Kerala and since he had been functioning as a communist 'unofficially'. He also mentions about the formation of a secret cell in Kozhikode in July 1937. P Krishna Piali, N.C.Sekhar, K Damodran and himself as members. EMS Namboodiripad, *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakuruppukal [Memoir of an Indian Communist- Malayalam]*, (Thiruvananthapuram: Chinta Publishers 1987), pp. 61-62.

³¹'The Manifesto of the Anti-Imperialist Conference 1934', cited in Roy (ed.), *Communism in India* p.17.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴'Statement of the Polit-Bureau on CPI Policy and Tasks in the Period of War,' Ibid, p. 127.

technique³⁵. On the contrary, the radicals in Malabar were inspired by Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. Jawaharlal Nehru's address at the INC session in Lucknow, in 1936 had stimulated the Left in Malabar. They regarded Nehru as the leader of emerging Left in the Congress. It was not without reasons.

From 1923 onwards Jawaharlal Nehru's espousal of 'Independence', replacing the vague concept of Swaraj or Home Rule, drew him to the communists; and by 1927 his participation in the communist-led Congress of Oppressed Nationalities at Brussels, led to his accepting a position in the newly-founded League against Imperialism; he also visited Soviet Russia. At the close of this year, along with Subhas Bose, he sponsored a successful resolution at the Madras Congress demanding complete Independence; and in 1928 both of them helped to found the Independence for India League. In 1934-35 Nehru wrote of his having 'long been drawn to socialism and communism', and spoke of how 'Marxism lightened up many a dark corner of my mind'. He was obviously speaking of his experience of the late 1920.³⁶

They were impressed with the attitude of this left-wing in the INC and the resolutions adopted in its sessions under his leadership such as "its organisational association with League Against Imperialism; friendship with China, Egypt and other countries fighting against imperialism, etc."³⁷

As for the CPI, the Meerut Conspiracy case of 1929 had thrown the young party in troubled waters and the "the institution of the case, which removed from the scene all the capable and experienced leaders, caused a serious setback to the Communist movement."³⁸ And the subsequent ban on the Communist party, in 1934, put a halt to its further expansion. The Party had to search for an alternative strategy and an objective analysis of the concrete situation led to the 'united front' strategy. It also meant infiltrating into the existing legal platforms (mass organisations) and utilise those to their ends.

A formal agreement between P.C Joshi, on behalf of the Indian Communists, and Jayaprakash Narayan, on behalf of the Congress Socialist Party, had brought the

³⁵ Ibid, p.132.

³⁶ Irfan Habib, 'The Left and the National Movement', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 26, No. 5/6, May - June, 1998, p. 9.

³⁷ Namboodiripad, *Nehru, Ideology and Practice*, p.33.

³⁸ Home/Poll/1935-F.7/6 Serial 103, Brief Note Dated 8th May 1935 on the Present Position of Communist Movement in India', cited in Roy (ed.), *Communism in India*, p.1.

Communists into the CSP. This was partly tactical – to find some space amidst the ban – and partly out of a realisation among the communists that they were unable, so far, to “paralyse the influence of national reformism among the masses, it has not so far succeeded in rallying and winning over the most active and militant sections of these masses to the side of the irreconcilable revolutionary struggle, it has not succeeded in wresting these masses from under the influence of the National Congress, in spite of a number of partial successes which has won in this respect”³⁹ and hence this was a strategic move to use an existing platform of the Indian socialists within the Congress to their ends.

However, the ideological base for an association between the Socialist Party and the Communists began in the second conference of the All India Congress Socialist Party in Meerut in 20-21 January 1936; by then, the communists were already working in the CSP in the various provinces. The document known as the *Meerut Thesis* adopted by the CSP in its Meerut Session of 1936 explicitly stated that:

The Congress Socialist Party grew out of the experience of the last two national struggles. It was formed at the end of the last Civil Disobedience movement by such congressmen as came to believe that a new orientation of the national movement had become necessary . . . The initiatives in this direction could be taken only by those who had a theoretical grasp of the forces of our present society. These naturally were those Congressmen who had come under the influence of, and had accepted, Marxian socialism. . . The word ‘Congress’ prefixed to ‘Socialist’ only signified the organic relationship – past, present and future- of the organisation with the national movement . . . The immediate task before us to develop the national movement into a real anti-imperialist movement - a movement aiming at freedom from foreign power and the native system of exploitation. For this it is necessary to wean the anti-imperialist elements in the Congress away from its present bourgeois leadership and to bring them under the leadership of revolutionary socialism.⁴⁰

The year 1936 was significant for many other reasons; the year witnessed the emergence of three distinct but ideologically connected mass organisations; the All India Kisan Congress, the All India Students Federation and the Progressive Writers’

³⁹International Press Correspondence Problems of Anti Imperialist Struggle in India, 9th March 1935’, Ibid, p. 31.

⁴⁰ Namboodiripad, *Nehru, Ideology and Practice*, p. 80.

Association. Incidentally, the epoch making formation of the All India Kisan Congress, later renamed as All India Kisan Sabha, had happened in the same *pandal* of the Lucknow Session of the INC. It has been discussed, earlier in this chapter, that Kisan Associations were active and functioning independent of a central organisation in many parts of India, including in Malabar since the 1920s; these localised organisations were involved in foregrounding such immediate demands of the peasantry against eviction, reduction of rent and against other exploitative practices. The Haripura session of the INC, in February 19 to 22, 1938, while emphasising the great role of the peasantry in the freedom struggle and admitting the rights of the peasants to establish their own organisations, called upon the Provincial Congress Committees to take suitable action in pursuance of it. However, it cautioned that, “the Congress cannot associate itself with any activities which are incompatible with the basic principles of the Congress and will not countenance any of the activities of those Congressmen, who as members of Kisan Sabhas, help in creating an atmosphere hostile to Congress principles and policies.”⁴¹

In Malabar, in the mid-1930s, it is already mentioned that the youth in general were disillusioned with the vacillating policies of the right wing Congress. Not satisfied with Gandhi’s construction programme - the activities of Harijan Seva Sangams, inter-dining and the propagation of Khadi - the radicals were waiting for an opportunity to adopt a more radical course of action such as organising the poor peasants, agricultural workers and other workers⁴² and mass organisations of teachers, students, women, even children’s groups into a people’s front to fight feudalism and imperialism.

⁴¹Ibid, p. 98.

⁴² There was a beedi workers Union as early as 1934 in Kannur.

It is important to stress here that those who represented this radical position in Malabar were not novices in the political field and in carrying out agitations; for instance, A.K Gopalan, had set out on a procession with 16 volunteers and travelled all over Kerala, taking on untouchability, during the Guruvayoor Satyagraha in 1931. Likewise, P. Krishna Pillai was not only an active participant in the Guruvayoor Satyagraha but was in the forefront, for some years, organising the workers. And in this context, the formation of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party in 1935, gave them a platform to realise the radical programme. This, indeed, was the beginning of a new era in the political discourse in the Kerala society as a whole, even while the CSP was restricted to the Malabar district alone. Meanwhile, Malabar as such witnessed an unprecedented growth of Karshaka Sangams and Labour unions and other mass organisations in a short span of time.

The political activities of the Karshaka Sangams were not only “restricted to an attack on the inequalities in the agrarian structure or calls for the reform of the pattern of the landholding. It attempted a wholesale change in the attitude of people; a transformation of rural structures of deference and authority.”⁴³ The CSP’s activities extended to those areas which had been untouched by the nationalist movement so far; the question of poor peasants (*verumpattakars*) and the landless agricultural labourers, who were the victims of social and economic exploitation by the upper and intermediary classes, was central to the new format of the struggle. The economic depression of the late 1920s and the early 1930s set the stage as it led to a deep agrarian crisis in Kerala. Indebtedness, usury, large scale evictions or threat of evictions and other exorbitant demands from the *janmis* were leading to alienation of lands from the peasantry in large scale. As a result;

⁴³ Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, p. 131.

A new peasant movement centred around the poor peasantry developed in Malabar demanding reduction in rent and for amending the Tenancy Act in favour of inferior tenants. Village and taluk level kisan committees under an all Malabar 'Karshaka Sangam' formed the organisational structure of the movement. It was in the northern Malabar notorious for feudal oppression that peasant upsurge was most widespread, militant and violent. Starting with the campaign against illegal feudal exactions and oppressive social customs the peasant movement in the region developed to the brink of a no rent campaign. The Congress Socialists were trying to build their Socialist Bardoli.⁴⁴

In short, the agrarian discontent brought the peasantry into the fold of the Karshaka Sangam organised by the CSP. Most importantly, for the first time, the question of the agricultural workers was brought into the scope of the larger struggles in the agrarian and social fronts. The *Cherumar* and the *Pulayar* (castes) who were in the bottom of the social and economic structure of the society were in a 'transitional phase from semi-serfdom to wage labour'.⁴⁵ With a rustic but decisive understanding of the stratification among the peasantry, the Karshaka Sangams, under the leadership of the CSP began its activities aiming at bringing about changes in the socio-economic-cultural situation of the peasants and agricultural labourers. And later on, politically, the masses were integrated into the larger struggle of anti-imperialism. In other words, the changes in the agrarian structure brought about by the colonial policies and the land revenue administration were integrated into the political agenda by the leaders of the CSP and this followed a pattern that was established in the course of the Chinese revolution. It is a different matter that there is no evidence, as such, on such a theoretical framework being in place among the communists in India. It is, however, important to register the praxis in this context.

As a result of the activities of the CSP, the number of Karshaka Sangams and its membership increased in an unprecedented manner. "By the end of 1938, the All-Malabar Peasants' Union had a paid-up membership of about 30,000: 5,000 members

⁴⁴ T. M. Thomas Isaac, 'The National Movement and the Communist Party in Kerala', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 14, No. 8/9, August - September, 1986, p. 63.

⁴⁵ Prakash Karat, 'Agrarian Relations in Malabar: 1925 to 1948, Part Two: Differentiation amongst the Peasantry,' *Social Scientist*, Vol. 2, No. 3, October 1973, p. 35.

in Kasargod taluk; 10,000 in Chirakkal; and the remaining 15,000 in the rest of Malabar, with Kottayam and Kurumbranad probably accounting for the bulk of it.”⁴⁶ The Sangams had reached even the remotest areas, including the hill tracts where the tribal population cultivated in the forest land of the *janmis* and was exploited endlessly. This was despite the large scale violence perpetrated against the Sangams by way of false cases slapped against its workers, indiscriminate arrests, vicious campaigns orchestrated by the administration against the Sangams’ leaders and the insinuation techniques employed by the landlord-administration nexus to isolate the Sangam people from the general public.

The leadership of the Sangams, mostly, came from the educated caste Hindus; P. Krishna Pillai, A.K. Gopalan, K.P.R. Gopalan, Chandroth Kunhiraman Nair, K.P Gopalan, P. T. Narayanan Nambiar, T. Subramuniayan Thirumumb, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Kunhiraman Nambiar, P Narayan Nair, N.C. Sekher, Bharatheeyan, and K.A. Keraleeyan are the few names that call for mention. Among them, the only exception was K.P. Gopalan who belonged to the Tiyya Community. They advocated radical agricultural reforms, such as “abolition of land revenue, exempting small cultivators from income tax and vesting property right over the land in the actual cultivators”⁴⁷ and also fought the other oppressive practices of the *Janmis*. As a result, peasants began to oppose the collection of feudal exactions such as *vasi* and *nuri*⁴⁸ and numerous other illegal exactions such as collection of rent in advance and they demanded protection from eviction.

As far as the landless agricultural workers were concerned, the major ambit of the reform was social -for self-dignity and enable them to defy the practices of social

⁴⁶Jeffrey, ‘Matriliny, Marxism’, p. 91.

⁴⁷ Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, p. 133.

⁴⁸ Feudal exaction prevailed in those days. Some additional paddy kept away for the landlord for every certain measurement.

deference - not using honorific suffixes while addressing the landlords, stop the usage of customary language (demeaning usages) of untouchables, defy the rule of *un-approachability* and *untouchability* and so on, along with the agitation for standard and fixed wages. As for the political concerns, the movement was not restricted to activism against inequalities in the agrarian structure or calls for reform of the pattern of land holding. "It attempted a whole scale change in the attitude of the people; a transformation of the rural structures of deference and authority."⁴⁹This is where a paradigm shift that was effected from the Congress (read Gandhian) approach and the agenda of the caste organisations, which had "stressed self- help and self-betterment over the need to question inequality."⁵⁰The intensity of these activities of the Sangams created panic among the authorities. It went to such extent that the District authorities were alarmed with the activities of the Karshaka Sangams and this concern was reflected in the district collector's reports to the Madras government.

In August 1938, the collector reported that agitation and propaganda was going on among the tenants not to pay dues to the *jenmis* and that 'generally speaking, the tenants are not paying.' By November, he reported that the no-rent campaign (among lease-holding tenants in respect of dues payable to the ryotwari pattadars) which has been carried on for some time in the district is achieving considerable success, and in the absence of any organized opposition, is in some parts undermining the authority of the government ... if the *jenmis* are unable to collect their rents, it will have a serious effect on the land revenue collection which starts next month.⁵¹

Thus, by late 1930s, the KCSP had hegemonized the KPCC and the national liberation movement in Kerala completely. There was a huge leap in the INC' membership from 32,000 in 1937 to 55,031 members in 1938.⁵² This was reflected in the election of the president of AICC in 1939 too. Out of 116 representatives who

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 131.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 134.

⁵¹ Prakash Karat, 'Organized Struggles of Malabar Peasantry, 1934-1940', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 5, No. 8, March 1977, p. 6. According to the collector, 'this agitation is based on village karshaka Sangams and sub-Sangams composed largely of tenants and labourers in which some teachers of the district board and aided schools are reported to have taken part'. Ibid.

⁵² *Prabhatam*, 5 December 1938, Issue 33.

participated in the INC meeting from Kerala, 98 voted for Subhas Chandra Bose and 18 voted for Pattabhi Sitaramayya at the Tripuri Annual session of the INC in March 1939.⁵³ It was not the Congress but the CSP in Malabar that followed the ideals of Nehru and Bose.⁵⁴ They also tried to carry out the objectives of the All India Kisan Sabha, which was spelt out in the Congress resolution at the Karachi session as early as in 1931; and that was to “secure complete freedom from economic exploitation and the achievement of full economic and political power for the peasants and workers and other exploited classes.”⁵⁵ Finally, they were successful in building a mass front of anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces by organising the peasants and workers and other sections like teachers and students in their fold. This was how they hegemonized the process of National Liberation Movement in Kerala and the result was far reaching.

When the Congress Ministry was voted to power in Madras Presidency and a Provincial Government was formed under the premiership of C. Rajagopalachari in 1937, people, especially the peasants and working class had high expectations from the government. However, this was proved wrong soon.

The ministry failed to provide any relief to the peasants other than the mere passing of Agriculture Debt Relief Act. This betrayal on the part of Congress leadership disappointed the leftists within its ranks and alienated the entire body of peasantry which soon came to realise that any improvement in their conditions was possible only through their own organised strength. Accordingly they resolved to launch two-pronged struggle against the *janmis* on the one hand and the *Janmi* backed Congress government on the other.... The organised struggles

⁵³ Namboodiripad, ‘The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony’, p 38.

⁵⁴ In his presidential address in the Faizpur Session of the INC Nehru was openly defending the socialist solution for India’s problems. He said “to solve the (that) problem we shall have to end the imperialist control and exploitation of India. But what is imperialism of today? It is not merely the physical possession of one country by another; its roots lie deeper. Modern imperialism is an outgrowth of capitalism and cannot be separated from it. It is because of this that we cannot understand our problem without understanding the implications of imperialism and socialism. The disease is deep-seated and requires a radical and revolutionary remedy and that remedy is socialist structure of society”. From Nehru’s Presidential Address in AICC session at Faizpur in 1936, cited in Uma Iyengar (ed.) *Nehru*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), P 237.

⁵⁵ For the first time the Karachi resolution spelt out on economic issues of the peasants. “It promised substantial reduction in rent and revenue, exemption from rent in case of uneconomic holdings, and relief of agricultural indebtedness and control of usury...” Cited in Bipan Chandra, *et al.*, (ed.), *India’s Struggle for Independence*, p. 284. Also see, Namboodiripad, *Nehru, Ideology and Practice*, p. 98.

of the peasantry questioning the age-old feudal oppression and exploitation forced the *janmis* to give up feudal levies, illegal exaction, and also switched to the use of standardised measurers.⁵⁶

The years 1937-39 (the period during which the Provincial Ministry led by Rajagopalachari was in power) was a crucial period for the CSP in Malabar. Protests became regular phenomena during that period. The numerous village committees of the KPCC were under the complete control of the CSP. “Congress committees in every village with an office, where there were reading rooms, adult education centres [night schools], had become an integral part. The local peasant organisations and the teachers unions, etc., worked hand in hand with the Congress [CSP]. Literary study circles, art and theatre activities were integral to these efforts.”⁵⁷ In fact the “Leftists had stolen a march over the Rightists in organising the workers, peasants, students and teachers under their banner. When elections were held to the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee in January 1939, the Rightists suffered a severe setback. Muhammad Abdur Rahiman became the president and E.M.S. Namboothiripad its General Secretary.”⁵⁸ The thoroughly marginalised right wing Congress did register their protest here and there; in the KPCC meeting, held at Kottakkal on April 2, 1939, the minority right wing (seven members including K. Kelappan) staged a walk out. They (called the Gandhi-faction by the Left) had made it clear that they will not be able to cooperate with the CSP leadership of the KPCC and they reiterated their position that a united front is possible only if the present leadership of the KPCC was ousted.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change*, pp. 95- 97

⁵⁷ EMS Namboodiripad, *Communist party Keralathil* [Malayalam] (Thiruvananthapuram: Chinta Publishers, 2009), p. 70.

⁵⁸ Menon, *Political History of Modern Kerala*, p. 80.

⁵⁹ *Prabhatam*, Editorial, 10 April 1939, Issue 51.

Gradually, the CSP was turning red. The Communist leaders in Madras presidency were getting in touch with the CSP leaders in Kerala and some sort of ideological orientation began. These personal contacts and also other contacts developed through the National meetings of All India Kisan Sabha and other mass organisations and the activities of the common platform. As Bipan Chandra explains:

The CPI, the CSP and Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and other Left groups and leaders all shared a common political programme which enabled them, despite ideological and organisational differences, to work together after 1935 and make socialism a strong current in Indian Politics. The basic features of this programme were: consistent and militant anti-imperialism, anti-landlordism, the organisation of workers and peasants in trade unions and *kisan sabhas*, the acceptance of a socialist vision of independent India and of the socialist programme of the economic and social transformation of society, and an anti-fascist, anti-colonial and anti-war foreign policy.⁶⁰

These sporadic interactions with communist elements had its influence on individual leaders. *Prabhatam*, a socialist journal under the editorship of Namboodiripad was started in 1935. During its initial stages in 1935, most of its contents were either Kerala specific or translated material from the journal of All India Socialist Party. Kerala Socialists had no relationship with the Communist party then⁶¹ and their knowledge of Marxism was elementary. As K.P. Gopalan put it: “We had socialist aims without knowing anything about socialism.”⁶² Acquaintance with the concept of socialism was restricted to few newspaper articles⁶³ that appeared in the early and mid-1930s and that too among the few who had the privilege of higher education. However, when *Prabhatam* revived in 1938, during the time when the Congress ministry was in power in the province, there were considerable changes in the contents of the journal. The CSP in Kerala, by this time, had established contacts with the all India leadership of CPI and also a cell of the CPI was discreetly

⁶⁰Bipan Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, p. 307.

⁶¹Namboodiripad, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam*, p.32.

⁶²N E Balram. 'Keralathile Communist Prasthanam', cited in Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, p. 147.

⁶³In 1936, the oldest Malayalam News Paper, Mathrubhumi introduced a section called Workers' World'

established in Kozikode in 1937. To resolve the scarcity of Communist literature in Malayalam, intellectuals like Namboodiripad and K. Damodaran, took the initiative to translate some communist literature into Malayalam. But even then, their main source was Stalin's *History of the CPSU*. As Damodaran recalled later, the Party was starved of the basic Marxist-Leninist works, and it came to regard Stalin as the fountainhead of all communist wisdom. Even Lenin's Theses on the National and Colonial Question of 1920 was not available in Kerala until the 1950s.⁶⁴

With all these information now available, it can be safely held that the CSP in Kerala was slowly moving towards Communist ideology, with a huge rank and file, thanks to their close association with the people in the region. In the late 1930s, the Karshaka Sangam leaders began to criticise Gandhi's programmes openly. In a Karshaka Sangam meeting held on February 2, 1939, where 3000 peasants participated, Subramuniam Thirumumbu, a Sangam leader declared, "the proposal of trusteeship to eradicate poverty by Gandhi is meaningless"⁶⁵. By this time, *Inquilab Zindabad* became the common slogan in all these meetings. The communists' Red flag⁶⁶ (despite the criticism of the Right wing Congress that red flag is an import from Russia) and national flag were hoisted together on all occasions; the former as the symbol of struggle for their rights and representing the future as a socialist society and the latter as the symbol of the anti-imperialism against Britain. As for the controversy of hoisting red flags in the meetings of the Sangam and Labour unions, P. Krishna Pillai justified that act and held:

[The] red flag is not an import from Russia. It is the flag of the workers and peasants world over. The red colour symbolises the bloody exploitation of workers and peasants world over. The sickle and hammer are the metaphor of the peasantry and the workers who work for an

⁶⁴ Jeffrey, 'Matriliney, Marxism', p.88.

⁶⁵ *Prabhatam*, 10 April 1939, Issue 51.

⁶⁶ This was opposed by the right wing Congress calling it as an import from Soviet Union; however, the Karshaka Sangam carried on with this practice and it was possible since the Left wing completely hegemonized the movement.

egalitarian society and towards the defeat of capitalism and feudalism. The red flag is not inimical to the Congress' struggle against imperialism.⁶⁷

However, even in the midst of such verbal duals and growing protests in the shape of sloganeering such as, 'communist get lost to Russia'⁶⁸, the CSP men who were in the leadership of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee were not yet ready for the final rupture with the INC leadership. Even in the end of 1938, CSP leaders seemed hopeful of the Congress and they appreciated the fact that even the right wing Congress leaders participated in the Conference of All Malabar Karshaka Sangam held in 1938. The *Prabhatam* editorial on April 10, 1938 revealed this hope:

The second All Malabar Karshaka Sangam Conference witnesses the strength of a united front of peasants, workers, Youth organisations, Students, reading Rooms. This is indeed epoch making as it shows that peasant struggles are inherently a part of the freedom struggle and larger struggle for the rights of the people. Despite the open declaration that this is a class struggle of the peasantry, though having disagreements with the class approach, Congress members [right wing] had kept away that differences and participated in the conference wholeheartedly. They did not even oppose the raising of the red flag on the occasion. This means that they have taken the election Manifesto of the Congress seriously and understand the historical necessity to participate in such a movement. In other words it accentuates the significant role of the peasantry in the fight against imperialism. The Karshaka Sangam is an integral part of the national liberation movement.⁶⁹

In the late 1930s the Karshaka Sangams were strong enough⁷⁰ to launch a no rent campaign as well as to socially boycott the rapacious *Janmis*. This provoked the

⁶⁷ P Krishna Pillai, *Ibid*.

⁶⁸ When Bharathheyan and his colleagues from CSO went to Kalyat to form Karshaka Sangam, there was board hanging in the village asking them to get lost to Russia. It also demanded not to vulgarise the ideals of Gandhi, *Prabhatam*, 17 November 1938, Issue 3. Yet another instance, In Cheruvathur Karshaka Sangam conference where about 7000 Sangam workers gathered from two Taluks of Chirakkal and Kasargod on October 9, 1938, a group of right wing Congress men led a jatha of protest to the venue shouting slogan – Karshaka Sangam down, down, let the Gandhism win over". These kinds of protests and oppositions were common then.

⁶⁹ *Prabhatam*, 26 December 1938, Issue 37.

⁷⁰ The fact that the All India Kisan Committee was specially mentioned about the Malabar situation of the peasants shows that it was strong enough to be mentioned at the national level. The Tripuri meeting of the All India Kisan Sabha which was held on 7-8 March 1939 appraised the situation of Malabar Karshaka Sangams and appreciated the growth and development of the peasant organisation there. They criticised the police atrocities on the Karshaka Sangams workers and the arrest of 200 KS workers. It condemned the punitive attack of the police and revenue administration on the peasants. New police stations are opened in Malabar with the aim of suppressing the peasant movement in the region. The committee demanded that action should be taken on errred policemen and requested the Madras government to take immediate action to protect the peasants; source *Prabhatam*, 27 March 1939, Issue 49.

administration and consequently many of the Karshaka Sangams workers and local leaders were falsely implicated in cases of theft, burglary, public nuisance and so on. The revenue officers forced the village folks to give false evidences against Karshaka Sangams workers. And in Kottayam and Chirakkal Taluks, where the Karshaka Sangams were the strongest, the peasants faced police atrocities the most. A circular issued by the Taliparambu Deputy Tahsildar, by order of the Collector on 1 December 1938, says this all:

Some people are creating misunderstanding among the farmers that not to pay rent. Some people are also threatening the washer-men and barbers not to provide services to certain sections of the people [read *janmis* here]. These unruly elements scare them. Also they threaten the agricultural workers not to work for certain people.⁷¹

The Tahsildar threatened the Karshaka Sangam workers with dire consequences and he stressed that if needed new police stations will be opened in troubled areas and the Collector has the power to make the locals put up with the economic implications for running such police stations. He was specifically mentioning about the Chirakkal and Kottayam Taluk Karshaka Sangams and this was a reaction to the decision of the Sangams to boycott the obstinate landlords socially. And also the Sangam's influence was strong in these two Taluks. This is evident from the huge *Jathas* the peasants led to the *Janmis* houses. For instance, a huge *jatha* marched to the residence of Kottam Kovilakam on December 18, 1938, and a 7000 member *jatha* from 20 villages to the residence of the feudal landlord Karakattle Chandukutti and the two *Jathas* from North and South of Malabar which culminated in Kozhikode in a huge public meeting to present a memorandum to the District Collector on peasants demands were historical examples.⁷²

⁷¹*Prabhatam*, 5 December 1938, Issue 33, See also Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change*, p. 96.

⁷²The memorandum consisted of the recommendations to the proposed amendment to the Malabar Tenancy Act and an appeal to the government to address the immediate concerns of the peasantry and bring relief to the peasants. It demanded for fixed and fair rent, and appealed against arbitrary

By the late 1930 s, not even a single segment of the subaltern social groups was left without being organised. We have already seen about the peasantry. In the workers front, almost all segments of the workers were organised by the late 1930s. The Kannur Beedi Workers Union, established in 1934, was perhaps the oldest one. The Kannur Press Workers Union was formed in 1936; the Beedi workers union in Payyanur, the Kottayam Toddy Workers Union, Kallai Timber Workers Union, Cigar Workers Union, Kozhikode Shop Workers Union, Coir Knitting Workers Union, the Nilambur Forest Workers Union, Weavers Union, Kannur Municipal Workers Union, Tellicherry Municipal Workers Union, Kottayam Clay Workers Union, Motor Workers Federation, Soap Workers Union and even a Slave Workers Union (of Vettuvar, Karimbalar and Mavilar) were organised in this period. These unions held their meetings regularly and Malabar witnessed a series of strikes⁷³ called by the Unions for better wages and working conditions and protests against the dismissal of workers and so on.

Interestingly, the Kannur Beedi Workers Union organised a public meeting on 15 November 1938 and the meeting condoled the death of Kamal Pasha Atta Turk. This shows the awareness of the workers in world affairs. It is not to state that all these strikes ended in success; but this indeed augmented the consciousness of the workers as a class. As Krishna Pillai, a CSP leader and a Communist leader, later, rightly pointed out:

evictions, excessive levies and feudal exactions. *Jatha* covered whole of Malabar from Kanchikode south to Karivellur, North. They propagated their issue throughout its journey through distributing pamphlets, singing songs, shouting slogan etc. Chandroth, the Karshaka Sangam leader said that the *jatha* conveyed the message that “the peasants are awaken today from the shackles of age old ignorance and poverty. They no longer hold the fate or wrath of God were responsible for their sufferings. Today they are aware that their sufferings are directly connected to the exploitation of the nexus of the landlords, capitalists and imperialists. Peasants are conscious of their class now, that is why they organise themselves to fight these triple evils” *Prabhatam*, 19 December 1938, Issue 36.

⁷³ Kottayam Toddy Workers’ Strike, Boat Workers’ strike, in 1938, Kanur Commonwealth Weaving company workers strike- 1939- 800 workers went for strike, Beedi workers’ strike in 1939 were few to mention.

The Trade Unions may not have ensured a rise in their wages... their demands were unheeded by the Employers many times... their agitations might not have succeeded in reducing the working hours... But it succeeded in thwarting the oppression of the employers. Similarly, the Karshaka Sangams succeeded in fighting against the oppressive practices of the *Janmis*.⁷⁴

There is ample evidence that by the late 1930s, the workers had a good knowledge of what was happening in the other parts of the country. For instance, meetings were organised at different centres such as Kozhikode, Kannur, Thikodi, Mukkom and other places in Malabar to express solidarity with the striking workers in Kanpur in 1938. If one looks at the resolutions of labour unions in the period between 1938 and 1939, apart from the immediate demands of the workers, the unions passed resolutions expressing solidarity with the striking workers in Travancore,⁷⁵ Cochin and other parts of the country. P. Krishna Pillai, Secretary of the Kerala CSP and the KPCC Working Committee Member, appealed to the people in Malabar, through the CSP newspaper *Prabhatam*, to contribute generously to the cause of the 40,000 striking workers in Alapuzha under the Alleppey Workers' Association. The appeal to the workers of Malabar was to contribute a day's wage to the cause of the workers.⁷⁶

This, indeed, was the contribution of the CSP leadership, mostly Communists by then, though not openly. *Prabhatam*⁷⁷, the mouth piece of the CSP, opened a space for study class to the workers which regularly reproduced articles such as *What is Wage?*, *What is State?* and so on⁷⁸. Apart from the writings of national leaders such as Nehru, Jayaprakash Narayan, Minoo Masani, Subhash Chandra Bose, an array of

⁷⁴ *Prabhatam*, 26 December 1938, Issue 37.

⁷⁵ The three week long strike ended on November 14. *Prabhatam*, 21 November 1938, Issue 32.

⁷⁶ *Prabhatam*, 7 November 1938, Issue 30.

⁷⁷ *Prabhatam*, was the Mouth Piece of the CSP in Kerala. Interestingly it had a Logo of sickle and Hammer inside a star. And 'long live the Revolution' was the masthead! Apart from other articles and stories of the period, it had section on Labour World, on Peasants World and the World news.

⁷⁸ Apart from the issues of Indian Peasantry and workers, stories like 'Truth of Lenin' - A Russian Story, Article on Chinese Leader Chu Teh, 'On Collective farms of Soviet Union', 'On Wage and Capital' (PC Joshi), 'Red Army in Russia' by Stalin, 'Indian Industrial Revolution' (Dr. Surendra Nath Banerjee), and a series articles on Fascism and war. Articles on socialism, on revolutionary consciousness of the workers and peasantry and other revolutionary classes were regularly appeared in the paper. Interestingly obituaries of world communist personalities one such G Adhikari's 'obituary of Karl Kautsky' also appeared in the paper.

local writers like Namboodhiripad, Damodharan, Surendran, Krishna Pillai and A.K. Gopalan continuously wrote on various issues. There were constant appeals that the “party members should discuss and debate the articles that appeared in the ‘Study Class’ in the group meetings and seek clarifications that should be sent to the Party secretary or the editor of *Prabhatam* for better understanding. Upon that, the matter can be presented and discussed in depth in the group meetings of Karshaka Sangam, Trade unions, Students Federation and Youth organisations in order to create the political consciousness among these groups.”⁷⁹ Interestingly, *Prabhatam* carried out even debates over the trial of Trotsky in 1938 which was critiqued by Minoo Masani, the socialist leader as violence; and responded to by Surendran, representing the other end of the spectrum within the Left.

The CSP volunteers (they were known as Congress volunteers then) ran night schools for the peasants and workers and this period witnessed the emergence of a number of Reading Rooms⁸⁰ which was also the hub of political activities.

Commemorating days remembering events of the past too followed a pattern. For instance, the observance of the All India Trade Union Congress Day, Tenancy Act Amendment Day (which was also an occasion to collect suggestions from the peasants for the amendment of the Malabar Tenancy Act), observance of the anniversary of the Russian Revolution⁸¹ were some of them. On the occasion of the

⁷⁹P. Krishna Pillai, ‘To The Attention of the Party Workers’, *Prabhatam*, 6 June, 138, Issue 9.

⁸⁰ Pallazhi, Kozhikode, Gramaposhini Vayanashala (Reading Room), Ellerinji Swaraj Vayanashala Talasseri Beedi Workers Union Vayanashala- Thozhilali Vayanashala are few examples. The Thozhilali Vayanashala conducted a reading examination too. *Prabhatam*, 5 December 1938, Issue 33.

⁸¹ Articles appeared on Soviet Union regularly in the Newspaper highlighting the achievement of the country and explaining the socialist system explicitly. For instance an article that was appeared on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution stated: “There is no classes, no exploitation, no inequality and no unemployment under the Soviet system. To deracinate the imperialism, to establish peace all over the world Soviet model is the only way out”, Mullan, *Prabhatam*, 7 November 1938, Issue 30.

observance of the 10th Anniversary of the Meerut Conspiracy case, the resolution stated:

The meeting demanded to withdraw the ban on Communist Party, the only political organ of the workers. The ban is against democratic principles; the strong arm tactics by the imperialist power is a tool to divide the United Front. It is suicidal to the Congress to succumb to this tactics. And it will enable to whittle down the fighting spirit of the people who are ready to sacrifice their lives for freedom and peace. In the least, to uphold the Manifesto of the Congress – that it will work for the resumption of the human rights of the people – the Congress should support the withdrawal of the ban on Communist Party.⁸²

In Malabar, the school teachers played an important role in organising the workers and peasants. At times, they were victimised for this by the private management as well as the district administration. The school managers always tried to keep off the teachers from political activities, especially from the activities of Karshaka Sangam. The first Teachers Union was formed in Chirakkal Taluk in 1934, and very soon it spread across the whole of Malabar. By 1938, Malabar's 15000 Aided School teachers had organised themselves under the Teachers Union⁸³. Apart from teachers, students were organised under the Students Federation and even children were organised under the Bala Seva Sangam. The importance of the Students Federation can be gathered from the fact that K F Nariman, (freedom fighter and was Mayor of Bombay in 1935-36, who was expelled from Congress later on) inaugurated the Conference and Jawaharlal Nehru, Kamala Devi and Jayaprakash Narayan sent their greetings to the All Kerala Student Conference which was held in Palakad in June 1938.

Amidst these, the relationship between the CSP leaders and the national leadership of the INC was beginning to strain. September 15, 1940 was the watershed in this regard. That was the day when the KPCC, under the leadership of the left, decided to observe the Anti-imperialist Day. They broke the prohibition orders of the

⁸²*Prabhatam*, 27 March 1939, Issue 49.

⁸³*Prabhatam*, 14 November 1938, Issue 31.

government and organised *Jathas* and other kinds of protest marches. The Karshaka Sangams and other mass organisations joined the protest march which ended in clashes with police in many places and finally ended in the violent incident of Morazha⁸⁴ on September 15, 1940. This ended the relationship between the Left and the INC unceremoniously.⁸⁵

The Morazha incident sent a clear message to the INC leadership. Malabar was no longer the same. The anger of the masses would continue to burst asunder; they would not face challenges with equanimity anymore. The INC central leadership was not prepared for this. The Left dominated KPCC was dissolved on the basis of an investigation report on the incident by P. Subbarayan and Nandkeolyar and a three member adhoc committee headed by Nandkeolyar was nominated to steer the KPCC.⁸⁶ The CSP leaders of the Malabar region then joined the Communist Party of India, of which some organisational presence was established since 1937, en masse. This was the end of the CSP in Kerala. This brought about a paradigm shift in the politics of Kerala. Malabar began to appear in the national Communist map only from then. And Communism had begun to spread in the Princely States of Travancore and Cochin too. The ground, in the states, was prepared in the mid-1930s by the radicals representing the Youth League in Travancore, the CSP in Cochin and with the active support of the CSP leaders from Malabar. Fundamental changes were brought about in the character of the trade union front in Alapuzha and Sherthala in Travancore, where such CSP leaders as P. Krishna Pillai and N.C. Sekhar and the local leaders

⁸⁴ The KPCC, dominated by the CSP, had given a call for observing September 15, 1940 as Anti-imperialist Day. The demonstrations in North Malabar led to police violence against the demonstrators and two people were killed in Thalasseri in police firing. Following this, in a clash between the demonstrators and the police a sub inspector got killed at Morazha that led to huge scale of police clampdowns. The incident occurred in September 15 1940. See also, K. K. N. Kurup, 'Peasantry and the Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Kerala', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 16, No. 9, September, 1988, Karat, 'Organized Struggles of Malabar Peasantry'.

⁸⁵ By this time it was clear that the Left will be no longer able to function within the Congress and the only way to them to make a hasty exit from the Congress to function as Communists openly.

⁸⁶ Karat, 'Organized Struggles of Malabar Peasantry', p.15.

belonging to the Travancore Youth League had worked in unison. The Trade Unions in these centres shredded off its communal colour and the workers were organised on class basis now.

At the international level, the Second World War broke out in September 1939 and the colonial regime dragged India into the war without consulting the Indians. The Communist Party of India decided to oppose the 'imperialist war'. It criticised the Congress; that "the big guns of the Congress are time and again begging for 'independence' at the door of the Viceroy and advising all of us with folded palms, devoid of manliness..."⁸⁷ In 1940, the Malabar unit of the Communist Party which had already organised its base among the peasants and workers, teachers and students during the CSP years, decided to fight Britain during the 'imperialistic War'. It waged a war against imperialism and the peasants and agricultural workers played an important role in the resistance. There were open challenges against the British rule and the Kayyur peasant revolt (March 1941)⁸⁸ was one of important confrontations with the police and thus against the colonial state; it resulted in the execution of four persons of the Communist Party, after summary trials, by the government in 1943.⁸⁹

Interestingly, there was a change in the political context between the Kayyur incident and the hangings; the communist position of anti-war changed to supporting what had now been described as the peoples' war by this time and this happened amidst the Quit India Movement of post August 1942. The equations changed when Germany attacked Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. After the Soviet Union entered the war against Germany, the 'imperialist war' changed to 'People's War' or 'Just War'

⁸⁷'Home/poll/1940- F 37/31, Fight for civil Rights: Agitate for the fight for freedom: Appeal of the Communist party', Roy (ed.), *Communism in India*, p. 204.

⁸⁸ A demonstration of the peasants against the police atrocities on Karshaka Sangam members met with police repression and arrests. This led to further protests and demonstration which culminated in the drowning and death of a police constable in a nearby river. This was followed by widespread arrests and police atrocities.

⁸⁹ See Kurup, 'Peasantry and the Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Kerala'.

for the Communists. On behalf of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Harry Pollit issued an appeal to their Indian counterparts. He reminded the comrades the basis of Marxism that the Communist Party shall formulate all its policies in accordance with the concrete situation that exists and advised them not to ‘speculate’. It read:

The war for the defeat of Hitler is now the supreme issue before the whole of democratic and progressive mankind. This is what needs to be understood in all its decisiveness, for it governs our entire political approach to every question standing before the people. In this situation, there is only one consideration which governs our attitude; those who are for the defeat of Hitler, and those who openly or covertly endeavour to sabotage the achievement of the victory of the British and Soviet people over Hitler.⁹⁰

However, this put the CPI in a difficult and anomalous position and it took many more months for the CPI to take a stand on this. In the words of Irfan Habib, “unlike other communist parties, the Indian Communist leadership, most of it in prison, found it difficult to turn from the long-established position of hostility to British imperialism, to treating it as an ally in a world-wide alliance.”⁹¹ That it was a difficult decision is evident from the fact that a resolution to this effect, from an anti-war position to that calling it a people’s war, in the Cawnpore Conference of the All India Trade Union Congress (by this time firmly under the communist control) in February 1942, was defeated.⁹² A large chunk of the leadership was still in jail, detained under the Defence of India Rules, and the Party was fully aware that this will create huge confusion and dejection among its rank and file. After all, a majority of them had turned into communists after the disillusionment caused by the withdrawal

⁹⁰Roy (ed.), *Communism in India*, p.262. This appeal was issued by Harry Pollit on behalf of the Sect of CPGB on 8th July 1941 to explain the task of the Party in the new situation created by Hitler’s attack on Soviet Union.

⁹¹ Habib, ‘The Left and the National Movement’, pp.20-21.

⁹² This 1942 note was discussing the problem of policy towards the Communists and the CPI. The British feared that the ‘people’s war’ policy of the CPI was inconsistent with the activities of their rank and file. It says: “In India, there was no immediate change in the attitude of the CPI after the entry of Russia into the war against Germany. Indeed for many months the CPI endeavoured to follow the policy of the ‘dual front’, which consisted in giving all possible moral support to the Soviet, but at the same time regarding Great Britain’s war against the common enemy as being still Imperialistic in character and, therefore, still calling for obstruction rather than help.” ‘Policy Towards the Communist Party of India’, Roy (ed.), *Communism in India*, p.341.

of the Non-Cooperation Movement in the wake of Chauri Chaura and subsequently the Civil Disobedience Movement. To shift to a stand and cooperate with the colonial power and that too at a time when the nationalist struggle was at its peak following Quit India resolution at the AICC session at the Gowalia Tank grounds on August 9, 1942 was not an easy proposition. In other words, the party's leaders were aware that the cadre may not understand the relevance of 'proletarian internationalism'.

In 1942 the 'Jail Document', a lengthy document which was prepared by the incarcerated communist leaders, analysed the whole war situation and reached to a conclusion in favour of extending support to the war efforts of the government that imprisoned them on charges of subversion. They identified the tasks of the communists in India in the people's war against fascism. Thus, the imperialists' war became the people's war overnight. And the anti-war preparation, which had dominated their agenda hitherto and had guided the activities of the peasant-workers and mass organisations in the late 1930s, took a sudden U-turn and winning the war became a slogan, meant for serious practical working.⁹³ However, the jail document clearly said that though the support means the 'same thing as accepting the imperialist steamroller', considering the new situation, it added, "a general support to war when we regard it as people's war, a war for the defence of the USSR, must be given irrespective of any conditions. . . History gives only one message to the proletariat:

⁹³'A note from Jail Comrades, File No 44/32/1942, Home Poll.' The document indicates that while the CPI was criticising the 'conditional support' and other bargains with the British, they were in a huge dilemma. It said; "The masses will fed on narrow nationalism and the task of internationalists will now be uphill one. If the proletariat fastens its chariot to the slogan of national government, it will come to grief—all these arguments are offered not to stop the demand for such a Government but to recognise the limitations in the international context and demonstrate the necessity of an independent approach towards the war. We will demand such a government because it offers us greater liberties to carry forward our main task of the period, because it makes a small dent in the imperialist armour. But there the matter ends. We will be again racing the country with the nationalist bourgeois for our aims (international), our understanding and organisation of the war". Roy (ed.), *Communism in India*, p. 311.

win the war quickly for the Soviet- defeat Nazism with the help of its former allies. That is the only guarantee for your liberation.”⁹⁴

The implications of the CPI joining the war efforts were many. First of all, the image of the young party of revolutionaries, whose policies, since its inception were consistently opposing imperialism, now changed drastically; they were thus vulnerable to be called ‘traitors’ or ‘British agents’ and such other shameful names. They had to tread into unfamiliar waters in the least expected moment; most of its leaders were still in jail and the party remained unlawful.⁹⁵ The Party had enmeshed itself into a huge crisis. If the INC had continued to follow its policy of lukewarm response to the war, as it did in the initial period of the war, things would have been different for the CPI. But the Quit India Movement of 1942 and the zeal it created among all the classes of the people including the peasants, workers and petty bourgeoisie, the main constituencies of the Left, was unparalleled in history. Moreover, this change of attitude of the CPI seemed to prove critics – which the CPI was an appendage of the Soviet Union – right and this alienated the party from the prominent leaders of the CSP such as Minoo Massani, Ashok Mehta and Ram Manohar Lohia.

And ironically, the British administration did not trust the Communists even during the period of so called cooperation. The attitude of the colonial rulers was guided by a reading that “persons who have so bitterly opposed Government for so many years would find it an easy matter, to say the least of it, to give their

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵ The CPI along with many other Left organisations were declared an unlawful organisation under the Criminal Law Amendment Act- Notification No:7/8-Poll, dated 23 July 1934, which was notified in Punjab and Bihar and Bombay in September 1934 and Bengal in February 1935. See Roy (ed.), *Communism in India*,p.49.

wholehearted support to the government.”⁹⁶ And later on the British were complaining about how the Communists’ people’s war overstepped the permissible level of attack on the Government.’⁹⁷ There were ample evidences to prove that the CPI was critical of the bureaucracy and government. This vilification, according to the British, was a strategy of the CPI to retain its popularity among people.

For the Communist Party in Malabar, which was more than a decade younger than the CPI in India, it was very difficult for the leaders to explain the war situation to its cadre. We have already seen that the ideological orientation of the cadres was minimal. Moreover, the cadre was prepared thoroughly for a campaign against the war and the anti-imperialist struggle in that context; in other words, the colonial regime was identified so distinctly and directly as the ‘other’ in Malabar through the shared experience of the recent past by the communists even while they functioned under the banner of the Congress Socialist Party. Throughout 1938-39, the CSP positioned the peasant-working class and mass organisations in the anti-war mode and convinced them that the imperialist war will create an opportunity to fight Britain in its weakest moment and thus lead to their own liberation as well as independence. Evidence of this preparedness and the zeal were easily found in Moraza and Kayyur.

However, by utilising its legitimate status (as the ban on CPI was lifted in July 1942)⁹⁸ and its strong cadre base, built up during the CSP days, the CPI was able to propagate that the need of the hour was being on the side of Soviet Union to protect

⁹⁶ ‘Policy towards the Communist Party in India’, Roy (ed.), *Ibid*, p. 344. The document was cautious on the matter of the release on the Communist leaders from the jail. It stated: “ To release all (communists) would be running of great a risk; and even if we were satisfied – which we are not- that all of them genuinely intended to help the war effort, there would be dangers in such a course... a general release of the communists would certainly unwelcome to Congress. Even if there were no doubt, however, that all released communists would follow wholeheartedly the present policy of their leaders, it is difficult to believe that persons who have so bitterly opposed the Government for so many years would find it an easy matter, to say the least of it, to give their wholehearted support to the Government.”

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 414.

⁹⁸ Communist Attitude to War Removal of Ban on CPI, File No 7/7/1942, Home Poll, *National Archives India*, New Delhi.

the only socialist country in the world; and that was very much connected to the liberation of India. More than Germany, the nearest enemy - Japan - was brought into the picture. Highlighting the Japanese atrocities in China, the Party propagated that the Japanese will take away their mothers and daughters. These kinds of campaigns about the imminent dangers sustained the CPI in that context. However, the propaganda units used every available medium - theatre, art, leaflets, and pamphlets - to reach the people. Namboodiripad explains the grave situation that party faced during 1942-45, the period of cooperation with the British:

During the next three-year period (1942-1945) the Party had greater freedom of action, enjoying greater civil liberties but had to face popular fury for the Party's attitude to Quit India struggle and the Muslim League demand for Pakistan. The Party was in virtual isolation from the anti-imperialist masses. It goes to the credit of the Party that it could once again weather the storm-this time of popular hostility-and maintain its unity. The new opportunities available in this period were used for extensive mass activities and to forge closer links with a large segment of the people. A series of campaigns were organised making the Communist Party, for the first time, a real mass party, rather than a ginger group in the anti-imperialist movement. For the first time in Kerala history, the slogan of "Aikya Kerala" was popularised on a wide scale, integrated with the Travancore and Cochin struggle for responsible government and solidly based on the principles on linguistic states.⁹⁹

However, it is evident from the fact that the so called unity of the Party could not be maintained and Namboodiripad himself admits that despite the People's War policy of the party, a large part of the cadre of the CPI actively took part in the Quit India movement and these difference led to the emergence of new Socialist groups such as Kerala Socialist Party (KSP), formed in September 1947. The KSP suffered a split soon after the war, in October 1947, and those who left the Party formed a branch of Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) in Kerala under the leadership of N Sreekandan Nair. In the 1952 elections, he won from Kollam constituency to the Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly.

Writing on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Quit India Movement in 1992, Namboodiripad wrote:

⁹⁹ Namboodiripad, 'The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony', p. 39.

Never before were we so isolated from our brothers and sisters of the mainstream anti-imperialist movement . . . Instead of bridging the wide gulf that separated us from the millions of mainstream anti-imperialists who were engaged in the quit India struggle we further enlarged the gulf. Never before in the history of a century-long struggle for Indian freedom were we so isolated from the mainstream anti-imperialist masses in our country.¹⁰⁰

III

The agrarian situation in Travancore and Cochin was different from that of Malabar. Agrarian reforms began in Travancore from the mid-19th century onwards with the Pandarapattam Proclamation of 1865 that declared all *Sirkar pattam* lands heritable and transferable and the 1867 Janmi-Kudiyam Proclamation by Ayilyam Tirunal provided for the fixity of tenure to the tenants.¹⁰¹ Subsequently, in 1883, a Royal Proclamation abolished many oppressive taxes. These legislations were to “fulfil the requirements of fixity of tenure, fair rent and free transfer and thereby facilitate capital investments in coffee and tea plantations by the European capitalists and joint stock companies. These legislations and their amendments and the subsequent legislations like the Nair Regulations against the matrilineal system, a feudal institution, in the long-run weakened the traditional feudal class and landlordism”¹⁰² and brought about some changes in the agrarian relations insofar as the tenants were concerned. Commercialisation of agriculture and the development of traditional and modern industries created new classes - the economically middle class and a large number of workers in Alapuzha and Sherthala, mainly in the coir, handloom and textile industries.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 40-41.

¹⁰¹ A Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, (Kottayam: DC Books, 2007), p. 270.

¹⁰² Kurup, ‘Peasantry and the Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Kerala’, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰³ See also Kurup, ‘Peasantry and the Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Kerala’, N Krishnaji, ‘Kerala Milestones On the Parliamentary Road to Socialism’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 9 June, 2007. Sherthalai alone had around 100 factories and 30000 workers in the coir, handloom and textile industries, *Prabhatam*, 7 November 1938, Issue 30.

But social relations remained pre-capitalist and the parasitic residues of the feudal order continued in Travancore. Especially, these changes did not bring any changes in the status of those people belonging to lowest castes - the landless agricultural workers.

Education was yet another field where marked changes were evident since the advent of Missionaries in Kerala. They began to open schools as early as in the late 18th century and early 19th century; the Christians and the 'polluted caste' people like the Ezhavas thus had access to modern education earlier than elsewhere in colonial India. This indeed brought significant changes in the educational status of the Ezhava community. The changing situation led to a number of social reform movements that initiated the process of democratization. The constitutional style of political agitation had begun in Travancore with the '*Malayalee Memorial*' of 1891 which was followed by the '*Ezhava Memorial*' in 1895, demanding the removal of discrimination in educational institutions and in the government jobs.¹⁰⁴

Since Travancore and Cochin were Princely States, there was no direct action by the INC in these regions due to the non-intervention policy of the INC in the affairs of the princely State.¹⁰⁵ However, the echo of the national liberation movement

¹⁰⁴ Though it was called Malayalee Memorial, basically, the process was dominated by the Nair community. The protest was against the denial of government jobs for qualified Malayalees (read Nair here) which were snatched away by outsiders (Tamil Brahmins). A memorandum was submitted to the Raja and in the course, Nairs benefitted out of it. Abysmal representation and zero gains from the Malayalee Memorial and the humiliating remarks of the then Diwan about Ezhavas (while replying to the Malayalee Memorial) provoked the Ezhava community. They submitted a memorandum -- Ezhava Memorial-- in 1895 to the Raja, demanding the removal of discrimination in educational institutions and in the government jobs. Though, there was not any immediate response to this; later on the Ezhavas were allowed to study in the public schools.

¹⁰⁵ While rejecting the amendments in favour of State People's Appeal for help, the Haripura Congress said: "The Congress, therefore, directs that for the present Congress Committees in States shall function only under the direction and control of the Working Committee, and shall not engage in direct action in the name or under the auspices of the Congress nor undertakes internal struggles of the peoples of the State in the name of the Congress. For this purpose, independent organisations should be started and continued where they exist already within the States". The Haripura Session, Ben Bradely, https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/periodicals/labour_monthly/1938/04/x01.htm. Accessed on 3/4/2016. The Left including Subhas Chandra Bose was in favour of actively espousing for the cause of the State people.

reached these states also. The success of the Russian revolution too had its influence in Travancore and for the first time a Communist group called Communist League was formed in Trivandrum as early as in 1920. However, this was restricted to limited intellectual discourses.

This does not mean to say that they were blissfully unaware of what was happening in other parts of the country in general and in Malabar specifically. The great depression of the late 1920s did impact the agriculture in the region. Travancore, especially in Alapuzha and Sherthala set the stage for the formation of a radical organisation called the Youth League in a big way, had a history of trade unionism since 1920s. The Travancore Labour Association, an independent organisation was functioning among the workers there. The All Travancore Youth League was formed in 1931 with Ponnara G.Sreedhar as president, N.P.Kurukkal as organising secretary and N.C.Sekhar, G.Chandra Sekhara Pillai, Thiruvattar Thanupillai and others as members. This was well before the formation of the Travancore State Congress in 1938. The fact that a pamphlet published by N.P. Kurukkal titled 'the Communist Party Kerala Provincial Organisation' in 1931 was banned by the administration shows the political character of the organisation. When the agitation for responsible government started in Travancore, they functioned as a ginger group within the Travancore State Congress and supported the movement. Like in Malabar, the Youth League hegemonized the activities of the State Congress and attracted a large section of the youth to it.

An active mass movement, in the true sense of the term, began in Travancore in 1932; however it was on communal lines. The Joint Political Council/Conference, consisting of sectarian platforms of the Muslims, Ezhavas and the Christians, was formed to fight for the civil and political rights of the people belong to these

communities. They agitated for representation in the Legislative Assembly and reservation in Government jobs proportionate to their population. Though the basic character of the organisation was communal, the fact remains that they stood for the fight against the oppression of the majority by a few and also they fought for the rights of the majority. In this sense, it can be perceived as a progressive movement. Their movement known as 'abstention'¹⁰⁶ gained momentum in Travancore when they agitated against the state in large scale. After the initial suppression, the state detracted from its rigid position and agreed to extend voting rights. Further, a Public Service Commission was appointed to look into the matter of government appointments. It is important to note here that the CSP in Malabar supported this movement. Namboodiripad writes:

The movement for adequate representation in the services and in educational institutions to the non-caste Hindus and non-Hindus became a major political demand which united the overwhelming majority of the people against the caste Hindu dominated regime. The demand for political democracy could not be divorced from the parallel demand for safeguards to protect the oppressed castes and communities from caste Hindu domination.¹⁰⁷

The main difference in this development between the Malabar area on the one hand and Travancore and Cochin on the other, according to Namboodiripad, was that "in the former, the centre of all political activities was the struggle for freedom from British rule, while the question of democracy-political and socio-cultural, directed against princely rule dominated the latter."¹⁰⁸

The Joint Political Council/Conference and the Congress Conference (which existed there but was not playing any significant role) together formed the Travancore State Congress, owing to the changes in the policy of the INC from 'non-interference' to qualified support to movements for popular government in the Princely States

¹⁰⁶ It means abstain from taking part in election process either as candidates or as voters or accepting nominations until their demands are met with.

¹⁰⁷ Namboodiripad, 'The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony', p. 35

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp.36-37.

adopted at the Tripuri Session. That was the beginning of agitations for responsible government in Travancore. *Prabhatam* described the situation as:

In Travancore the State Congress activities are going on in full swing. The communal character of the Travancore politics had been changed. Political opinion was shaping well and this is disturbing Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer without end. So he tries his level best to suppress the new politics and also the human rights of the people in this area. Police force is used indiscriminately and goons were used to disrupt the public meetings of the State Congress.”¹⁰⁹

The agitations were suppressed ruthlessly by the Diwan C.P. Ramaswami Iyer using various devices. The Congress successfully organised a general strike to protest against the excesses of the state in 1938. Prior to this, a memorandum was submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore that listed out the atrocities committed by the Diwan and therefore demanded his removal. The Diwan, in response, declared the Congress and Youth league unlawful and leaders were arrested. Large scale repression followed. *Lathi* charges and firings¹¹⁰ became the norm to suppress the agitation. Though, the memorandum was withdrawn on Gandhi’s advice, in March 1939, this had far reaching implications in Travancore politics; the rift between the Youth League members and the moderates within the Congress became wide open.

However, the agitation was continued by the Youth League in the Congress. The CSP from Malabar had been supporting the movement for responsible government ever since the movement gained momentum in Travancore. It formed an Aid Committee for assisting the agitation in Ernakulum and A.K. Gopalan led a *jatha* from Malabar to Travancore expressing solidarity with the movement. CSP leaders like Krishna Pillai, N.C. Sekhar and others went over to Alapuzha and Sherthala, time

¹⁰⁹ NC Sekar, Labour leader from Malabar, had expressed this while appraising the situation of Travancore after travelled there extensively. *Prabhatam*, 6 June 1938, Issue 9.

¹¹⁰ 1938 witnessed a number of police firing and other atrocities carried out by the State. In Trivandrum students agitated on July 15, 1938 and prohibitory orders were passed and a firing was ordered on 21st July. In Neyaattinkara, 5 people had died in a police firing in August 31, 1938. Kollam and Attingal had witnessed police firing in September 2 and September 21 respectively. In Alapuzha, in August 26th four people had died in police firing. Chenganoor and Chengota also witnessed police firing. Around 5000 students boycotted schools and colleges as a response to the lathicharge on students in Science college in Travancore, *Prabhatam*, 17 October, 1938, Issue 27. This was a routine in the years between 1938- and 1939.

and again, to organise the workers. Though Travancore had a strong labour movement - the Travancore Labour Association, an independent organisation - from 1920s onwards, its leadership belonged to the communal forces (mainly from the Ezhava community). However, after the three weeks long strike of the Alapuzha coir workers in 1938, the Youth League and the CSP leaders from Malabar succeeded in organising the workers on a class basis. However, that was not the end of communal politics in Kerala. The communal based organisations, later on, strengthened their hold in Kerala politics and have now become a decisive constituent in the election scene. We shall discuss this, its causes and implications for the Marxist praxis in Kerala, in Chapter VI of this study.

As far as Cochin was concerned, the agitation for responsible government was not as strong as it was in Travancore. However, the Kudian (tenant) movement was strong there. The agricultural workers agitation in Kodungallur, which spread to Mukundapuram and Kanayannur Taluks in 1932, was one of the oldest movements in Cochin. In 1938, the Kochy Karshaka Sabha was formed under the leadership of C. Achyutha Menon (he would become Chief Minister of Kerala for six years between 1970 and 1977) and Krishnan Ezhuthachan. This sabha organised agitations foregrounding the demands of the peasants such as tenancy rights and so on. Labour unions in the textile mills were also strong in Cochin.

By the end of 1930s, there were two Congress organisations in Cochin: The Cochin Congress and Cochin State Congress. However, compared to the two other regions, their activities were minimal and they were co-opted into the legislative reforms in the Princely State soon. The major developments in the region were the expansion of the CSP and the emergence of a number of trade unions. In 1941, a new political entity called the Cochin Praja Mandalam came into existence. This was

formed by the dissidents who walked out of the Cochin Congress on the issue of dyarchy. They were active in the political scene since then and including in the Quit India movement in 1942. The rift between the extremist and moderates in the organisation led to the expulsion of the Communist segment from the party in 1945. And in the elections to the Cochin Legislative Council, held in 1945, the Cochin Praja Mandalam could secure a major victory. The victory was repeated in the 1948 elections too and this led to the formation of the first Praja Mandalam ministry in the independent Cochin State.¹¹¹ In the same year, the Praja Mandalam merged with the INC.¹¹²

IV

Once the war ended, the Communist Party plunged into their anti-imperialist struggle once again, more forcefully to prove a point that they had always stood against British imperialism. The peasants continued their resistance against landlords and imperialist forces. And between 1945 (when the World War II ended) and 1948 (when the Calcutta thesis of CPI was adopted) the peasants and workers carried out a large number of agitations and struggles under the leadership of CPI. The war brought severe food scarcity and famine in Malabar. As far as the Travancore is concerned, the workers suffered heavily due to large scale retrenchment. The last leg of the National Liberation movement saw peasants' agitations and workers' strikes throughout Kerala. The atmosphere was totally charged.

¹¹¹Post-independence, there were ministries in Cochin, Travancore and Madras. Subsequently, Travancore-Cochin was made into a separate state in 1951-52 elections while Malabar remained part of the Madras State. All these were merged to form the Kerala State in 1956 and the first ever elections to the State Assembly was held in 1957. It was then that the CPI won a majority in the assembly and formed the first ever elected communist government in history.

¹¹²Also see Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, Isaac, 'The National Movement and the Communist Party in Kerala', and Namboodiripad, 'The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony'.

In 1946, the famous Punnapra-Vayalar struggle against the State in Alapuzha shook the whole of Kerala society. Hundreds were killed in the police and army suppression. In the same timeline, Malabar had witnessed large scale of peasant agitations. A peasant rebellion began against black-marketeering in Chirakkal, in Malabar, a stronghold of the CPI, on December 12, 1946, which was met with untold repression by the police. Yet another event, the peasants forcefully occupied waste lands which were held by the *Janmis* for cultivation and this was dealt with brutal suppression. The Karivellore peasant revolt of December 20, 1946 was met with violent police reaction that ended up in the killing of two agriculture workers (including a 16 year old boy) in the police firing and criminal proceedings were initiated against more than 100 people. It should be mentioned here in the context that the notorious Malabar Special Police force, established only for the purpose of annihilating the Communists from the region, unleashed a reign of terror in Malabar. In one such brutal attack on the people at Kavumbai on December 25-26, 1946, three people were killed in the police firing.¹¹³ There were many such incidents like Kandakai, in Kurumbranad, Beedi workers strike in Koilandi and Neeleswaram and so on which unfolded untold miseries. Almost all the communist leaders in the region were arrested under Preventive Detention laws which were in force. The movement took an unprecedented dimension.

Taking advantage of the situation, the *Janmis* began eviction of their ‘troublesome’ tenants and in 1946, “there were 9000 cases against tenants and out of it 5000 were from Malabar.”¹¹⁴ Though the numbers indicate large scale evictions, the actual number of evictions would have been higher than this.

¹¹³ Also see Kurup, ‘Peasantry and the Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Kerala ‘.

¹¹⁴ KKN Kurup, *Keralathile Karshaka Samarangal*, [Malayalam], (Kottayam: Sahitya Prvarthaka Cooperative Society, 2010), p. 59.

Meanwhile, the CPI decided to contest in the August 1946 elections to the Provincial Assembly with the foremost slogan 'land to the tiller'. The CPI contested in 5 constituencies in the Malabar district alone - Chirakkal (K.P.Gopalan), Kottayam (C.H. Kannaran), Kozhikode General (A.K. Gopalan), Malappuram General (E.M.S. Namboodiripad) and Malappuram Reserved (E. Kannan). The Party also supported the INC in a number of constituencies and the Indian Union Muslim League in those reserved constituencies for the Muslims. This is evidence that the CPI did not have a charted course and approach to elections at that stage. After all, voting rights were restricted to 13 per cent of the population. The CPI did not stand a chance. These were the constituencies of the rent seekers represented by the Congress. Naturally none of the CPI candidates won. Moreover, in the 1946 elections, the CPI had to pay the price for its pro-war policy during the Quit India Movement. Congressmen won 164 seats out of 210 seats in the elections.

However, K.P. Gopalan secured 22880 votes against 30662 secured by his rival candidate from the INC.¹¹⁵ It proved that Chirakkal was the stronghold of the Karashaka Sangams and even in as adverse a situation as it was in 1946, the Communist Party still had a strong hold there. The Communists had polled a total number of 54196 and the Congress 143242 votes.¹¹⁶ To secure more than a third of the total votes when the franchise was still restricted was no mean achievement.

It was in this context that the Second Congress of the CPI in Calcutta (February-March, 1948), adopted the B.T. Ranadive¹¹⁷ line holding that "the party had been actually following a fundamentally mistaken line of policy-a right-reformist

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.22.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p 32.

¹¹⁷ The document, the Strategy and Tactics of the Struggle for National Democratic Revolution in India famously known as the Calcutta Thesis of 1948 that called for armed resistance against the state to complete the tasks of the of the democratic and the socialist revolutions in India.

class- collaborationist policy at that-under the leadership of P.C. Joshi.” This ‘right wing reformist line’ was corrected and the Telengana way was pronounced as the right way. A new phase of waging war against the ‘bourgeois state’ began.

The months that followed the elections, witnessed a sequence of armed revolts by the peasants in Malabar such as Payyanur, Thilangeri, Aralam, Onjiyam, Korom, Shuranad and Munayamkunnu that left many killed in the police actions and firing and landed a large number of people in prison and the CPI was banned once again. The party’s line changed once again, in 1951, and the 1948 line was called ‘left adventurism’ and the CPI decided to take the parliamentary path while keeping the path of struggle alive.

The first ever elections to the Legislative Assemblies on the basis of adult franchise were held in Travancore –Cochin in 1948. The CPI and Indian Socialist Party were in alliance; the combine also had an understanding with the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress. And yet the combine could not win even a single seat in the assembly. The TTNC, meanwhile, won 14 seats. The Congress had a landslide victory. Out of 120 seats it won 97 seats. However, the Congress miserably failed to provide a stable government despite the huge numbers. Between 1948 (when the first government was formed) and 1951-52 (when the general elections were held), the Congress had a record of three chief ministers. The fissiparous tendencies – internal strife, group rivalries, communal factors, personal ambitions and other dissents -- within the Congress were wide open. This instability of the Congress governments was one of the factors that helped the Left gain power in 1957.

In the meanwhile the first General elections were declared in 1951-52 and the CPI - KMPP (Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party) alliance in Malabar could beat the Congress there. In the 1952 election, in Travancore Cochin, a United front of the

Left- CPI, RSP, KSP – contested and the CPI won 28 seats and a coalition KSP and CPI in Malabar won 24 seats out of 30 and CPI leader A.K. Gopalan was elected to the Lok Sabha from the Kasargod Lok Sabha constituency for the first time.

Though the armed revolts of the peasants and the workers between 1945- 1951 were ruthlessly suppressed by the Governments in power, in Kerala, the Communist Party could get larger gains for its sacrifice. Peasants, working class and petty bourgeois, the backbone of the CPI, stood strongly with it. Malabar, which was the cradle of the communist movement in Kerala, had become the forte of the CPI. This was evident in the elections to the District Boards in 1954. The CPI, without an alliance with other political parties, could get the majority. E.M.S stated about the success of the Party as:

Despite some sectarian mistakes committed after the all-India (Calcutta) congress of the Party, these militant struggles brought the Communist Party once again to the centre of the revolutionary movement. Although in the period of the Quit India struggle and in the subsequent months new left groups had emerged in Kerala challenging the Communist leadership of the leftist movement, the militant and organised leadership given by the Party to the post-war revolutionary upsurge (i n Kerala as well as in the rest of the country) restored to the Communist Party the position it had secured before the Quit India movement.¹¹⁸

A major factor that contributed to the electoral politics of the CPI after the tumultuous decade was the campaign for Aikya Kerala (Unified Kerala) based on linguistic state approach, where it scored over the Congress and other parties. EMS Namboodiripad's writings, *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi* (Kerala: The Abode of Malayalees) which was published in 1948, and a revised book on the same issue in English - *National Question in Kerala* (published in 1952) provided with a theoretical premises to the linguistic basis arrangement of the State.

On November 1, 1956, Kerala State was formed on linguistic basis. And for the first elections since its formation, the CPI contested alone. And finally in the

¹¹⁸ Namboodiripad, 'The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony', p 40.

elections for the united Kerala state which was held in 1957, the communists and communist-supported independents won 65 of the 127 seats with 40 percent of the vote share. From there begin its long journey in the parliamentary road. E.M.S. Namboodiripad became chief minister. Namboodiripad explained the factors that forced the communists to contest the elections alone and attributed its victory also to the prevailing situation of the State and said:

By the middle of the 1950s, however, an entirely new situation arose with two characteristic features: Firstly, the relations between the Communist Party and the other left parties both in the Travancore and Cochin area as well as in Malabar (which came to be merged in to the new Kerala state in 1956) had become so strained that the Communist Party had to go almost alone, with no allies. Secondly, the conflicts among the bourgeois politicians and their parties had become so intensified that, while the dominant Christian elements in the Travancore-Cochin area were solidly behind the Congress there were bourgeois elements in other castes and communities which did not mind any non- Congress party (including the Communists) taking the place of the Congress ; a few of them went to the extent of helping the Communist candidate in this or that constituency win at the expense of the Congress candidate who was a Christian. This correlation of caste-communal forces helped the defeat of the Congress candidates in a large number of constituencies.¹¹⁹

In short, apart from the long involvement of the communists in organising the subaltern groups in struggles, the changes in the correlations of the communal forces also acted in favour of the Communist victory in the State. Indeed, it is also a fact that the CPI had registered impressive wins in the first general elections in India held between October 1951 and March 1952. The CPI won as many as 16 seats in the Lok Sabha, polling 3.3 per cent of the total votes polled. Of these, eight were from the Madras State; it is significant to note here that the Madras State, then, included the Malabar region and the CPI candidates won in Cannanore while its ally, the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP) won from Ottapalam, Tellichery, and Kozhikode. The CPI also won from Allepey, which then was part of the Travancore-Cochin state.

The point is that the communist party had established its presence in the electoral sense even in the first general elections. This was consolidated in the five

¹¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 41-42

years since the first general elections and the CPI's victory in 1957, the first ever election to the Kerala state assembly (since the state's formation on November 1, 1956 based on the linguistic re-organisation of the states) had to do with the historical experience of the Party in Kerala. This reflected the hegemonic influence of the CPI in the political discourse of the region which was the fallout of historic experiences rather than simple electoral arithmetic.

The next chapter will deal with the first ever democratically elected communist Government in the world-the Communist Party in Power in Kerala- 1957-1959: Theory and Praxis.

CHAPTER III

COMMUNIST PARTY IN POWER 1957- 1959: THEORY AND PRACTICE

The Communist Party of India won the majority of the seats in the Kerala State assembly in the elections in 1957 and was thus elected to run a government (in fact the first such experience across the world) with E.M.S. Namboodiripad as Chief Minister. The Party, thereafter, embarked upon an experiment, perhaps unknown in the history of the communist movement across the world, in the realm of *radical legislative reforms* as part of the imperative to function within the framework of the Constitution. Only a decade ago had the communists in India dismissed the entire context in which the Constitution was being conceived, launched an armed conflict against the independent Indian State (marked by the struggle in Telengana and Tebhaga as also the Punnapra-Vayalar armed resistance in Travancore) apart from the trade union actions against the Nehru-led government in Bombay, Calcutta and elsewhere. There was, however, a substantive shift in the Party's approach in 1951 (after the Nehru government lifted the ban imposed after the 1948 Calcutta Thesis) and the CPI had begun to outline its approach to such aspects of the Constitution as multi-party democracy and universal adult suffrage that led the party to participate in elections even while holding a revolutionary transformation as its end. This, indeed, characterised the Party's policies towards various aspects of administration.

In this context, an analysis of the policies of the CPI led government on industrial development, legislations related to restructuring the agrarian relations and in the field of education, the administrative and police reforms assume importance and hence will be looked into in this chapter. It will also deal with such questions as to the

extent to which the CPI succeeded with these programmes; the challenges they faced while working in a parliamentary set up; that its leaders had to bend over their back to prove their commitment to the multi-party Parliamentary structure and whether their attempts in this regard were at all successful are the questions that will be addressed to in this chapter. This chapter will also deal with, though briefly, the nature of the social groups that rallied behind the call for the 'liberation' struggle by the Congress party and the communal dimensions of it and the dismissal of the democratically elected state government on this basis.¹

This chapter has seven sections: Section I will deal with the transition of the Communist Party of India (CPI) into a ruling party in a State. Section II deals with the industrial policy of the State government; Section III with legislative and administrative efforts restructuring the agrarian relations; Section IV with the police policy and its repercussions; Section V with reforms in the education sector including the legislation on school education and its consequences and section VI on measures taken in the area of administrative reforms. Section VII is about the formation of cooperative societies in Kerala and the movement Section VIII looks into the 'liberation, struggle' led by the church and other communal forces and supported by all opposition parties in Kerala with a sole aim to bring down the communist government in Kerala and this section will also briefly look into the changes in the attitude of Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru towards the Government of Kerala that finally these factors together led to the dismissal of the government invoking

¹I am using the word 'liberation' within quotes here on purpose and an explanation is warranted. The word 'liberation' in many ways belonged to the communist discourse and used by them historically. Here, we find this word appropriated by the anti-communist forces that had organized behind the Congress party and the struggle against the communists were described as liberation; for the groups rallied behind the Christian Church, it was conveyed as liberation from the communists who were anti-God and this semantics did seem to work. It is interesting contrasting this experience with 'liberation theology' as experienced in Latin America and even in Kerala in subsequent years. That, however, is subject matter of another research and will be dealt with, only in brief, later in this chapter.

provisions from Article 356 of the Constitution, the for the second time in the history of the Republic.²

I

The metamorphosis of the Communist Party of India in the few years between 1951 and 1956 (from the Calcutta Congress in 1951³ to the Palghat Congress in 1956) is indeed an important aspect that warrants a detailed narrative here in order to make sense of the theoretical context in which the first elected state government came into place in Kerala and its contours. The Party Programme of 1951, the most important landmark as far as the history of the CPI was concerned,⁴ assessed the objective conditions of the country and concluded that the economic and social conditions of the country and the state of mass organisations of workers, peasants and other revolutionary classes were not mature enough to carry out a socialist transformation in India immediately.⁵ Hence a tactical line – while not giving up the revolutionary path – was formulated in order to contribute to the long term strategy. The 1951

²It may be recalled that Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, defending the provision in the Draft Constitution, had held in the Constituent Assembly that this will remain a dead letter in the Constitution allaying fears that it could emerge into a threat to the federal basis of the Constitution. It took less than a decade for those apprehensions to come true.

³ The Party's Calcutta Congress in 1951 is an important landmark in its history because it was then that the CPI adopted a new programme and a tactical line – to utilise the legal possibilities along with mobilizing the masses and taking them forward in the struggle for freedom and for people's democratic revolution. Capturing the parliamentary institutions was one of the main tactics. This tactical line was formulated considering the specific situation of India. However, the understanding was that in the long term, armed revolution is the only way to replace the present state upholding - the imperialist –feudal order - by a people's democratic republic. The Programme of 1951 was later reviewed as dogmatic and sectarian. 1951 Tactical line, Mohit Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol. VIII, 1951-1956, (New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1977), pp.20-21.

⁴ It was in 1951 that the CPI recorded a departure from the Party's line since 1946 (incidentally in Calcutta too) which led the CPI launch armed struggles leading to the party being banned and the arrest and detention of a cross section of its leaders and the massive repression that led to the death of a number of its cadre; this was also a phase when the party cadre fought armed battles against the police in Telengana, Tebhaga and in Punnapra Vayalar (in Travancore which has been dealt with in detail in the previous chapter of this thesis) and a number of peasant revolts in Malabar. All these contributed to the party's growth in these regions. It is, hence, important to stress here that the shift, notwithstanding, there was indeed a continuity insofar as the party's historic legacy is concerned in that the struggles launched during the 1946-50 period had lent the party its core strength in terms of a cadre and a strong support base. It may be noted that the CPI had won from constituencies that were part of the region where these movements were organized in the 1951 elections.

⁵Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, p.9.

Programme charted a revolutionary course including restructuring the state apparatus, abolition of landlordism without compensation⁶ and right of all nationalities for self-determination and so on. In the given historical context, the CPI held the view that this tactical line was vital in order to sustain and strengthen the vanguard and mass organisations. Hence, a binary path was indispensable and according to the 1951 programme, “while utilising all legal possibilities, the existing illegal apparatus of the party is strengthened enormously.”⁷ In short, the parliamentary path was accepted as one of the legal tactics and the question of the attainment of full national independence through an armed revolution of the people was kept on hold for the future.⁸ This tactical line of the Party remains significant in the context of the allegations (after the CPI won the elections and formed the state government in 1957) by the opposition parties and even a perception that the communists were using the constitutional institutions for further expanding their agenda of revolution and to subvert democracy and constitutionalism.

This, perhaps, was not just wild imagination or a canard without basis. For instance, the Election Manifesto of the Communist Party in 1951 reiterated its thrust in 1951 programme. It pronounced the party’s disdain for the Nehru Government in categorical terms and reiterated its line on the nature of independence; according to the manifesto, the government at the Centre was a government of national betrayal that had not merely “permitted the British imperialists to hold sway over our country’s economy and loot its wealth but also permitted the princes, the landlords

⁶The communists were critical of the Constitutional scheme where landlordism was sought to be abolished not through confiscation of surplus land from the zamindars but by acquisition of such surplus land after compensating them. Article 31 of the Constitution guaranteeing the right to property as Fundamental Right was however tinkered with by this time by the Constitution (First) Amendment Act, 1951 inserting Article 31 A and 31 B and the Ninth Schedule to render such laws abolishing zamindari constitutional. See V.Krishna Ananth, *The Indian Constitution and Social Revolution: Right to Property Since Independence*(Sage, New Delhi, 2015), for an elaborate discussion on this). The CPI, however, changed its views on this subsequently.

⁷ Ibid. p. 31.

⁸Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, pp. 19-20.

and the Indian monopolists and financiers to continue their plunder and loot.”⁹ The Indian National Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru, the manifesto held, had inherited and maintained the exploitative structure of the British. The manifesto said this in so many words:

What has come is not freedom. What has come is the replacement of a British viceroy and councillors by an Indian president and his ministers, of white bureaucrats by brown bureaucrats, and a bigger share in the loot of Indian people for the Indian monopolists collaborating with the imperialists.¹⁰

It also blamed Nehru government for not initiating a programme to set up heavy industries in India for the development of the country and even explained that the reason for this hesitation was because of their intimate ties with the British and American imperialists. The Manifesto was critical of the government’s domestic policies too.¹¹ Interestingly, the manifesto did not use the word ‘comprador’ to describe the nature of the Indian ruling classes even while holding the Nehru-led Congress of having such intimate ties with the imperialists. It may be noted that this approach is in total variance with subsequent analysis of the Nehruvian economic policy by Marxists.¹²

The Madurai Congress of the CPI, in 1953, reiterated this line of the 1951 Programme, with minor changes. Notwithstanding this, the Party was moving towards

⁹‘Election Manifesto of the Communist Party of India, 1951’, cited in Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, p. 65.

¹⁰Ibid. This view was heavily influenced by the pre-second world war analysis of the Communist International which stated that the “national liberation movement, led by the national bourgeoisie, would not achieve complete independence; it would pass on to a semi-colonial status, having not an independent capitalist development but a stunted capitalist growth controlled by imperialism in its own interest.” This analysis continues after the Second World War right up to 1956- up to the 20th Congress of the CPSU. G Adhikari, *Communist Party and India’s Path to National Regeneration and Socialism* (New Delhi: Communist Party Publication, 1964), p. 14.

¹¹ The election manifesto of the CPI refuted the tall claims of the Congress government on development. It blamed the Nehru Government protecting the princes and landlords and thus preserving the feudal system intact which “pauperised the peasants, ruined (our) agriculture and caused catastrophic fall in the food production.” See ‘Election Manifesto of the Communist Party of India, 1951’ in Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, p. 65. The Election Manifesto blamed that the Congress have betrayed the freedom struggle as they have allowed the foreigners and the reactionary Indian vested interests to plunder and loot our people.

¹²See also Prabhat Patnaik, ‘Nehru’s Legacy: Development Plan’, *Frontline*, 12 December 2014.

the parliamentary path even though the confusion about tactics and strategy remained. Meanwhile, substantial changes were taking shape in the foreign and domestic policies of the Nehru government. In the realm of foreign policy, a clear shift towards the Socialist bloc was evident and even pronounced in the celebrated Bandung spirit of 1955.¹³ This shift in the foreign policy of the government was greatly appreciated by the communists. However, the antagonistic approach continued to guide them insofar as the domestic policy front was concerned. This, despite the categorical declaration by the Nehru government in parliament that the government's aim was to establish a socialist order through implementing agrarian reforms, industrial development and employment generation in late 1954. The communist Party held this as a sinister plan of the Congress to weaken the Left base. In tune with this, Ajoy Ghosh, then General Secretary of the CPI, dismissed Nehru's socialism as 'a hoax'.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the Avadi Session (21-23 January 1955) of the Congress officially accepted the phrase 'socialistic pattern of society'¹⁵ as the Congress policy and this had far reaching implications as far as the CPI was concerned. This incontrovertibly reinforced the arguments of the emerging pro-Congress faction in the CPI; this was a time when a section within the party had begun to speak on the need to cooperating with the congress under the Left-leaning Nehru than remaining antagonistic to it. This, as it appears, however, was a minority line and Ajoy Ghosh, the Party's General Secretary then, had to voice the majority position and thus clarified that Nehruvian

¹³The Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian countries which was held in Bandung, Indonesia on 18-22 April, 1955. The Conference discussed about an independent foreign policy keeping the newly independent nations away from the cold war. Decolonization and economic development were the major concern. This was a culmination of the initiative taken by the government of India.

¹⁴In an article published in *New Age* on January 2, 1955, Ajoy Gosh lamented the belie claims of the Nehru government, rottenness of Plan's foundation and held him for distorting the Communist stand.

¹⁵The significance of the Avadi session "was in the realm of the reassertion made by the Congress Party of its commitment to building a socialist pattern of society. The immediate context was that, it was time, by the, to set the direction for the second five year plan. At avadi, the Congress session laid out that the objective for the plan shall be the creation of a society where the means of production are brought under social ownership and the national wealth is distributed equitably." V Krishna Ananth, *India Since Independence, Making Sense of Indian Politics*(Delhi: Pearson, 2010), p.44.

socialism was nothing but a deception.¹⁶ In that context, it was necessary for the Party to ward off the pro-congress feeling within and hence the criticism was justified given the time at which it was done. But then, the theological nature of the discussion was evident when E.M.S. Namboodiripad, writing about that in the 1980s, recalls what Ajoy Ghosh said almost three decades ago:

Pretensions to socialism was a ploy adopted by the Congress to revive itself and bring in the Left cadre to its fold. The Congress propagated that it was the only capable party to change the course of the country towards the Left. The Avadi Congress was a culmination of this strategy.¹⁷

Meanwhile, Nehru's visit to Soviet Union, along with his daughter, in June 1955 and the return of this courtesy by the Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev and his huge team by the end of 1955 and his extravagant appreciation of Nehru and his government found immediate reverberations in the attitude of the CPI towards the Central Government. Ajoy Ghosh found the farewell speech of 'our Prime Minister Nehru' on the occasion of the parting of Khrushchev and his team at the Palam airport on 14 December 1955 as very moving. The party was full of praises for Nehru's foreign policy and sang in praise of the *Panch Sheel* and the friendship and cooperation with the socialist block.¹⁸ This, notwithstanding, the party continued to register its disagreement with the Congress and its Government on the domestic policies' front.

At a theoretical level, Khrushchev's thesis on the peaceful transition to socialism, presented at the 20th Congress of the CPSU between 14 and 25, February 1956, had huge ramifications for the conventional Marxist formulations; all of a

¹⁶This aspect of the communist party's functioning - Democratic Centralism - will be dealt with in some detail later in this study (Chapter 5).

¹⁷Namboodiripad, *Communist Party Keralathil*, p. 450.

¹⁸This was further emphasised in the review of the general elections; "the Congress entered the election campaign with great advantage in its favour. The prestige of Government's foreign policy, the priorities under the Second Five Year Plan, and the propaganda about socialism, the personal popularity of Nehru, etc. 'Review of the second General Elections', Central Committee of the Communist Party of India, *New Age*, New Delhi, July 1957. p.2.

sudden the transition to socialism¹⁹ was considered possible through various means - peaceful or revolutionary path - and the only non-negotiable factor was 'the political leadership of the working class headed by its vanguard,' without which there can be no socialism.²⁰ This does not mean that the CPI, as a whole, lapped up this change. There was strong dissidence against the imposition of 'so called peaceful transition to socialism' and a section even described this as a reactionary intrigue (in the Indian context, the parliamentary path) and that this will dilute the revolutionary objectives of the Party. On the other hand, the resolution of the CPSU encouraged those within the party leadership, who were in favour of a Congress -CPI alliance. And soon this difference within had begun to take the shape of an ideological debate within the party before it appeared in different concrete formulations at the 4th Party Congress of the CPI in April 1956 in Palghat. However, the majority of the delegates were not convinced with the peaceful transition line and in effect those who sought a unity between the CPI and Nehruvian Congress were overwhelmed by those who opposed the Khrushchev line to be taken literally and applied to the CPI's attitude towards the Congress party.²¹ It must be added that the CPI as a party, however, refrained from any intense debate on Khrushchev's thesis of a peaceful transition to Socialism, as

¹⁹This formulations found its way in most concrete form in the Amritsar Congress in 1958. The Kerala experience also contributed to it. In the Palghat Congress it was in a fluid state and there was no theoretical clarity over the new formulation. In the Amritsar Congress Part adopted a Constitution and the preamble of the Constitution clearly stated the objective of the Party that "the Communist Party of India strives to achieve full democracy and socialism by peaceful means. It considers that by developing a powerful mass movement, by winning a majority in Parliament and by backing it with mass sanction, the working class and its allies can overcome the resistance of forces of reaction and ensure that the Parliament becomes an instrument of people's will for effecting fundamental changes in the economic, social and state structure." Adhikari, *Communist Party and India's Path*, pp.150-51.

²⁰ "The winning of stable parliamentary majority backed by a mass revolutionary movement of the proletariat and of all the working people could create for the working class of a number of capitalist and former colonial countries the conditions needed to secure fundamental social changes. Khrushchev, 20th Congress of the CPUS, cited in Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, pp. 505 -506.

²¹The Palghat Congress assessed the Government at the Centre as a bourgeois -landlord government and its leading force is the bourgeoisie. "Its policies were motivated by the desire to develop India along with capitalist lines." Adhikari, *Communist Party and India's Path*, p. 134. In the 1951 Programme it was government of landlords, princes and reactionary big bourgeoisie who were collaborating with the British Imperialists.

such in the Palghat conference.²² It is possible to conclude here that the ensuing general elections in 1957 could have led the Party to refrain from initiating a meaningful discussion on the issue, which, they feared, could throw in the open the differences brewing within the Central Committee of the Party since 1951. The fact is that an important discussion was pushed under the carpet in order to prepare for the general elections.

It is pertinent to note here that the Palghat conference of the CPI, nevertheless, witnessed a paradigm shift and this had implications for the making and the functioning of the first elected communist government in Kerala. While the party had retained the idea of a revolutionary transformation on its agenda even then, the immediate priorities were identified as ‘strengthening the national freedom, rebuilding the national economy, improvement in the condition of the people and strengthening the forces of democracy in the economic, political and social life’²³ and so on. The Political resolution adopted at the fourth Congress of the CPI, in general, presented an incongruous picture and this in turn confounded the confusion. The Congress party was now described as both progressive and reactionary in the same document. The document represented the concoction of different approaches and ideas that were prevalent within the CPI Central Committee at that time. The attempt at Palghat, given the proximity of the general elections, was to put a gloss of unity rather than let the conflict be resolved through an intense debate. The contention, in the basic sense of the term, was on the definition of the nature and characteristics of the state and the class interest it represented, which indeed is fundamental insofar as the Marxist approach to politics is concerned. The difference, in this sense, in fact, had begun to be expressed right when the Mountbatten Plan was executed in June 1947 and the

²² See Namboodiripad, *Communist Party Keralathil*, pp. 479 -483.

²³ Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, pp. 550-551.

Central Committee of the CPI passed the resolution on the Mountbatten Plan in June 1947.²⁴ However, this was somewhat reconciled without any resolution in each of the Party congresses since then until it led to the split before the 7th Congress of the Party.

While the course of events culminating in the split of 1964 will be discussed in the next chapter (Chapter IV), it is relevant here to elaborate on the confusion or even the conflicting approach to the Constitutional scheme and on Nehru's Congress party at the Palghat Congress resolution. Endorsing the foreign policy of the Nehru government without ambiguity and qualifications²⁵ the resolution on the domestic policies revealed the conflict within between the two lines. The party document, for instance, recognised the Nehruvian economic policy in a manner that was substantially different from its earlier position (that it only strengthened imperialist designs) and now held that it 'strives to weaken the position of British capital in the economy' and also recorded that the Government was engaged in attempts 'to curb feudal forms of exploitation'. The political line at Palghat, in its own words, held that:

The Communist Party is vitally interested in such developments and strives to strengthen them, for they help in strengthening the democratic movement and in consolidating and extending the democratic front. Every step is taken by the government for strengthening national freedom and national economy, against imperialist, feudal and monopoly interests, will receive our most energetic and unstinted support.²⁶

However, the political resolution of the 4th Congress hastened to 'caution' the cadre that such contradictions between imperialism and the government and between the

²⁴This resolution recognized the independence of the country and stated that the national leadership was in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Though "the forces of freedom movement had forced the imperialists to open negotiations with Indian leaders and to talk of agreeing to independence, they were manoeuvring to forge new alliance with princes, big landlords and with big business in order to control the Indian State and economy through it. . . It called for the broadest front against imperialism and its allies." G Adhikari, *Communist Party and India's Path*, p.5. However, this document was condemned as revisionist and right opportunist by the Second Congress of the Party in Calcutta in 1948.

²⁵'The political resolution of the 4th Congress of the Party', cited in Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, p. 525.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 546.

feudalism and the government are just the means that the ruling party was using to strengthen the bourgeois government at the cost of the people. The basic nature of the government, it sought to reiterate, remained anti-people. And all this was used to construct a tactical line of tacit unity and struggle in relation with the national bourgeoisie. The resolution said:

Therefore, while opposing imperialism and attempting to weaken its grips over national economy, the bourgeoisie simultaneously maintains its links with British capital and giving facilities for further inflow of foreign capital. While striving to curb and weaken feudalism, it simultaneously maintains its alliance with landlords, against the democratic forces and makes concessions to the landlords. While striving to industrialise the country, it seeks to place the burdens of the economic development mainly on the common people.²⁷

Apart from its support to certain set of policies of the union government, the party promoted the idea of national reconstruction (which was far different and far more radical from the Gandhian programme that the Indian National Congress had adopted since the 1930s), based on *people's democracy* and that would gradually move to a socialist order. Further, this was the time the Party began to express patriotic sentiments and talk of national unity and integrity as different from its earlier position favouring the right of all nationalities for self-determination.²⁸

The most significant point here is that this confusion prevailed over the functioning of the communist government in Kerala too. The fact remained that there were many or different understandings within the leadership and this had a cascading effect on the cadres and their attitude and approach to the Communist government; in other words, this impacted their perception of a Communist party government in a bourgeois set up. Three important documents - the Party programme of 1951 and the

²⁷ Ibid, p. 547.

²⁸ The 1951 programme of the Party proposed far reaching changes in the field of state structure and the right of all nationalities to self-determination is one among them. "The republic of India will unite the people of various nationalities of India not by force but by their voluntary consent to the creation of a common state. Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist*, p.10. This concept is straight away picked up from the Soviet state structure without looking at the implications of it super imposed mechanically.

tactical line, the political resolution at the Palghat Congress of 1956 in the international context of ‘peaceful transition to socialism’ and the statement of the Politburo on the occasion of the general elections of 1957- largely contributed to this confusion: from the decision of the Party to accept the possibilities of working from within the Constitutional framework as a tactical line (even while moving away from the idea of a revolutionary transformation as the immediate goal) to the call for building a democratic front and building a mass based Party to a clarion call for the active participation in the election with ‘sound democratic instincts and flaming patriotism’²⁹ in the battle for alternative policies.

The Politburo’s call, in the immediate context of elections, did create an impression that election is the most important battle and nowhere had it stressed that this was a tactical shift and that the most important task was organising the masses for a revolutionary transformation under the leadership of working class for the establishment of a people’s democracy and then to socialism. The Politburo document stated: “What is going to be the direction of our political and economic life tomorrow very much depends on the outcome of the election battle that we face today.”³⁰

Shorn of frills, the point is that the roadmap was drawn for the parliamentary path at least insofar as the party leaders were concerned while ensuring that the cadres were still left to imagine that the party was committed to nothing short of a revolutionary transformation.

Therefore, the 1957 election should be analysed in the changed context and the Party’s understanding, which was full of internal contradictions. While in Kerala,

²⁹ Election was the battle and for which the Party “will rely on the unity and strength of the people, on their sound democratic instincts and *flaming patriotism* – on the activity and mobilization of the broad masses. They will rely on the superiority of the work which have already stood the test of life.

³⁰ ‘Forward to Election Battle’, Politbureau statement Published in *New Age* on 23 December 1956, cited in Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, p. 648.

the Congress party being the principal enemy of the CPI, the Party decided to defeat the Congress and hence put up efforts to bring in the Praja Socialist Party (PSP)³¹ and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) into its fold to form a united anti-Congress front, in spite of the fact that the PSP, an electoral ally of the CPI, betrayed the cause of socialism in 1954 when it joined hands with the Congress party to form a government in Travancore-Cochin state (prior to the making of the present day Kerala State including Malabar to the Travancore-Cochin State in 1956 and the subsequent first elections to Kerala assembly in 1957) to keep the CPI out of power. However, as mentioned earlier, the Congress Government at the Centre was regarded differently. And as for Nehru, he commanded huge respect among a section of the CPI leaders in Kerala, particularly those from the CSP stream who joined the CPI in 1940 (the influence of *Left* oriented Nehru among the early communists had been discussed in the Chapter II). This legacy persisted at least in 1957.

All these nuances went into the making of the CPI's Manifesto in 1957; it was a commitment to implement the Congress party's programme earnestly and honestly than a Congress government would do.³²The most attractive slogan was *a stable government and a prosperous Kerala* which the state needed so desperately after a decade of unstable and corrupt Governments of the Congress and the PSP.

This tendency continued and in fact the communists' expressions of commitment to the constitution and constitutionalism were on the ascendency after the Party won a majority in the election and the idea of a Communist party-led State

³¹ It was not consummated though due to the adamant stand of the PSP.

³² The CPI manifesto presented a comprehensive list of 14 point programmes which will be implemented if they voted to power. This covered larger areas of social justice, economic upliftment of the poor and downtrodden with a right based approach. It talked about the need for the establishment of new industries to tackle the question of unemployment, wage rise for the industrial and plantation workers, nationalisation of foreign owned plantations, restructuring agrarian relations through a comprehensive land reform Act, revamping the education system, reorientation of police policy, administrative reform, Priority was given for growing food-grains as Kerala was facing food scarcity, by increasing the food production.

Government became a reality. Constitution and constitutionalism were the key words that the government dabbled with thereafter, to convey the message to its cadres and others to accentuate their willingness to work within the parameters of the parliamentary set-up. Nevertheless, the extent to which this change would percolate into the Party's ranks and even among a section of the party's leaders will be analysed in the context of the fall of the government. If one takes a close look at the public statements of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the Chief Minister of Kerala, about the policies of the communist government, it is clear that he and his colleagues in the cabinet were conscious of the task ahead: To prove their credentials and commitment to constitutionalism and to project an image of themselves and the party to run a super-democratic government.

Examples of this are far too many. For instance, when a reporter asked Namboodiripad whether the programmes in the Election Manifesto were pitched too high and whether it was possible to implement them within the framework of the Constitution, he said:

When we formulated the programme we were quite conscious that every item included in that programme had to be fitted into the framework of the present Constitution. We had bestowed all the thought and attention that was possible on the practicability of each item included in the Manifesto and were of opinion that every one of them is capable of being implemented within the framework of the Constitution. However, if it is found, in the course of actual implementation, and in the course of consultations with the Central Government, that provisions of the Constitution do not allow the implementation of a particular item in the manner in which it had been formulated, we would hold further consultations with the Centre and do our best to implement as much of it as possible within the framework of the Constitution.³³

His thesis in May 1957, circulated for discussion within the party's highest levels (the full text of which is in appendix 1 of this study), support this.³⁴ He further added that

³³ 'Communists in Kerala', *The Hindu*, 26/3/1957.

³⁴ In his report in the Plenum which was held on 24-26 May on the Political Resolution, he said that the "main reason for this is that the Party is faced with a new responsibility calling for a new perspective, new methods of organisation and also new style of work of not only the entire Party but each Party member." Report of Comrade E.M.S. in the Plenum held on 24-26 May, 1957 on Political resolution,

there was no way that they would deviate from the promulgated policies of the central government or the Second Plan which was then in force.

Similar sentiments were echoed in the statement of then Secretary of the CPI's Kerala State unit, M.N. Govindan Nair on the eve of the victory of his party in Kerala. To ward off the apprehensions created in the minds of the people that communists had intended to wreck the existing system, he said:

We, as the majority party, expect to be called to form a Government; and we are confident of giving the people of Kerala a stable government. Once we form a Government, we are not going to stage an upheaval the next day. What we mean to do is to function in the service of the people within the four corners of the present Constitution. This is nothing of the nature of a Red Revolution. The bogey of revolution, violently upsetting everything, is not our making, but of our opponents . . .³⁵

Thus, there was a conscious effort at dispelling the images that the communists were opposed to any order and instead strike a positive note to assure the people of Kerala that they would work for a prosperous Kerala and will provide a stable government. The section of the leadership sincerely believed that the communist victory in Kerala and further its government's progressive pro-people policies will influence the policies of the other governments, especially the Congress governments positively and "strengthen the forces of democracy in the public life."³⁶ Namboodiripad, time and again, reassured that his government's path was not that of confrontation but to seek conciliation even if the existing framework of the system, its several regulations and procedures, were not to his Party's likings. He reiterated that the line was to use the powers that were conferred upon the State Government by the

CPI Documents, File No: 1957/3, Archives on Contemporary History, (New Delhi : Jawaharlal Nehru University), [here after ACH, JNU], p.5.

³⁵*New Age*, Vol. IV, No: 26, March 24, 1957, pp. 8- 9 cited in Fic, *Kerala Yenan of India*, p. 84.

³⁶Review of the Second General Elections, Central Committee of the Communist Party of India', *New Age*, New Delhi, July 1957, p. 12.

Constitution to the maximum; the government shall adhere strictly to the limitations imposed on the State Governments by the Constitution.³⁷

While discussing the inadequate allocations to Kerala in the Second Five Year Plan, a few months after his ministry was sworn in, Namboodiripad said:

We are not at all advocating the cause of Kerala in opposition to the rest of our country. We are in entire agreement with the idea that no state or its government should counterpoise its own local interests to the interests of the whole country. Every sober, patriotic Indian will concede that no state in our country can develop on its own in isolation from the entire country. We communists of Kerala are not dreaming of a new, united Kerala independent of the rest of the country(as some other people do); we want the new, united Kerala to play its legitimate role in the new and democratic India.³⁸

The only complaint that the communist government raised, time and again, was about the sabotaging attitude of the Congress leaders from Kerala with the support of certain leaders from Delhi who were not accepting even those progressive measures which Nehru and the All India Congress leadership wished-for and the Communist Party adopted in its Election Manifesto. Namboodiripad, in fact, lamented that this was ‘despite the fact that the communist Party was to recognise the progressive measures adopted by the government of India and the All India Congress party under the leadership of Nehru, the Congress in Kerala is very antagonistic towards the communist government’.³⁹

However, this note of optimism did not last for long. The Congress organisation in Kerala persisted with a concerted campaign against the CPI government and partisan political interests overwhelmed democratic political behaviour soon. The mobilisation of the people on the streets against some of the measures by the elected government - legislations to effect reforms in the agrarian

³⁷ ‘Kerala Communist Cabinet Sworn in’, *The Hindu*6/4/1957.

³⁸E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Kerala: Problems and Possibilities, July 1957*, (CP publication, 1957), File No: 333, ACH, JNU, NewDelhi.pp.12-13. In this document, Namboodiripad presents the political praxis of his government in the various sectors such agriculture, industry and reforms in administrative system, police policy and so on. In a way this was the practical guide to his 1957 thesis presented before the plenum in May 1957.

³⁹Ibid, p.14.

structure and in the arena of school education in particular - culminating in the dismissal of the Government on July 31, 1959 altered the course in a substantive sense. An analysis of the major policies of the government during the short period when it ruled Kerala is pertinent here to understand the Marxist praxis.

II

On the industrial front, by and large, the approach of the Communist government was a moderate one, except for the question on 'nationalisation of plantations' that raised a controversy. However, there were preconceived notions about the industrial policy of the government, given the CPI's record of trade unionism and the influence of its trade union - the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) - with its history of militant strike actions in the past and the extent to which it moulded the minds of the party leaders as well as its ranks. There was a general perception of increasing incidence of industrial unrest in the aftermath of the coming of a communist government. The communist leaders walked the extra mile to dispel this perception. For instance, after assuming power, the chief minister unambiguously clarified the policies of the communist government towards industrial development of the state and the mechanisms to arrive at peaceful settlement of the labour disputes. He appealed to the trade unions for industrial peace for the larger good. Similarly, Namboodiripad, along with other leaders, took pains to clarify that the CPI-led government will not set out on nationalisation of all private enterprises. The communists were themselves to blame for this; they had cultivated this notion among the masses that this was how the Soviet Union was transformed after the revolution of 1917.

Hence, in as many occasions as they could, the government explained that it was in general agreement with the principal objectives laid down in the Second Five

Year Plan⁴⁰ and also to follow the letter and spirit of the Karachi resolution on general policies for industrialization.⁴¹

Our government bases itself primarily on the industrial policy resolution of the government of India dated 30 April, 1956 means reserving only the most important industries for the public sector and leaving the large field of industries for the private sector to operate. Not only we do leave a large number of industries for the private sector, but we will give various facilities and encouragements to the private sector to start industries and work them on reasonable terms. We will do utmost to provide the industrialists with land, building materials, electricity, etc. at reasonable rates; we will help them to remove bottle-necks with regards to securing adequate supply of raw materials, credit, foreign exchange, etc.⁴²

The government's only concern, insofar as the industrial development was concerned, was the plan allocation to the state, which in their view was far too less than expected and inadequate for industrial development of the state.

In true nationalist spirit, Namboodiripad even reminded the trade unions of their role in nation building and the role of the working class in the development of the national economy. His advice was that this was not to be seen as merely in relation to the employer but largely for the interest of the workers themselves as the rapid industrial development is the only way through which the question of unemployment can be tackled; a central problem of the working class. Hence, for the sake of their own interests, it is the duty of the trade unions to carry on a systematic campaign among the working class for a policy of industrial peace.⁴³

Similar concerns were shared by the General Secretary of AITUC, S.A. Dange, at the 25th conference of the Trade Union in Ernakulum on 25 December 1957. Dange declared:

⁴⁰Ibid, p 11.

⁴¹ The State shall safeguard the interests of industrial workers and shall secure for them, by suitable legislation and in other ways, a living wage, healthy conditions of work, limited hours of labour, suitable machinery for the settlement of disputes between employers and workmen, and protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment . . . Labour should be freed from serfdom and conditions bordering on serfdom. . . The State shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources, railways, water-ways. Shipping and other means of public transport."⁴¹ Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I (1885-1935), (Bombay: Padma Publications Ltd, 1946), pp. 464- 465.

⁴²Namboodiripad, *Kerala: Problems and Possibilities*, p. 19.

⁴³Ibid, p. 21.

Under the existing conditions of the country, they could not go on strike in the old way, irrespective of their belief. 'In our country today the values are changing and there is therefore no question of militancy or violence or non-violence in the matter of the struggles of the working classes for achieving their demands'. They should also be correlation between what they demanded and what they expected to get in fulfilment of their demand. The rigidity in their approach to problems of working classes was obstructing the trade union movement today. This was the result of experience in Kerala, where a Government of theirs was in power and where this Government had to handle disputes, settle disputes, and in so doing, settle them through Government level or other procedures by tribunals or arbitration.⁴⁴

While campaigning for the industrialisation of the state, A. K. Gopalan, a Member of Parliament from Kerala and one of the important leaders of CPI, however, struck a slightly different note. While inviting industrialists from Bombay and Gujarat to set up new industries in the State, he said; there is no question of nationalisation of all the industries in the State for 'there are not many industries in Kerala and the question might not arise for a long period to come if the industrialists were prepared to co-operate in ensuring public good through their industries'. He further said that the Communist Government desired to make sure that there was no mismanagement of industries and that the industrialists were prepared 'to share the profits' with labour and the Government would see that industrial peace was maintained in the State provided, of course, the workers were given a fair deal. He repeatedly talked about the reasonable share of the profit in industries in the form of wages, bonus and other facilities. Moreover, he said that there was nothing new about his proposal and that it was the industrialisation policy envisaged by the Congress in its goal of the socialistic pattern of society. Hence, 'nobody would have any serious grudge, if the Communist Government worked for these requirements' he argued.⁴⁵ However, this did not help dispel the fears among the industrialists and employers

⁴⁴'Trade Union Policy', *The Hindu*, 30/12/1957.

⁴⁵'Plantations in Kerala, Govt's Plan to Nationalise', *The Hindu*, 11/4/1957.

who held that there was no clear definition about the reasonable 'share the profit or what was meant by 'ensuring public good' and so on.⁴⁶

All these, however, did not prevent an agreement between the communist government and the Birla group to establish a pulp factory in Kozhikode; the terms of the agreement, signed on May 3, 1958 were ridiculously in favour of the capitalists. It granted huge concessions⁴⁷ to the monopoly capitalist which was against the basic policy of the CPI. The government, meanwhile, justified its move by stating that industrial development was necessary to tackle the unemployment question and it did not have adequate resources to start industries in public sector; hence this deviation. Thus the Mavoor Gwalior Rayons pulp producing factory was set up in Mavoor, on the banks of the Chaliyar, in Kozhikode district and it began production in 1963. Though the Central Committee of the CPI, by and large, was in agreement with such a move, it was critical of certain clauses in the agreement which were not labour friendly. Namboodiripad recalls, years later, that "it viewed that the government did not adopt adequate caution in the preparation of the agreement in the last stages. It might have adverse effect on the workers in specific and the people in Kerala in

⁴⁶United Plantation Association of South India (UPASI) consistently campaigned against the communist government. Mr. Calderwood, president of the organization said: "The existence of this (communist) government, however, restrained it may be by the framework of our democratically constituted Union, is undoubtedly a source of grave concern to private enterprise of any kind to which its ideology is violently opposed. . . Our fear is that foreign-dominated cult, alien entirely to the ordinary aims, beliefs and purpose of an overwhelming majority of the people of this country may be inculcated by legislation and imposed by force; and it is the light of that fear that I see in taxation trends in Kerala today not the determination to build up or foster our industry but to wreck it by subtle economic means." 64th Annual Conference of UPASI, Statesman, 28 August 1957 cited in H.D. Malaviya, *Kerala: A report to the Nation*, (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1958), p. 55.

⁴⁷The Government then entered into an agreement with the Birlas that it would supply Mavoor Grasim with the requisite quantity and quality of raw materials that include bamboo, eucalyptus and softwood-200,000 tonne a year demanded by the Birlas... George Iype, 'Trade unions, politicians flay Grasim's bid to sell Mavoor plant', *The Rediff Business Special*, 9 June 2000, <http://www.rediff.com/business/2000/jun/09grasim.htm>. Accessed on 12/10/2015. 200 acres of land was acquired for the company at the rate of Rs. 100 per acre. See also Abey George and Jyothi Krishnan, *River, People and Industry: The Politics and Pollution of River Chaliyar* (draft), Report Submitted to Kerala Research Programme to Local Level Development, p. 182. The possible environment repercussions of such a project was not discussed at all.

general.”⁴⁸ Interestingly, two decades after the factory began its production, the concerns of the Central Committee were proved right. Namboodiripad, however, continued to justify his government’s initiative and does that using Marxist jargons.

As late as in the 1980s, he writes:

There was no change in the basic characteristics of the Communist Party. It opposed capitalism as its aim is to establish a socialist society. The Party also opposed the Congress policies that support the augmentation of monopoly capitalists like Tata, Birla and so on. There is another side to the story. When the Communist government had to function within a bourgeois framework, it had to follow the policies of the Congress government which represented the State.⁴⁹

To justify his government’s action, Namboodiripad even (mis)quotes the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels. “The communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement.”⁵⁰ He forgot to add, from the same text and context, that “they (communists) never cease, for a single instant, to instil into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat...”⁵¹ The point is it does not explain how did the agreement between the government and Birla protect the interests of the working class or how did it instil class consciousness in them. The thesis, in this context, turned out to be a misconceived one. First of all, nowhere does the *Communist Manifesto* suggest that compromising with the bourgeoisie is a tactic for the attainment of the immediate aim of the working class or that it will protect the momentary interests of the working class. Secondly Marx and Engels placed their arguments in the context of the position

⁴⁸ Namboodiripad, *Communist Party Keralathil*, p. 565.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.562

⁵⁰ K Marx and F Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p.94. In the Manifesto the authors talk about tactical alliances for the momentary interests of the working class- the alliance of the communists with the social democrats against the conservative and radical bourgeoisie in France, in Switzerland supporting the radicals, in Poland they support a party which insists on agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.95.

of the communists in relation to the various existing opposition parties at the time they wrote the manifesto (in 1848) and certainly not in relation with capitalism. Interestingly, the same line of argument – the imperative for the communists to do such things as long as they are ruling from within the confines of a bourgeois constitution – led them elsewhere (in a larger way in Singur and Nadigram) to such disastrous moves of grabbing farm lands in the name of development and the Left had to pay dearly for that; they lost their electoral base in West Bengal.

It had been proved that the Mavoor agreement with Birla was a mistake which was carried out to achieve an immediate aim, without thinking of the long term impact it could have. The Mavoor Rayons, though provided employment to around 3000 workers in the factory, caused huge damage to the environment - air, water and atmospheric pollution – and deforestation. The toxic effluents released by the factory into the Chaliyar polluted the river as well as the water bodies in the region. The people in the region fought against the factory for more than 35 years till it was finally closed down in 1999. The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parisad, (KSSP), an organization whose members were mostly Left oriented, also sided with the people's protest. Prior to that, the factory was closed down for more than three years citing labour problems and it was reopened during the Left government headed by E.K. Nayanar in 1989; once again, the management set the terms and conditions that were inimical to the rights of the workers.⁵²

The proposed nationalisation of the foreign owned rubber, tea and other plantations in Kerala and the compensation to be paid to them in such cases, was an

⁵²See also K T Rammohan, &K R Raman, 'Mavoor Rayons Accord: Kerala Government on Its Knees', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 24, Issue No. 1, 7 January, 1989, see also 'Trade unions, politicians flay Grasim's bid to sell Mavoor plant', in <http://www.rediff.com/business/2000/jun/09grasim.htm>, and 'Mavoor Rayons wound up', *The Hindu*, 8/7/ 2001

issue of contention between the Central Government and the State. Nationalization of foreign owned plantations was one of the major promises in the agenda of the CPI. The 1951 programme of the Party spoke in terms of nationalization without compensation; but once in power, this attitude changed. Though the government did not retract from its commitment to nationalization of foreign owned companies, it was not treated as a socialist imperative; rather envisaged as a necessary step for the development of the economy of the state. No ideological hallow surrounded the whole argument. The government talked about some compensation to be paid according to the means of the State and not according to what the Centre had paid in the case of the Kolar Gold Fields in Mysore.⁵³

However, the government at the Centre was apprehensive of this on the ground that it will tarnish the image of the Indian government and will affect the industrialisation of the country. The Prime Minister declared that for the sake of getting a few crores of rupees what was at stake was the honour of India. He strongly refuted that he was not going to allow anyone to tamper with the honour and good name of India just to gain a few crores of rupees.⁵⁴ Unlike A.K. Gopalan, Chief Minister Namboodiripad spoke of adequate compensation and even safeguards for investments in terms of the returns. He was unambiguous on this when he declared:

Acquisition of property that is required for the development of the national economy is done after paying adequate compensation and the owners of these plantations should have no grouse. Furthermore, every new investor is assured of reasonable interest on his investment, the principal being returned in due course.⁵⁵

⁵³ A.K. Gopalan MP said at a reception accorded to him in Kozhikode said: "Their first attempt after coming to power In Kerala would be, to take steps for nationalising the foreign owned rubber, tea and other plantations in Kerala in consultation with the Centre. As the power for fixing the amount of compensation to be paid for the firms, had been given to the States his Party would see that the compensation was paid according to their means and not according to what the Centre had paid in the case of the Kolar Gold Fields." 'Communist Aims in Kerala, Mr. A.K. Gopalan Explains', *The Hindu* 20/3/1957.

⁵⁴ Georges Kristoffel Lieten, 'Progressive State Governments: An Assessment of First Communist Ministry in Kerala', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan. 6, 1979), p. 31.

⁵⁵ 'Communists in Kerala', *The Hindu*, 26/3/1957.

On the labour front, the communist government's record was indeed commendable. Establishment of tripartite consultative bodies, implementation of uniform wages and establishment of the Coir Industrial Relations Council in the coir industry, extension of the scope of the Minimum Wages Act to more industries and keeping the police intervention to the minimum in labour disputes and strikes were the radical chords struck by the Communists. The fact that the labour minister, T.V. Thomas, was a trade union leader himself, made a deep impression in the labour oriented policies. An assessment of this by G.K. Lieten, many years later, is relevant:

. . .during the 28 months that the CPI was in office, the scheme [minimum wage scheme] was extended to 12 more industries: cashew, tile manufacture, timber industry, toddy tapping, agriculture, printing presses and others. This list of statutorily fixed minimum wages became far more comprehensive compared to the rest of India. . . It was observed that the wage policy gained for the communists much support among the lower strata of the population. They realised that this was their government, for it showed more concern for them than any previous government.⁵⁶

There were, however, instances of industrial unrest; especially organised by the Congress party affiliated trade unions - INTUC and UTUC which had its umbilical chord tied to the RSP. A two months long agitation in the government owned Sitaram Mill in Trichur led by the INTUC and the Chandanathoppu Cashew Factory workers' strike were two such examples; in the second instance there was also an act of firing by the police killing two workers. Meanwhile, there was also a strike action by the plantation workers in the tea estates led by the AITUC, the CPI allied trade union. The paradox here is that communist government's policy of keeping the police neutral in case of workers' agitations did not persist for long and everywhere. Within a month of the inception of the government, the police had to resort to violence to quell workers' strikes and even fired on the agitating workers. The CPI seemed to begin to learn the limitations of being a party in power. A

⁵⁶ Lieten, 'Progressive State Governments', p. 34.

discussion on this was initiated, within the highest echelons of the party by Namboodiripad himself.⁵⁷

III

Rather than a promise, restructuring agrarian relations in Kerala was a commitment of the Communist Party to the Karshaka Sangam and to the poor peasantry who constituted the party's core base and a class whose members had stood by the Party during its ups and downs since the days of the CSP. They stood by the Party even when it was charged with betraying the freedom movement during the Quit India struggle of 1942 and then when the party waged a sectarian armed struggle – the Telengana way – it was the peasantry in Malabar that sacrificed greatly in the process including many lives lost. In fact, the Congress Socialist Party in Malabar began its activities organising the peasantry and agricultural labourers in the 1930s and when a unit of the CPI was established in 1940, this class provided the new party a strong rural base. If one looks at the literature of the period, the peasant struggles and the emancipation of the peasantry remained one of the recurrent themes of communist and progressive literature; *Randidagazhi* (two measures) by Takazhi Sivasankara Pillai or *Manite Maril* (In the heart of the soil) by Cherukad Govinda Pisharodior *Pattabaakki* by K Damodaran and many such prominent works of the period dealt with this social class.⁵⁸ These works depicted the plight of the peasantry, the mired

⁵⁷Within a month of being in the government, the government was torn between its commitment towards a neutral police policy and the labour unrest organised by the opposition trade unions. They had serious doubts over how far could they go with the policy of ensuring neutrality by the police and the confusion about the right 'policing continued till the last moment of the Government. Namboodiripad raised this question in his report to Plenum: "The basic question, however is, with our Government in power, what is the role of police in maintaining peace and order? Where to draw the line for the police are to step in agrarian, industrial and police mass actions. What is the Party's role in developing them; where the police are to step in? If struggles are organized deliberately as in Chavara and Trivandrum, what is the police to do? Even in cases where the workers are moved by just demands but where they overstep limits of peace and law and order, can and should the police intervene. Upto what extent?" Namboodiripad, Report to Plenum May 1957, p. 5.

⁵⁸This is dealt with in detail in the chapter Culture and Ideology.

lives of the agricultural labourers over the centuries and ultimately how they realise their strength through their organisation and the Party and fight for a better tomorrow.

The CPI's thrust was that the peasant question should be addressed even for the development of the industry and the central argument was that an impoverished peasantry cannot serve as a market for the manufactured goods and thus support the industrial development. However, this formulation and the emancipation of the peasantry at the social and economic level was a larger agenda in the context of Kerala. The demand for an aggressive restructuring of the agrarian structure had been an integral part of the CPI's 1951 programme, where it was explicit on the need to transferring agricultural land from the landlords to the peasants and agricultural workers and more particularly without payment of any compensation, 'in order to create human conditions of existence for the peasantry' and the 1951 document further added that it was necessary "to take land from the landlords and hand it over to the peasants."⁵⁹ The party was categorical that this will have to be done without any compensation. It said:

To hand over landlords' land *without payment*, to the peasants including agricultural labourers and to legalize this reform in the form of a special land law and thus realise abolition of landlordism without compensation⁶⁰ (emphasis added).

However, the Party mellowed down on this position of denial of compensation to the landlords in the wake of the reality that the state government had to work within the frame-work of the Constitution and Articles 31, 31 A and 31 B, due to which there was no scope for expropriation of the land from the landlords; compensation was inevitable. However, agrarian reforms continued to be the main

⁵⁹'Programme of the Communist Party of India', Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, p.13.

⁶⁰Ibid.

agenda before the elected government. So, it was not surprising that the communist Chief Minister declared that land reforms legislation was the priority of his government, immediately after the swearing in ceremony. He said:

Within a short and definitely a fixed time limit, we expect to prepare one or more Bills fixing fair rent, giving fixity of tenure to the tenant; fixing a ceiling on land holdings in keeping with the peculiar conditions of Kerala and distributing surplus land above the ceiling fixed. Giving such safeguards as are legitimate for these small landholders who stand to lose by these reforms. Since peasants require some immediate relief while these reforms being worked out. It would be necessary to bring in emergency legislation staying all evictions.⁶¹

The government kept its promise. Within a week, the State government promulgated its first ordinance –*The Kerala (Stay of Eviction of Proceedings) Ordinance, 1957* – that provided for measures against indiscriminate eviction of tenants and also provisions for injunction of eviction proceedings. The Ordinance had huge positive effect on the agrarian scene.⁶²

While the emotional quotient of this change in the system pushed the dreams to higher levels, legislations restructuring the agrarian relations, as envisaged, was not an easy task given the economic, social and political implications of the same in the state. Namboodiripad, who himself belonged to landlord class once, was all in favour of abolition of landlordism and in his own words without paying ‘*anaya paisa* as compensation’. However, as Chief Minister of the State and having to function within the Constitutional framework and the procedure established therein, he realised that it was easier said than done and now they were bound by the Constitution to pay compensation.⁶³ Difficulties for effecting the land reforms were not merely due to the compromise warranted on the question of compensation; they were also of a political nature. The Pattom Thanu Pillai ministry (PSP) and the Panampilly Govinda Menon

⁶¹*The Hindu* 6/4/1957.

⁶²K.R.Gowri, Kerala’s revenue Minister told in a public meeting in Chittur, Palakkad that till then (from the issue of ordinance April 1957 to mid November 1957), 14000 cases of eviction had been stayed. This shows the the intensity of eviction. See H.D. Malavya, *Kerala: A Report to the Nation*, People’s Publishing House, New Delhi, 1958. p.85.

⁶³E.M.S. Namboodiripad on Land Reform Bill at the State Conference of the Communist Party in Kozhikode, *The Hindu*, 4/2/1958.

ministry (Congress) thereafter, in 1956, did not succeed in bringing a comprehensive land law despite some attempts by them.

Finally, after several rounds of discussions involving the concerned people,⁶⁴ the *Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill, 1957 (KARB)*, was introduced in the Legislative Assembly on 21 December 1957. Prior to this, the draft Bill was sent to the Planning Commission for advice and scrutiny in October 1957 to ‘certify’ that the Bill had adhered to the norms set by the Land Reforms Panel of the Planning Commission of India; it was adapted to the conditions in Kerala. They took utmost care to ensure that the provisions of the Bill were consistent with the Constitution. The Namboodiripad government further conceded that “these provisions are not fixed or unalterable, but are liable to be modified in the light of discussion.”⁶⁵ It is evident that the communist government was determined to avoid any direct confrontation with the Centre, as far as possible, even while facing much criticism for this from the Karshaka Sangam members who advocated radical policies as advocated by the party earlier.

The most important fact to be stressed here was the participatory process followed in the making of the Bill. This was a pointer to an attitude of a mature and deeper democratic commitment. So far, none of other political parties had followed such a political process. First of all, the Bill was circulated widely for eliciting public

⁶⁴The Karshaka Sangams (KKS) in Kerala had immensely contributed to this process. KARB was always described as a Bill emerged from below due to this large scale participation of the peasantry in it. For instance, KKS special Conference in Muvattupuzha in May 1958, the Annual Conference of the Karshaka Sangam in Kaladi in October 1957 did the ground work for the KARB. Many conferences were held and numerous study classes, meetings, processions at all level-village, taluk, district and state before the KARB to discuss it at length- See Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change* p.113.

⁶⁵ The Government was keen to avoid any conflicts arising out of the Bill. There was a strong opinion prevalent among the Communists that public, religious and charitable institutions need not be exempted from the provisions of the Bill. However, while interpreting the Bill Menon said that the government is keen about to avoid wounding the sentiments of the religious people. Kerala Agrarian Relation Bill, An Interpretation by C Achutha Menon, Minister of Finance, Government of Kerala, File no: 354 E, 1958 ACH, JNU, pp. 31 and 45.

opinion. This had provided an opportunity for the beneficiaries and the adversaries to have a discussion on the Bill.

Led by the Karshaka Sangam, the peasants gathered in their villages irrespective of their party affiliations to discuss various clauses in the bill and suggest changes. This was followed by a special session of the State Karshaka Sangam which suggested certain changes in the bill. This popular participation in the discussion of the bill is something unique, a parallel to which can hardly be found in any other Indian State.⁶⁶

The comprehensive Bill had four chapters and eighty six sections covering such important aspects of agrarian life as the fixity of tenure, fixed fair rent, compensation to landlords, and restriction on landholdings and so on. In short, the Bill was to safeguard the rights of the cultivating tenants⁶⁷ but also took care of the supervising tenants, which indeed was inexplicable. Moreover, the government was keen to find ways to reconcile the rights of the tenants with the rights of the small peasants and added adequate provisions for the restoration of the lands alienated from the small peasants through a conciliation process through the land tribunal. However, there is clear evidence that the provisions were not adequately clarified and hence the message did not reach the small peasantry and this led to unforeseen implications, to the extent that the aggrieved small peasants (who were in large number, particularly in the Travancore region) joined hands with the landlords against the Bill subsequently.

At the execution level, the Bill had a provision for the constitution of Land Boards with powers of a civil court. It is not imperative here to look at the clauses in detail and suffice to state that this was the first comprehensive measure of its kind attempted in India; and it tackled tenereal relations of greater complexity than anywhere else in the country⁶⁸ and more importantly, this was carried out internalizing

⁶⁶Malaviya, *A Report to Nation*, p.89.

⁶⁷As a precautionary measure against attempts at cheating the law, it has been provided that all voluntary transfers by way of sale or gift effected by persons having more land than the ceiling after 18 December 1957 shall be rendered null and void. 'Kerala Agrarian Relation Bill, An Interpretation by C Achutha Menon, Minister of Finance, Government of Kerala', File no: 354 E, 1958 *ACH*, JNU, p. 17.

⁶⁸Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p. 149.

the spirit of the Constitution and the norms laid down by the Land Reforms Panel of the Planning Commission of India.

It should also be noted here that the communist party refrained from advocating a soviet model of collective farming (which was highlighted in as many occasions) and retracted from such notions without much ado. Interestingly, the Chief Minister ruled out any such radical solutions - state ownership or collective farms - on the ground that the best revolutionaries try to help the peasantry carry out those schemes they have themselves evolved, whether or not they appeal to intellectuals from the scientific point of view.⁶⁹ Yet, the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill, 1957, turned out to become a point of contention.

As expected, strong protests emerged and were organised by the land owners associations that had mushroomed across the state immediately. And they succeeded in taking the large number of small peasants into their fold by spreading the canard that the small farmers were going to be expropriated of their subsistence holdings under the proposed legislation. Representing one such organisation, the Palghat District Landholders' Association, C. P. Madhavan Nair, the president and P. R. Narayana Swamy Aiyar, the secretary, went on a delegation to the Chief Minister on January 28, 1958, just a month after the Bill was introduced in the Assembly and submitted a memorandum containing a detailed examination and criticism of the various provisions of the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill.

In their memorandum, they demanded “dropping of the Bill altogether in view of its drastic, expropriatory, unethical and totalitarian character. The compensation offered being a make-believe and a show and it had no justification

⁶⁹ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, ‘The Peasant in National Economic Reconstruction’, cited in Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p. 150.

behind it either social, economic or political and that it was bound to impoverish the entire middle class". The Bill, according to the memorandum, was "discriminatory violating the rights guaranteed to the citizens under the Constitution...the all-round rent reduction proposed were exceedingly heavy, and violent and drastic" it added.⁷⁰ Prior to this, the moment the government began to talk about restructuring the agrarian relations, a newly founded landlords association, represented by its vice president D.H. Namboodiripad, led a delegation to Delhi and met Union Home Minister, Govind Ballabh Pant, Gulzari Lal Nanda (Union Minister for Planning) and T.T. Krishnamachari (Finance Minister) as early as in June 1957.⁷¹

It was in the midst of all these that the Kerala Assembly passed the Agrarian Bill in June 1959. However, the Bill was returned, with the president's comments, and by then the communist ministry was dismissed and the congress - PSP ministry was in power before and the final version was passed on 21 January 1961 "placing and protecting a wide range of landed interests."⁷² However, it had to wait another decade to reach the implementation stage, thanks to the judicial entanglement, and until the Kerala Land Reform Amendment Act was passed on 17 October 1969, once again when the communists ruled Kerala. But then, this time too, the ministry fell before the Bill got the assent of the president; as noted in the previous chapter, the fall this time was under its own weight. It is not pertinent to go to details of the nature of the amendments here but to state that the Land reform attempt was one of the major issues and this brought the Nair Service Society, an organisation explicitly aimed to mobilise the Nair community on a single platform, closer to the Christian church in the 'liberation' struggle; and the Congress party in Kerala that had always stood by

⁷⁰ E.M.S. Namboodiripad on Land Reform Bill', *The Hindu*, 4/2/1958.

⁷¹ Malaviya, *A Report to Nation*, p.84.

⁷² Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change*, p. 132.

the interest of the landed gentry in Kerala, notwithstanding Nehru's protestations to the contrary in the Constituent Assembly as well as in the first Lok Sabha.⁷³

IV

“We were not invading the economy by Marxian revolution but trying to eliminate feudalism, inaugurating agrarian transformation, refusing to misuse the police against workers when their demands were legitimate and control rackets, corruption and industrial exploitation. In short we were only putting into practice what in the finer anti-imperialist era the Congress proclaimed but never implemented.”⁷⁴ These words from V.R. Krishna Iyer, Minister for Law and Police Administration in the Communist party government, rather explains the intentions of his government in general and the new police policy of the state government in particular.

The Police policy of the state was, perhaps, the major area of dispute between the communist government and the opposition parties in the state, including the Congress party leadership in Kerala. A number of allegations were hurled in this regard and these involved the government's decision on remission of jail terms and withdrawal of charges in some cases; there were also issues raised on punitive transfer of police officials; that the communist government was keen on criminalisation of politics; of police inaction for partisan political reasons; and these culminated in a general insecurity among the common man. And these were used to deride the government in every possible forum. It is pertinent here to specify some of the aspects of the CPI government's police policy before getting into the charges of the opposition.

⁷³See Ananth, *The Indian Constitution and Social Revolution* for a detailed discussion on the legislative interventions towards land reforms under Jawaharlal Nehru.

⁷⁴ V R Krishna Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*, [Autobiography], (New Delhi: Pearson, 2009), p. 119.

The Election Manifesto of the CPI promised “far reaching changes in the police policy so that the police are not allowed to interfere in the *class struggles* [emphasis added] of the workers, agricultural labourers, students and other sections of the working people fighting for their rights. The new police policy will make sure that the labour laws were strictly and vigorously enforced in the interest of workers and against the employers.”⁷⁵ The police, as the communists perceived and learned from their collective experience, was always part of the oppressive state apparatus and was used for suppressing protests and agitations of poor peasants, agricultural labourers and workers for betterment of their lives.

When the Congress Socialist Party began to organise the peasants and workers in the 1930s and later on under the banner of the Communist Party of India, the movement had to face serious physical challenges from the state and its police. The Malabar Special Police (MSP) was notorious for its role in suppressing the legitimate struggles of the workers and peasants in the Malabar area. It was a similar story in Travancore and Cochin too. We have discussed this in some detail in Chapter II. In fact, almost all the ministers in the communist government- Namboodiripad, K.P Gopalan, C. Achutha Menon, K. R. Gowri, and V.R. Krishna Iyer – had, at one point or another, experienced police violence and also been to jail. The police was never a neutral force and particularly so when it came to dealing with labour strikes; they always took the side of the employer or the powerful. This was the historical context in which the communist ministry considered it an imperative for it to effect changes in the existing police policy of the State. However, it must be stressed here that the new police policy was not an impulsive act of the government; instead, it was a considered

⁷⁵‘Election Manifesto of the CPI, 1957’, cited in. Fic,*Kerala Yenan of India*, p. 69.

response to a historical phase where the communists were persecuted by the state apparatus and its forces.

In a policy statement, Chief Minister, Namboodiripad described the new police policy of neutrality on July 23, 1957 (little more than three months after the government assumed power). The police force, hitherto, instead of merely engaged in the maintenance of law and order, had also proceeded to ‘prevent the development of the democratic movement in the country by restricting the activities of, if not totally suppressing, certain democratic political parties.’ He added that while under the British rule the police was used to suppress all political parties including the Indian National Congress, after independence the left movement alone became the prime target of this suppression; hence the government, he said, “wants to make it clear to all the concerned that the rights of freedom of speech, press, assembly or organisation, being the essence of democracy and guaranteed by the Constitution of our Republic, shall be allowed to be exercised by every political party in the country and the police will not be allowed to use the provisions of law and the duties of maintaining law and order in such a way as to suppress or restrict the democratic activities of any political party whether big or small.”⁷⁶

The document specifically mentioned what should be the stand of the police in the matters of workers strikes, peasants’ struggles, student agitations and other such peoples’ movements. It criticised the long-standing practice of the police, under previous regimes, taking the side of the employers, landlords and so on and resorting to repressive measures against the agitating masses and thus against their legitimate rights. However, this did not mean a free hand to the agitating masses. In simple terms the statement sought to clarify on how not to use police in an anti-people way by a

⁷⁶ Namboodiripad, *Kerala: Problem and Possibilities*, p .50.

class (the propertied) against another (the propertyless). It was in no way meant to encourage violating a person's property or life but recognising the rights of the people in collective bargaining and direct action in well-defined limits. Namboodiripad placed the limit of the policy in a nutshell: "The personal life and the property of the employer or landowner was inviolable."⁷⁷ At the same time, the Communists did not hide their strategic goal: "That the Police policy of non-intervention in labour disputes and peasant struggles as a party stratagem to boost the proletariat"⁷⁸ which was the soul of the programme of the Communist Party; the state as an instrument to protect and safeguard the rights of the workers and peasantry.

The opposition parties, however, interpreted the policy in another sense and managed to create a lot of confusion among the common people; that the shift in the policy will only lead to criminal elements being set free across the state. This perception, then helped the opposition parties to generate a sense of insecurity and a perception that the law and order was threatened in the state. However, statistics on the withdrawal of police charges (compounding of offences as provided in the Indian Penal Code) and remission of jail sentences tell us an altogether different story. From April 1957 (when the Communist government assumed office) to end of July 1958, a total number of 1423 cases were remitted or withdrawn. Out of this, 1177 cases were related to agrarian and labour issues (989 petty cases and 188 non-petty cases). There were 82 (45 petty and 37 non-petty cases) of political nature and under the miscellaneous head; among them, 163 cases were withdrawn or remitted (92 petty

⁷⁷E.M.S. Namboodiripad, 'Police and the people', *New Age*, 18 August 1957, cited in Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p. 157.

⁷⁸Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*, p. 100.

cases and 71 non-petty cases). More than 88 per cent of the cases withdrawn or remitted were related to agrarian, labour problems and political in nature.⁷⁹

That most of these cases were against the peasants and workers by the previous regime while they agitated for legitimate rights is a fact that must be stressed here. In short, majority of the remissions and withdrawals were of convictions related to agrarian and labour agitations and not of a criminal nature in the true sense.

Statistics of this kind for the period between August 1958 and September 1958 reveals another dimension too. There were 359 cases that were withdrawn. Of these, cases pertaining to labour and agrarian agitations were only 21 (5 petty and 16 non-petty cases); there were 51 non-petty political cases and 287 cases described as miscellaneous (273 petty and 14 non-petty cases). The party-wise break up of these shows that out of these, in 66 cases, the Congress- PSP members were involved and 284 cases were related to the student agitation which began in July 1958 against the increase in fare for boats effected by the water transport corporation.⁸⁰ This shows how the opposition parties too had benefitted out of the CPI government's policy on police.

Citing the number and nature of the remissions and withdrawal of the cases, Namboodiripad maintained that it was a policy decision of his government to withdraw cases or remit the sentences arising out of industrial, agrarian and other agitations that are political in nature, once the agitation had been settled. The policy, in his own words, was evolved and implemented not with a view to benefitting communists alone, but with a view to creating an atmosphere of goodwill and harmony among the classes and parties in the event of satisfactory settlement of

⁷⁹ Compiled from 'What is Behind the Congress Attack on Kerala, Chief Minister's Reply to Congress President', File No: 352. F,ACH, JNU, New Delhi, pp. 11-19.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 19.

disputes of agitations.⁸¹ He also added that more than the communists, the opposition benefitted out of it.

The new police policy of the State and the administration of justice, however, created the ground for the ‘insecurity’ (*Arakshitavasta*) campaign to spread dissatisfaction and fear among the common people about communists. This campaign received support from a section of the mass media too and the perception that was created was that the communists had not deviated from their strategy of armed rebellion and that the police policy is a clandestine attempt to protect the communists and help them to expand their activities.

The law and order problem in Kerala was raised on the floor of the Lok Sabha too. “Criminalisation of politics” and “insecurity” were the words that were used while raising these charges. Dr. K. B. Menon, PSP Member of Parliament from Badagara, tabled a 55 page long document in parliament. Apart from a wide range of allegations, the police policy and administration of justice in the state found a prominent place in the document. Menon’s ‘chargesheet’ accused the government and the CPI of interference in the routine investigations of the police and influencing the officers. He held that “the failure on the part of officers to comply with instructions, often led to transfers and other forms of harassment. These punitive transfers reduced the police to a state of subservience to the party in power.”⁸² The document even went on to provide details of each case and one such complaint was about reinstatement of police personnel who were dismissed from the service for alleged communist

⁸¹Truth About Kerala: Statement of Chief Minister E.M.S. Namboodiripad on Prime Minister Nehru’s Reference to Kerala- 9 August 1958, Communist Party Publication, 1958, File No:349,ACH, JNU, New Delhi.

⁸²‘Documented Statement on Kerala’, Submitted to the Hon’able Mr. Speaker, Lok Sabha in Support of the Motion for a Discussion on Kerala, Tabled by Dr.K.B. Menon, 1958, File no: K352 D, ACH, JNU, New Delhi,p.19.

activities, being reinstated by the government and this according to the document was done with “clandestine” motives. It added:

The reinstatement of large numbers of dismissed personnel is likely to have grave consequences for the discipline of the state. It is not unlikely that consideration of their usefulness in indoctrinating young members of the force. . .⁸³

While the fact was that these reinstated persons were removed from the service following a strike in the MSP, in 1946, and its leader was K. A. Damodara Menon, who belonged to the Indian National Congress and not to the Communist Party.⁸⁴ Further, Ashok Mehta, also a PSP member, tabled a document containing 32 charges against the state government in parliament with similar accusations on 18 September 1958.

The stage was set when similar complaints were entertained by the then president of the Congress, U.N. Debar who promptly made into a report to the Congress Working Committee, which passed a resolution endorsing all the charges at the AICC session in Hyderabad in October 1958. Everything happened in a short span of time; and in less than a month after that, Debar sent a letter to Namboodiripad, along with the report. The way the Congress conducted the business shows the disposition of the party. In his letter Debar admitted that it is not possible to say that “every incident narrated to you (to Namboodiripad) has a basis of truth.”⁸⁵ The fact is that it is evident that the dismissal of the government was already scripted. Whether, parliament shall be allowed to discuss the day to day administrative actions of a state government is yet another question that was not raised then nor was it considered important by the presiding officers then.

⁸³Ibid, p. 23.

⁸⁴, ‘What is Behind the Congress Attack on Kerala, Chief Minister’s Replies Congress Government’, 1958, File no:352- F, ACH, JNU, New Delhi, p.37.

⁸⁵‘What is Behind the Congress Attack on Kerala’ File no:352, F, p.2.

Inside Kerala, Congress leader and former Chief Minister of the State, Panambilly Govinda Menon, added charm to the anti-communist propaganda. He is the one credited with having coined the term “liberation struggle” to denote the anti-communist campaign, and he said in July 1958:

If the communists violated laws, they would not be arrested; if they were arrested, they would not be prosecuted; if they were prosecuted, the cases would be withdrawn; if the cases ended in conviction, the sentence would be remitted.⁸⁶

From the state government’s part, aside a point by point reply from Chief Minister Namboodiripad to the Congress president U.N. Debar, there was no concerted attempt to dispel the propaganda or to set right the perception. Much later and reminiscing his days as Police and Jail Minister, V.R. Krishna Iyer writes:

. . . as the minister in charge of police administration, I was abiding by constitutional norms and the rule of law, never allowed the police to play into the hands of the party minions or bosses. I may categorically assert that even in the matter of transfer of police officials, I did not admit party interference, but heard them, made my own investigation and acted on my findings.⁸⁷

In the midst of the accusations and allegations about remittance of prison sentences, withdrawal of cases, criminalization of politics and the related insecurity, the jail reforms and the humanization of the force by providing its personnel with facilities such as residential quarters, establishment of a Police Welfare Fund, establishment of a police training college and other innovative initiatives such as the Unified Police Standing Orders were carried out but not highlighted in any quarter at all.⁸⁸ These reforms, indeed, had far reaching implications and remain as examples for best practices in the domain.

⁸⁶‘Party has Usurped Government’s Functions: Panampilly Attacks Reds’, *Indian Express*, 30 July 1958, cited in Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p.157.

⁸⁷Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*, p.101.

⁸⁸Dr. Alexander Jacob, ‘Onnam Kerala Matrisabhayude kalathe Police’ (Police during the First Kerala Ministry), in P. Rajiv (ed.), *1957 EMS Mantrisabha Charithravum Rastreeyavum* [Malayalam], (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), p. 127.

Revamping of the entire education system in the state was in the agenda, though not listed as prominently as the agrarian programme or industrial development in the election manifesto of the CPI in 1957. However, the Education Reforms Bill was presented in the Assembly on 13 July 1957 and this was even before the introduction of the Agrarian Relations Bill. However, it was this measure to restructure the education system in the state that proved fatal to the communist government. The title of the Bill described it as ‘A Bill to Provide for the Better Organisation and Development of Educational Institutions in the State’ and its objective was “to provide for the better organisation and development of educational institutions in the State providing a varied and comprehensive educational service throughout the State.”⁸⁹ None of the provisions in the Bill talked about nationalization of education and so on, though this was the broad view of the communists which found expression in the remark of the Chief Minister, Nambudiripad, that "it is good and useful to have the whole educational system under the control of the State. But that immediately creates a psychological barrier between different sections of the people. We do not want to rush in this direction and wound the sentiments of a section of the people, particularly when these sentiments are religious sentiments."⁹⁰ However, the government, as promised in the Manifesto, was committed to take steps ‘to mitigate the evils of the private agency’ in the education sector.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Preamble of the Kerala Education Bill.

<https://indiankanoon.org/judis.nic.in/supremecourt/imgs1.aspx?filename=551> accessed on 12/6/2016

⁹⁰ ‘Plantations in Kerala; Nationalisation Issue’, *The Hindu*, 7/4/1957.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

The Bill, at the time of its introduction, was well received with aplomb on the floor of the Assembly,⁹² and little was known that this was going to cause an agitation that ended in the dismissal of the first elected communist government in the State in 1959. It is not to say here that the opposition to this from the Christian Church that managed a whole range of educational institutions was not anticipated. Private educational institutions were a big business in Kerala then, as it is now,⁹³ and majority of those happened to be under the Christian corporate managements. There was, absolutely, no control over the managers on the matters of appointments and dismissal of the teachers. Salary and allowances had remained in the papers and the teachers and staff were paid only subsistence wage. The school industry, as rightly said by Krishna Iyer, that was “pervasively and profitably spread over the state, was an uncontrolled source of income and influence for the Church and other communal bodies.”⁹⁴

The plight of teachers in Kerala were depicted in the literature of those times vividly. The Education Minister Prof. Joseph Mundassery⁹⁵ himself was a victim of such ill-treatment. He was a teacher in a catholic institution for more than a quarter of a century and was unceremoniously sent off for speaking up for his rights. He said, “as a teacher and as the leader of a teachers’ organisation in Cochin, I was aware of the sad stories of the private school teachers very well. More than the service of the managements, it was the service of the teachers that had contributed to the development of education. It was unfortunate that nobody cared to shed tears for the

⁹² Initially, People like Pattom Thanu Pillai, the former CM of Kerala (PSP) and M. Narayana Kuruppu of Congress welcomed the Bill on the floor.

⁹³ There were 7950 private schools in Kerala compare to 2129 government schools, and out of it 7791 were aided schools and there were 48897 teachers worked in the private schools. Jithendra Singh, *Communist Rule in Kerala* (New Delhi: Diwan Chand India Information Centre. 1959), p.37.

⁹⁴ Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*, p.107.

⁹⁵ He had written a novel titled professor which narrates the difficult life of college teacher

teachers who sacrificed a lot. That is what drove me to bring this education Bill; at the least, teachers of this generation should be protected from exploitation and graft.”⁹⁶

As expected, the Education Bill invited the wrath of the Christian management and the Church. In fact, the Church’s war against the State government had begun even before the introduction of the Bill in the House. Anticipating the churning in the education system, as early as in May 1957, the Catholic Bishops met at Ernakulum to resolve to resist ‘tooth and nail’ any curtailment of the rights of the school managements and any plan to ‘nationalise education’. The Vicar general of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry, Mgr. Chittor, went further. Educational institutions, he said, were as sacred to the Catholics as their churches and they were prepared to lay down their lives for the cause of educational freedom.”⁹⁷ However, the tirade against the Bill gained momentum by the time it was passed in the Legislative assembly.

The provision that irked the private managements most was that all teachers in aided schools shall be appointed by the management only from out of the panel of names given by the prescribed authority (for the execution part, the Government will maintain a State register of eligible persons for appointment as teachers); this was intended to curb rampant corruption and malpractices in appointments. Another provision that angered the management was that of paying the teachers’ salary by the Government directly and not through the managements of these institutions. And the third irritant was the provision empowering the Government to take over a school, for a period not exceeding five years, if the management of any aided school had neglected to perform the duties prescribed in the Act. Finally, there was a hue and cry

⁹⁶Joseph Mundassery, *Kozhinja Ilakal* [Autobiography- Malayalam], (Thrissur, Current Books, 2009), p. 243.

⁹⁷*Deepika* 30 May 1957 and 18 June 1957, cited in Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p. 155.

against the provision to the constitution of local committees to advise the school management and the establishment of a State Education Advisory Board.

While the Advisory Board's brief was to advise the Government on matters pertaining to education policy and administration of the Department of Education, the local educational authorities were meant to "associate the people with the administration of education and preserve and stimulate local interest in educational affairs." The establishment of the local education committees were seen by the managements of private educational institutions, predominantly the Christian Church, as a way to control the education sector by filling it up with the communists. As Prof. Mundassery, author of the Bill put it:

The management sought that the Bill be withdrawn and their objections were to [1] Appointment of teachers from a panel [2] the disbursement of salary through headmasters instead of through the managements [3] the constitution of local committees to advise the management. . . Primary school teachers' organisations, mostly, welcomed the Bill. Management go-betweens went to Delhi as they could not do much here to stop the Bill becoming an Act. A good section of the people were eagerly waiting to see the reaction of the President of India who had given his assent to the Andhra Education Bill, enacted by the Congress Ministry there, which contained more radical provisions than the Kerala Bill received assent without any delay.⁹⁸

From the political front, the strongest opposition to the Bill came from the Leader of the Opposition, P.T. Chacko; from the Congress platform he was acting on behalf of the Christian management institutions. Prof. Mundassery said; "it was not that the Congress as whole opposed the Bill, but because the Congress Parliamentary leadership in Kerala happened to be in the hands of a Catholic, P. T. Chacko, he could present his own opposition to the Bill as that of the Congress. . . Initially, the hostility towards the Bill was restricted to the Christian managements in the Central Travancore area. However it was the opposition leader P.T. Chacko who, through

⁹⁸Mundassery, *Kozhinja Ilakal*, p. 268.

canards, ensured that the opposition to the Bill was rendered a mass appeal.”⁹⁹ It is true that Chacko had tried his level best to stall the Bill in the House and outside; however, there were others in the Congress in Kerala and the Central leadership including Shreeman Narayan,¹⁰⁰ Indira Gandhi and U.N. Debar who wanted to ensure the fall of the CPI government at any cost.

The Bill was passed in the Assembly on 2 September 1957 after heated deliberations, first in a Select Committee of the House consisting of 21 members and after a ‘consultation’ process with the ‘concerned people’ of the State.¹⁰¹ The Governor of the State reserved the Bill for the consideration of the President citing reservations over the constitutional validity of the Bill. As a matter of fact, it were the mass protests against the Bill on the streets, led by the Church and the Congress party, turning violent in many places, that was behind the Governor’s decision. And the President, Dr. S. Rajendra Prasad, in turn, referred the Bill to the Supreme Court seeking its opinion under Article 143 (1) of the Constitution.

Meanwhile the impending alliance between the communal forces - the Church and the NSS - with the political parties had begun to loom over the democratic process in the state. By now, private militia like the *Christopher Sena*, under the aegis of the Church, had set out waging war against the state. Priests and religious heads were leading this disruptive movement with the connivance of political parties. The media, mostly joined the opposition in the battle. Father Vadakkan¹⁰², one of the leading lights of this campaign went on a hunger strike to organise a so called *Shanti*

⁹⁹Ibid, pp.265-66.

¹⁰⁰Gopalan said: He cried of insecurity in Kerala on the third day after the ministry came to power. Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p.233.

¹⁰¹In the name of the consultation with the concerned people, P.T Chacko, a Select Committee member and opposition leader organized crowds in Aluva to threaten the education minister and disrupt the process. Mundassery, *Kozhinja Ilakal*, p. 267.

¹⁰² A disillusioned (with the church) Vadakan later on joined the hands of communists with his Karshaka Thozhilai Party in the 1960s.

Sena of five lakh volunteers to resist the Education Bill. He gave up his hunger-strike “on the assurance given by the opposition parties, including Sri Kurur Neelakandan Namboodiripad, president of the Trichur District Congress Committee, that five thousand volunteers had already been organised.”¹⁰³

Despite Nehru’s warning to the Congress in Kerala against involving in the anti-democratic struggle of the communal forces, the Congress leadership in Kerala, with active encouragement from sections in the national leadership, wholeheartedly supported the movement. Nehru wrote to Namboodiripad in response to the latter’s appeal for intervention:

I am clearly of the opinion that our political work and agitations should be on a peaceful and decent level, whatever the party concerned might be. Whatever party might misbehave in this matter, I would disapprove of it. Certainly, I do not want the Congress Party to do any such thing. . . It seems to me that if any party permits resort to violent methods, this will injure greatly our public life and not serve any good cause.¹⁰⁴

It may be stressed here that this was before Nehru changed his position and became critical about the Kerala government and finally sanctioned the dismissal of the government.

The nexus between the Church, the communal organisations like NSS and the political parties were exposed. While moving a motion in Parliament on the developments in Kerala, the PSP member, Dr. K.B. Menon, openly supported the so called liberation struggle headed by the church. He said:

The Christian community has made substantial contribution to education and they *rightly* felt that the Bill was directly aimed to destroy all that they had *laboriously built up* through several generations of hard work. The general public also suspected that the Bill was a move to control educational system in order to indoctrinate children in communist ideology.¹⁰⁵ (Emphasis added).

¹⁰³ ‘Truth About Kerala’ File No:349, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ Namboodiripad, *Nehru Ideology and Practice*, p. 257.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Documented Statement on Kerala’, File no: K352 Dp. 29.

A section in the Bill that “the Government may also regulate the primary and other stages of education and courses of instructions in schools” was interpreted as the clandestine agenda of the communists to indoctrinate the young mind. The fact was that there was nothing in the Bill that suggested the Communists were trying to indoctrinate the young generation. These were the moves to create insecurity among the people who were rather neutral in the matter and get them to oppose the Bill.

In the process, nobody discussed those provisions in the Bill such as that for pension for school teachers on superannuation, provident fund and insurance benefits to teachers in private aided schools (the entire cost of which was to be borne by the Government), and for free and compulsory primary education.¹⁰⁶ The Bill imposed an obligation on the part of the guardians to send their children to school. In cases where guardians were too poor to provide for the food or to buy books and writing material, the Government may, on the recommendation of the local Education Committee, provide such children with free noon meals on days on which children attend school and necessary books and writing materials free of cost.¹⁰⁷ In fact the Bill was a “daring stroke to free education at the lower levels from the commercial strongholds of vested interests, including the Church and the NSS.”¹⁰⁸

The unscrupulous propaganda of the church reflected in its argument in the Supreme Court against the Bill when it came for hearing before it. It stated:

A deliberate attempt on the part of the party now in power in Kerala to strike at the Christian Church and especially that of the Catholic persuasion, to eliminate religion, to expropriate the minority communities of the properties of their schools established for the purpose of conserving their distinct language, script and culture, and in short, to eliminate all educational agencies other than the State so as to bring about a regimentation of education and by and

¹⁰⁶ Following the spirit of the Karachi resolution and the Directive Principles of the State policy.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Kerala Education Bill’, *The Hindu*, 9/7/1957.

¹⁰⁸ Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*, p.107.

through the educational institutions to propagate the tenets of their political philosophy and indoctrinate the impressionable minds of the rising generation.¹⁰⁹

This demagoguery created a fear in the minds of the people that communists were out to destroy the church in particular and religion in general.

The Supreme Court full bench held that some of the clauses in the Bill were violative of Article 30[1]¹¹⁰ of the Constitution and suggested few amendments even while upholding such crucial provisions like the appointment of teachers from the panel prepared by the government and the direct payment of the salary and so on. Meanwhile, on November 24, 1958, the Kerala Legislative Assembly reviewed the Bill in the context of Supreme Court verdict. The Anglo Indian schools which were established before 1948 were removed from the ambit of the Bill. Other changes were; the minority institutions were removed from the scope of Clauses 14 and 15 and unaided schools were removed from Clause 20 of the Education Bill. Finally on November 28, 1958, the Kerala Education Bill was passed and it secured presidential assent on 19 February 1959.

Joseph Mundassery, then education minister has this anecdote in his autobiography in the context of the passage of the Act. After the commencement of the Act, he recalls a poor man coming to meet him at his official residence in Trivandrum. He suddenly fell at the minister's feet with tears in his eyes. On enquiry he told the minister that he had been working in a school in the locality for over 30 years and for the first time he had received his complete salary and allowances. Hence he wanted to thank the person who was responsible for that huge change in his

¹⁰⁹<http://indiankanoon.org/doc/161666/>In Re: The Kerala Education Bill vs Unknown on 22 May, 1958. Accessed on 17/7/2015

¹¹⁰It says: "All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice."

life.¹¹¹ Mundassery says that was enough for him. The Act indeed had created far reaching changes in the education system. However, later on, the CPI felt that if they had anticipated such huge protests against the Education Bill, which led to the imminent fall of the government, they would not have gone for it. The assessment came after they lost the Assembly election in 1960. We shall discuss this in the next chapter.

VI

The CPI was aware of the inherent regressive character and the limitations of the existing bureaucracy and the impending difficulties while introducing radical programmes from within the existing set up. The only way out to reach the masses was decentralization of power and peoples' participation in the administration. The 1957 election manifesto promised revamp of the entire administrative structure through decentralization of powers in order to achieve a three-fold objectives - to increase efficiency, to eliminate the proverbial red-tape and to bring down cost in running the administration.¹¹² The first communist ministry conceived the idea of 'self-government' - which had people-centric implications than the existing expression of local bodies. And, no doubt, the roots of the Peoples' Planning Programme that another Left Front government launched in the 1990s lay in this move. This will be discussed in Chapter V of this study.

It is evident that the communists were apprehensive of the intervention from the Centre and 'sabotage' of their programmes by the bureaucracy. This assessment was made on the basis of their understanding of the class nature of the Governments- a working class government functioning as a unit of a federation and a bourgeois

¹¹¹Mundassery, *Kozhinja Ilakal*, p. 271.

¹¹²'Election Manifesto of the Communist Party', 1957.

Government at the Centre and in other states. In their own words, “since these are opposing classes and their programme and policies are opposed to each other, the bourgeois party and its Centre will not and cannot tolerate the existence and functioning of Government led by the working class.”¹¹³ They had sufficient reasons to be sceptical. The bureaucracy was essentially inherited from the colonial era with the colonial make up and the Communist party had suffered immensely under the British and the Indian bureaucracy since its inception. Hence the bureaucracy, they apprehended, was out there to sabotage the programmes of a communist government.

However, Namboodiripad, as the first chief minister, did not share entirely, the pessimism of his colleagues on the assessment of bureaucracy. He argued within the party pleading that it was necessary to “replace it by dynamic understanding which takes note of new situation, the new allies we have in our class struggle and therefore the new opportunities. We have to resolve it in our favour that be it a conflict with Centre or bureaucracy.”¹¹⁴ He found those sections in the bureaucracy who were deliberately hostile to the CPI government was a negligible part and a large section of them, in his view, were apathetic and these sections can be stirred up by enabling them to fight the inertia. “In this struggle” he stressed, “the deliberate elements hostile to us will get isolated and the better elements will find their proper place. . . The task is to reform the administrative structure by fighting their inertia, rousing patriotic spirit of the service and yoking their work to rebuilding of a new life.”¹¹⁵ Hence, the apprehension about the bureaucracy was not warranted, in his view.

¹¹³ Report of Comrade E.M.S. in the Plenum, File No: 1957/3, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 3.

In his first address in the secretariat, while appealing for the cooperation of the bureaucrats, (the Chief Minister's appeal to the bureaucracy was indeed a shift away from the conventional understanding of many in his own party), he said:

You have been moulded and trained in a particular set-up. We (the Communists) have a different training and a different tradition. You have your own particular tradition and we come with a different tradition, ideology and viewpoints. We have to combine both of these traditions for the ultimate good of the people at large. I admit we will have to learn much from you. You will also have to learn much from us. You must bear in mind that we, the Communist Ministers, represent a democratic Socialist set-up. There may be a different set-up here—there obviously is. We have to make good that defect and we must build up a foundation for an administration which maintains close contact and relationship with the people. He further added that they "must have heard many things about the Communist Party and some of them may be largely correct. One thing which I want to tell you is that we will bring new ideas. You may point out defects in them, and we may or may not accept your suggestions, but our ideas should not prevent you from co-operating with us. Let us all co-operate and work for the good of the country."¹¹⁶

The communists in power had to face some serious issues. Firstly Kerala was known as a problem state¹¹⁷ as far as the administration was concerned; secondly, the bureaucracy, by and large, was antagonistic to the communists historically and thirdly the ministers lacked experience in administration; their only experience was running the local board or one or two municipalities in the state and not the state as a whole and finally the higher expectations of the cadre from their ministry had to be reconciled with the limitations imposed by working within the constitutional framework.

¹¹⁶ 'The Kerala Ministry: EMS's Appeal to the Govt Officials', *The Hindu*, 6/4/ 1957. The bureaucrats were pampered by the previous government. "Less than two weeks before the election in Kerala the government employees were given a considerable wage increase. Three days after coming to office the Communist ministry passed an order, staying the hike in wages for the gazetted officers, freezing them at the original limit, in a bid to iron out the extreme differences, and increased the wages of the labourers in government commercial undertakings considerably. In the meantime the wages of various other low-paid government employees were enhanced". See Lieten, 'Progressive State Governments' p. 33.

¹¹⁷EMS Namboodiripad stated in a Press Conference in two days after he took as the Chief Minister of the State that the administration of a State, which is called the "problem State", is no an easy for anybody. As it was he and his ministry were 'relatively inexperienced in administrative matters' and also had to function within the frame- work of a system which includes 'several regulations and procedures which are not to their liking'. He further said that "his party had placed before the people a blueprint for the building of a democratic and prosperous new Kerala through its election manifesto and he stressed that he would see to that their programme being implemented despite these hurdles. See *The Hindu*, 6/4/1957.

The initiatives, insofar as administrative reforms were concerned, was restricted to a set of suggestions by Namboodiripad, such as holding of periodic conferences, personal dealings with delinquent officials and a comprehensive decentralization policy. An Administrative Reform Committee was set up with distinguished persons from the area - Joseph Mundassery, H D Malavya, N.E.S. Raghavachari, K. S. Menon, P. S. Natarajan Pillai, Nandan Menon, Parameshwaran Pillai and Namboodiripad himself as chairman. The brief was to find efficient ways for decentralization and democratization of the Local Self-government institutions.¹¹⁸

The Kerala Panchayat Bill was passed in 1958. Though the Kerala District Council Bill, 1959, was introduced in the assembly, could not become an Act as the Ministry was dismissed by then. "The 1959 Bill, could include certain suggestions on decentralization and efficient and swift functioning of the administrative machinery from the Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report¹¹⁹ In the words of A.K.Gopalan, among those in the CPI who were known to have been sceptical over the parliamentary road:

Perhaps the most important step taken by the Ministry was the democratisation of the State Administration. Efforts were made to concretely associate the people with the planning and development activities. The people's food committees and fair price shops were steps in this direction. Similar committees were set up in the education and health spheres. It also ensured that the opposition parties were also represented on the basis of electoral support. It was this decentralisation view that the Panchayat Bill and another Bill, vesting local powers at the district level to an elected district council, were introduced.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p.166

¹¹⁹The Balwantrai Mehta Committee was appointed by the Central government in 1957 to provide suggestion on efficient decentralization of the administration. The Committee submitted its report in 1959.

¹²⁰Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p.230.

VII

Kerala has a long history of the cooperative movement. When the communists captured power in the State, one of the main questions was how to transform the Kerala society in a socialist pattern. Big industries were ruled out. Fiscal sharing of the Centre, the communists found, too inadequate to initiate new ventures. Strengthening the traditional industries like coir, handloom and textiles along with improving the agriculture input were the ways out. To strengthen these sectors, the first and foremost, the workers and the primary producers' situation had to be improved. Therefore it was decided that, in order to maximise the benefits for the working class, wherever possible the interference of the middlemen had to be banished in the small and cottage industries. And the profit should reach the workers directly.

Back in 1957 a distributive economy was the ultimate aim of the government and one of the best means to achieve this was through co-operative societies. This, according to Joseph Mundassery, the then Minister for Education and Cooperatives, were steps towards 'economic democracy.'¹²¹ The main objectives of this initiative were organising the producers for their benefit, upgrade the loan facilities, enhance the production sector, democratization and ensure participation in leadership and ownership and thus aim for self-sufficiency. The second Five Year Plan had provided large space for such ventures and the Communist ministry had made use of it according to their larger vision for a distributive economy. The first move towards this was the revival of the existing five hundred Coir cooperative societies. Coir is one of the major traditional industries in Travancore in Kerala and it should be recalled that how the communists organised these workers in Alapuzha and Sherthalai and

¹²¹ Joseph Mundassery, *Stepping Towards Economic Democracy* (Ernakulum: Prabhatam Book House, November 1959)

they became a major force behind the movement for responsible government in Travancore and their ultimate sacrifice in the historical Punnapra- Wayalar epoch.

The old societies were formed during the term of previous Congress government but was non-functional due to the corrupt practices and mismanagement. It was not the workers but a group of small scale industrialists singularly enjoyed the benefits of these societies before it went to bankrupt.¹²² The new government revived these societies with an initial financial support of rupees one crore and leadership was back with the workers. Similar efforts were taken to start toddy tappers cooperative societies on the request of the toddy tappers who suffered regularly in the loggerheads with the shop owners. A society was formed in Anthikad, Trichur and the government facilitated a loan from the Central Cooperative bank. The Anthikad Toddy-tappers cooperative society successfully run 57 toddy shops in Trichur district. As a caution, the activities of the society was monitored by a coordination group representing central cooperative bank, department of cooperatives and the Abkari department.¹²³ Subsequently, new societies were formed on the same line.

Next venture was to promote the fisher workers' cooperative societies (a primary society to every 250 fisher workers) and federate these societies into a marketing society at the district level. The Communist government, in a short span of 28 months of its existence, facilitated the formation of sixteen primary societies in Thiruvananthapuram and these were federated to a Marketing Society in Vizhinjam with facilities such as fish curing yard, ice plant, freezing plant and a cold storage.¹²⁴ Apart from these initiatives were taken to form agriculture cooperative societies (membership for small landholders of minimum 25 cents) and in the long

¹²²Ibid, p.2.

¹²³Ibid, p.4.

¹²⁴Ibid, p.10.

run these service societies were expected to develop into collective farming ventures. Minor irrigation cooperative societies, handloom small scale industries cooperatives, school level cooperative societies (with twofold aims- to reach books and other learning tools to the students at reasonable rate and in turn the annual profit of the society to be used for the development of the school) were the other new initiatives in the area.

VIII

This section will look into the events that led to the dismissal of the Communist government in Kerala on 31 July 1959. Begin with the so called liberation struggle led by the communal forces and supported by the political Parties in Kerala will be looked into. From an understanding of the destructive and undemocratic nature of the so called liberation struggle (*Vimochana Samaram*) and considering the characteristics of the leadership of the campaign - communal and divisive elements and the fact that movement had nothing to do with liberation in its broader definition - it is more appropriate to call it the anti-liberation struggle or the un-liberation struggle.¹²⁵ The movement was an alliance of diametrically opposite ideologies and forces with a single purpose to remove the democratically elected government and to contain the larger influence of communism in the state and elsewhere. In the whole script, the role of CIA has been confirmed.¹²⁶ Along with the plantation owners, the CIA too sponsored the programme. In the process all reactionary elements came together, solicited by the socialist parties like PSP and RSP and the secular parties

¹²⁵ The Economic Weekly in its editorial called it 'ridiculously-named 'Vimochana Samara Samiti (Liberation Struggle Front), The Economic Weekly, June 27, 1959, p. 831. The editorial criticised that though Pandit Nehru repeatedly asks Congressmen to dissociate themselves from communal organisations, the Kerala Congress Party flaunts its association with the Vimochana Samara Samiti led by Shri Mannath Padmanabhan. How does one explain such fundamental contradictions between the attitude of the Congress President and the Prime Minister and that of the Kerala Congress leaders?

¹²⁶ See Thomas Isaac, *Vimochana Samarathinte Kaanapurangal*, [Malayalam], (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2011).

like Congress. It is difficult to attribute an ideological parlance to this struggle other than its singular agenda to remove the communist government. Every available options were utilised -constitutional and unconstitutional - to achieve the target: presenting memorandums and complaints to every possible forums¹²⁷ including the parliament to resort to unconstitutional means such as attacking the ministers' cars on the road, pelting stones on them, black flag demonstrations, verbal abuse of the ministers,¹²⁸ and in extreme cases, physical attack on the ministers, instigating the students and workers to take the law into their hands, wherever democratic paths were not available. And more importantly raising quasi –military units to fight the government, a brazen violation of the democratic norms.

A detailed account of the un-liberation struggle, the orchestrated violence and police retaliation and so on are beyond the concerns of this thesis. However, it should be stated here that it was this high voltage, opposition sponsored violent protest that brought an end to the first democratically elected communist government in the world and the Central government and the Central leadership of the Congress, under Jawaharlal Nehru cannot escape responsibility for that. More than that it exposed the vulnerability of the polity in Kerala to communal forces despite the long legacy of the communist movement. The movement gave shape to a pattern of communal

¹²⁷It is mentioned earlier about two motions moved against the government in the floor of the Parliament by A.B. Menon and Ashok Mehta, the resolution of the Congress working committee and memorandum submitted to the Kerala Governor and so on. In another instance, Justice Krishna Iyer, then a minister, recalls that how the pressure was built up from all the possible corners against the communist ministry. "In 1958 at an international conference of jurists in New Delhi organised by the International Commission for jurists (ICJ), they sought to create an impression that the Constitution itself was in peril with the communists in power." The Central Home ministry enquired with the Chief justice of Kerala High court if any communist interference was happening with the investigation of cases, in order to blame the communists thwarting investigative justice. Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*, p.105.

¹²⁸ Slogan such as "beware chaste women, the minsters are coming", "we do not want the government of stammers and lame men" (EMS suffered from stammering and another minister was a lame man. The labour minister was called rowdy Thomas and the education minister Mandan (idiot) Mundassery. Malaviya, *A report to the Nation*, pp. 66-67. *Thanda, Munda, Mundassery nine njangal kandolam* was another threatening slogan.

polarisation in the state and this regressive tendency, since then, has affected all parties, including the Left in Kerala.

It is not the intention here to deny any wrong doing or any aberration on the part of the CPI, its leaders and the cadre while the party was in power. There were evidences that the party-men at the local level had run parallel institutions and intervened in the administration at times. The cell courts of the party was an example of this. There were evidence that Party Cell courts functioned as parallel justice dispensing instruments and in many ways these were kangaroo courts. In his reply to the Congress president, U.N. Debar, Chief Minister Namboodiripad confirmed instances of settlement of disputes by persons who were members of the Communist party. Namboodiripad, however, also sought to make light of that by arguing that “from the time immemorial the settlement of disputes through the mediation of village elders had been feature of village life in our country.”¹²⁹ It survived the British onslaught and still exists today. However, the charges were serious of nature and in most of these cases party local committee leaders were involved. The Kangaroo court covered an array of issues such as boundary disputes, inter-caste marriages, dispute on eviction and other petty cases.

Party interference in the administration was acknowledged by ministers like Joseph Mundassery, Krishna Iyer and the Chief Minister himself. “In September 1958, the Law minister assured a conference of District Collectors and police officers that the interference of local party officials in day- to-day administration would be

¹²⁹ Name of the few Cell courts mentioned in the reply were Kayakulam, Kottayam, Mullaseri, Pazhani, Chathanthara, Pattanakad and Mavelikkara Cell Courts. The government reply admit that at least in four such cases formal notices were sent to the accused parties. ‘What is Behind the Congress Attack on Kerala’, File No:352-F, p.28.

checked.”¹³⁰ There were two sides to this. A section of the communists genuinely believed that since their government in power, they have the right to interfere and lead the government to the right direction. Almost two decades of paramount agitprops had created a certain perception of the communist rule with the Soviet Union’s model at the high pedestal. For a cadre that was brought up on this staple, when the communists came to power the egalitarian society became a goal closer than earlier and they began thinking differently. They sincerely hoped that the horrendous landlords and the exploitative capitalists should be taught a lesson or two. The Communist party could not, rather did not, have the time to educate the cadres about the new situation and also limitations of their government. The revolutionary statement of the leaders also created confusion. Moreover the 1947- 57 was a chaotic and confusing period for the CPI was concerned. A.K. Gopalan analysed the situation as this:

It certainly suffered the failures natural in a situation where revolutionary changes were being initiated within the bourgeois frame-work and by making use of the bourgeois machinery. We had not forgotten Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, but the effective power in India definitely did not reside at the state level but at the Centre. Therefore coming to office at the state level meant only a further step in advancing the revolutionary struggle. I do not think this was very clear in the minds of many of our people and our supporters. There were failings too that were caused by lack of that attention to detail which is so necessary when a revolutionary party undertakes parliamentary work. . .In looking back, one sees that the Communist Ministry did definitely help in advancing the political consciousness of our people and the bourgeois-landlord regime did succeed in toppling it because at that historical juncture we were not strong enough and well enough organised throughout the country to prevent such anti-democratic measure.¹³¹

The analysis will be incomplete without looking at the twists and turns in the attitude of the Centre, especially Nehru, and the final act that followed- the unconstitutional removal of the government. This is significant in the context of 1964

¹³⁰ Times of India, 10 September 1958, IE November 1958 and VR Krishna Iyer, *Police in a Welfare State* cited in Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p. 163. See also Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*. Mundassery shares some incidence of interference in matters of promotion of teachers by the local party leaders in his autobiography. Mundassery, *Kozhinja Ilakal*, pp. 252-253.

¹³¹ Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, pp. 234-35.

split, where the major conflict was on the analysis of the class character of the state and its representative, the Nehru government. While the ‘noble statesman’s incongruous action’¹³² was not palatable for a faction in the party, the other faction found the dismissal of the government as impervious to their argument that the bourgeois party in the Centre will not tolerate the existence of a working class government for long and it will resort to any means to prevent transfer of power to another class.”¹³³ At the early stages of the government, the pro-Nehru faction dismissed this argument as an ‘oversimplified and dogmatic conception of class struggle’ and they sincerely believed that the progressive elements headed by Nehru were desirous to see the success of the implementation of the Plan by the communist government ‘so that their hands will be strengthened’¹³⁴ and it will inspire other governments. Hence “the sectarian understanding regarding class struggle, by a simple straight-line, regarding coming conflict with the Centre, bureaucracy and Congress on the one hand us as inevitable should be given up.”¹³⁵ Interestingly, this conciliatory line was advocated by Namboodiripad and some others within the party.

¹³² Nehru’s great name and a reactionary struggle with his party’s participation looked incongruous.

¹³² Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*, p. 108.

¹³³ Since these are opposing classes and their programmes and policies are opposed to each other the bourgeois party and its centre will not and cannot tolerate the existence and functioning of a Government led by the working class. On the other hand as the communist government goes on implementing its programme even within the limitations of the Constitution, as agrarian reforms are pushed through, class struggle in the countryside is bound to increase and as a result of both headlong clash can be expected File 1957/31, P.2 People like A.K. Gopalan represented this faction. When the Kerala Government was dismissed on 31 July AK Gopalan’s reaction was that “the Marxist principle that the bourgeoisie will resort to any means to prevent transfer of power to another class was confirmed by this experience. The bourgeoisie swears by democracy only so long as the balance of power remains in their hand. When it slips away, they will resort to anti-democratic and fascist methods to retain it”. Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p.234.

¹³⁴ Report of Com. EMS in the Plenum’, File 1957/31, p. 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 4.

This faction of the Party invested a lot in Nehru's leadership and his left ideological lineage¹³⁶ which they inherited from the Congress Socialist Party. This is evident from the fact that till the last moment they relied on the Left-liberal democratic credentials of Nehru; that he will not and cannot dismiss the Left government that had been implementing the Nehruvian agenda earnestly, just because the right wing of the Congress opposed it. S. A. Dange's statement that "even though the Communists won a majority in Kerala in general elections in 1957, the Congress president U. N. Dhebar and other Congressmen did not relish the idea of a Communist Government in any state in the country. It was only at the insistence of Mr. Nehru that Congressmen allowed the Prime Minister to have his way in the matter"¹³⁷ should be seen in this context. They overtly believed that the Centre did not endorse the propaganda of 'grim lawlessness' raised by the Congress in Kerala.¹³⁸

However, much later, Namboodiripad concluded that Nehru was sceptical about the continuation of the communist ministry for long and this he had expressed as early as in May 1958. He recalls, in retrospect, an interview by Nehru to foreign journalists in May- June 1958. Nehru is reported to have said: "So far as the near future is concerned, the communists, in my opinion, will be lucky if they manage to hang on to Kerala, let alone expand their hold anywhere else."¹³⁹ And another interview in which he was more forthright when he said: "The communists have to have a great deal of luck to be able to stay in power in Kerala much longer."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ It even reached the stage of adulation for instance Krishna Iyer spoke of Nehru: "I had great admiration for the noble statesman in Nehru, his uninhibited expression of views, even when they were critical of his party within the state. His vision inspired me, his grace fascinated me, his sneaking affection endeared me, and his value system made me his ideological adorer." Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*, p. 98.

¹³⁷ *Deccan Herald*, 4 August 1958, cited in Fic, *Kerala Yenan of India*, p.78.

¹³⁸ 'Report of Comrade E.M.S', File No: 1957/3, p. 2.

¹³⁹ Namboodiripad, *Nehru Ideology and Practice*, p. 257.

¹⁴⁰ He was indirectly referring to the allegations on Namboodiripad's public speech in Coimbatore on an impending civil war if the opposition did not refrain from its anti-democratic activities against his government. Namboodiripad, *Nehru Ideology and Practice*, p.257.

Despite these views of Nehru, the trust in his leadership remained intact among a section of the communist leadership.

It is also true that, apart from these, till the political situation became volatile in Kerala, Nehru did not openly discuss about the dismissal of the government. In fact he refuted the charges of civil war in Kerala outright in Calcutta in July 1958. In a press conference in Calcutta he said that he did not see the situation in Kerala a nightmare or the conditions there amount to civil war.¹⁴¹ Within few days, exactly after ten days, Nehru took a reverse turn and he reprimanded the local communists in Kerala for distorting the views expressed by him in Calcutta in favour of the communist government. Further he felt that a large section of the people in Kerala were “unhappy and insecure.”¹⁴² Namboodiripad, meanwhile, expressed pains over the references made by Nehru in the press conference in Delhi on 7th of August 1958 and a detailed reply was sent on the matter. He held the Congress in Kerala responsible for the distressing aspects of the situation in Kerala. The plea was that Nehru had been made to believe of things in Kerala or he was briefed wrongly on what was happening Kerala.¹⁴³

About Nehru’s statement of insecurity in Kerala, Namboodiripad said that the ‘Prime Minister has based himself on highly exaggerated, half true and even totally false reports presented to him.’ He further said: “Hence I want to impress on the Prime Minister that regarding all these (progressive) measures and various steps to implement the Plan . . . the Kerala Congress has not only refused to cooperate with us but in alliance with all opposition parties has created obstacles at every stage in our

¹⁴¹Nehru’s Statement on Kerala, *Statesman*, Delhi, 28/ July 1958, File 352-E, ACH, New Delhi.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³See ‘Statement of Chief Minister Namboodiripad on Prime Minister Nehru’s Reference to Kerala, in Statement on Kerala, Information Document, published the Communist Group in parliament, 11 August 1958’, Ibid. Namboodiripad was referring to the adverse remarks by Nehru on Kerala in a press conference in Delhi on 7 August 1958.

way.”¹⁴⁴ Namboodiripad further said that “we of the government of Kerala and Communist Party are anxious that no section of the people either owing allegiance to the Government or those who support the opposition take the law into their hand; we are also anxious that atmosphere of good will and cooperation is created in our state to further our common aim of national building.”¹⁴⁵ He pleaded the help of Prime Minister to end the stalemate in the state.

To save the government, Namboodiripad seemed to have resorted to all methods till the end. He sent Krishna Iyer, his law minister, as an emissary to brief on the situation in Kerala to Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi (who was the president of the Congress then)¹⁴⁶ in Ooty, the venue of the AICC meeting in June 1959. He, still held faith in Nehru’s ability to defuse the situation. A section seemed to believe that the intervention of Nehru will put sense in the Congress party men in Kerala and they will withdraw from the agitation. And Namboodiripad, further “knew that if the Congress at the centre frowned on the Congress-led upsurge in the state, the imbroglio would be cleared.”¹⁴⁷

Recalling his impressions after the meeting with Nehru, Krishna Iyer, in his autobiography claims that Nehru assured him that he will condemn the agitation; and that Nehru did so in a press conference in Coimbatore in June 1959.¹⁴⁸ However, he did not condemn the agitation as Iyer claims; Nehru merely said that Congressmen in Kerala should not compromise on the 'basic principles' of the Congress and that no action would be tolerated which directly or indirectly encourages violence or supports

¹⁴⁴Ibid, pp.15-16.

¹⁴⁵Ibid, p.16.

¹⁴⁶She was unanimously elected as the President of the Congress on 2 February 1959. On April 28, 1959 Indira Gandhi visited Kerala and criticized the policies of the Government. She expressed her anguish over the law and order situation in Kerala.

¹⁴⁷Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*, p.109.

¹⁴⁸Ibid, p.110.

communalism and casteism.¹⁴⁹ On the contrary, Nehru was critical of the Kerala Government in Coimbatore. What he said was that “a very considerable upsurge among large masses of people in Kerala is taking place against the Government there, that a feeling of distrust against the Government has grown.”¹⁵⁰ It was in this context, that Ajoy Ghosh, General Secretary of CPI, critiqued Nehru for not reproaching the unholy alliance of the Congress in Kerala with communal forces such as the Nair Service Society and the Catholic Church. He said;

It is then surprising that he does not comment on the open alliance of Congressmen of Kerala with rabid communalists of the Nair Service Society and the Catholic Church. While he repeats the charges which Congress leaders of Kerala make against the Government, he does not even refer to the charges which the Kerala Government has made against Congress leaders, charges moreover which are substantiated by documentary evidence. Will one be wrong if one considers that this is primarily because the Kerala Government is led by a party other than that which Mr. Nehru leads? . . . It is strange indeed that on this basic question, the Prime Minister of India has kept quiet—the question is whether it is consistent with principles of parliamentary democracy to rely not on the ballot-box, but on direct action to change a Government which enjoys a majority in the legislature. I request Mr. Nehru to ponder over these questions. A precedent is being created in Kerala which will have serious repercussions over the whole country, it will have consequences which neither the Congress nor Mr. Nehru nor any Indian who cherishes democracy and desires ordered progress would like.¹⁵¹

The Communist government still had carried on its hope of a positive intervention of the Centre and they walked that extra mile to carry out the last minute suggestions of Nehru when he visited Kerala in 22-25, June 1959. The Government had conscientiously prepared its responses to the 32 charges raised by Ashok Mehta in Parliament without questioning the impropriety of such charges being raised in Parliament; agreed to order a judicial enquiry into the firing which killed a pregnant woman, Glory who was a by-stander, and also agreed to suspend section XI of the Education Bill.¹⁵² Despite the Kerala Government’s assurance that they will carry out all his demands, Nehru in a press conference in Trivandrum Airport, just before he

¹⁴⁹ ‘Upsurge in Kerala: Nehru was criticised on his statement on Kerala’, *The Hindu* 9/6/1959

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Iyer, *Wandering in Many Worlds*, p.111.

left for New Delhi, indicated the imminent end of the communist government. Flaunting his beautiful linguistic skills, he said, “the wall of separation between the people and the government and the mass upsurge was uncontrollable except by fresh election.”¹⁵³ Within a month, on 31 July 1959, President Rajendra Prasad invoked Article 356 of the Constitution, bringing an end to the 28 months of the Communist Ministry in Kerala. As Krishna Iyer wrote later: “It was too dangerous a doctrine, too unconstitutional a theory, too incongruous a jurisprudence and too outrageous a grammar of anarchy.”¹⁵⁴ Benjamin Zachariah rightly described the position of Namboodiripad in the high drama of the dismissal of his government by the Nehru Government.

The strongest exoneration of Nehru came, paradoxically, from E.M.S Namboodiripad himself. Namboodiripad pointed out the deep internal differences within the Congress, the dangers of the triumph of the trends opposed to political democracy that had led to the dismissal of his government, and the increasing divergence under Nehru’s government of India’s political and economic path from the ‘goal set by him and all of us’. But he listed Nehru’s achievements: ‘development’ had progressed as far as it could ‘in the circumstances’, and Nehruvian secularism was a great achievement, especially when seen ‘in contrast to the medievalism, obscurantism and ideological backwardness shown by the leaders of certain other newly-independent but under developed countries’.¹⁵⁵

There is an interesting account of a last statement of the Chief Minister as he was left the secretariat to a journalist: “The dismissed Chief Minister told a small gathering of civil servants that ministers would come and go, but they had to do their duty. He did not say a single word against Nehru or the Union Cabinet.”¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the stand of the Left wing within the CPI that the Congress government is a government of bourgeoisie landlord combine one and it will not tolerate a government of working class stood vindicated. “The working class cannot simply lay

¹⁵³ Ibid, p.113.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Zachariah, *Nehru*, (London & New York: Routledge 2004), p.233

¹⁵⁶ K.C. John, Kerala, *The Melting Pot*, (New Delhi: Nunes Publications, 1991), p.65.

hold of the readymade state machinery and wield it for its own purpose.”¹⁵⁷ The alignment all reactionary forces won the game. The end results were (1) Land reform was delayed by a decade. Land reform measures had been diluted by the government succeeded (2) emergence of communal forces in politics and the communal polarisation of the society; (3) working class, poor peasants became vulnerable to the communal feelings; and (4) the ideological difference on the nature of the Indian State led by Nehru resulted a split in the CPI in 1964.

After the mayhem and the dismissal of the government, the Party lost two consecutive elections in 1960 and 1965 respectively. The review of the 1960 election debacle criticised the policies and administrative measures of the government that did not factor the ground realities and in the process they antagonised many who could have been potential allies of the party. This created “distress and apprehension in the minds of Christian masses and urban and the rural middle class and small landowners in many parts of the State.” The Party’s assessment was that had the party driven with a better understanding of the concrete situation and said:

We would not have launched on an education Bill in the field of education which created the impression that we are out to end private management system in educational sphere and which gave the supreme opportunity to priests and vested interests to influence the religious sentiments of the Christian masses against the Communist Government and the Party: we would have limited our measures to evolve steps for the adequate protection of the rights of teachers and students; and we would have utilised later opportunities we got to satisfy the sentiments of these sections by showing our preparedness to bring in changes in the Bill.¹⁵⁸

The assessment on the Agrarian Relations Bill was that it, by and large, failed to address the question of the small peasantry to give justice to the tenants; this gave an opportunity to the landlords to spread canards and take the entire small peasantry in Travancore into their fold effortlessly. The Party could not adequately create

¹⁵⁷ Engels was referring this in the context of the fall of the Paris Commune. Frederick Engels, Preface to the English Edition of the Manifesto, Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p.22.

¹⁵⁸ Election Review Report of the Kerala State Council of C.P.I., File no:1960/33, ACH, JNU, New Delhi, p.5.

awareness among its cadres and the beneficiaries of the programme how not to antagonise the middle and small peasantry.

However, the hard earned lessons did not save the party in the 1960 and then in the 1965 elections. It took exactly a decade to the Left to wrest power since the 1957 elections. Then the CPI was no longer a single party as it split into two in 1964- the CPI and CPI (M). When the left came to power again in 1967, the CPI (M) was facing another split as a group of extreme left was moving out of the party to form CPI (ML). Next chapter will look into the split and aftermath.

CHAPTER IV

THE SPLIT OF 1964 AND AFTERMATH

The pace of developments involving the politics and the tactics of the communists in India during the decade after independence had denied the Communist Party of India (CPI) leadership the luxury of reflecting upon the reality and charting a course of action. The events in the two years since April 1957, when the party won a majority in Kerala (in the first ever elections to the unified state's assembly) leading to the formation of the first ever communist government winning a multi-party elections in a Parliamentary Democracy in the world as such and the dismissal of this Government in October 1959 (also under provisions of the same Constitution that led to its making), threw up a lot for the party and its leaders to reflect upon, learn and unlearn, so to say. More important was, that many of these had to be learnt from outside the texts of Marx, Engels and Lenin; it may be noted that the communists in India, for most parts of their existence hitherto, were not in the know of the contents and the arguments in these texts (which were proscribed during most parts of the colonial rule and could not find the time and the space to read them in the wake of independence when the party was banned and its leaders were put in jail) until after 1951.

Nevertheless, they did seem to grasp the core of Marxism and this indeed is what took them closer to the people and to organise struggles in various parts of the country; these then helped them win a considerable number of seats in the First Lok Sabha (1951-57)¹ and further on, the impressive victory in the Kerala Assembly elections, held along with the second general elections in 1957. However, the Party, particularly the leaders at various levels, was unable to reach a consensus on what was

¹ It may be noted that the CPI won 16 seats in the first Lok Sabha and the CPI's became the second largest party in the House then.

the nature of the independent Indian state in general and on the class character of the Indian National Congress, now under Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership. We have seen some dimensions of these in the statements of Chief Minister, E M S Namboodiripad and his cabinet colleagues time and again after they assumed power in Kerala and also in the agenda that the Party had set before its government. However, it is also significant that there were attempts, during the same period that sought to raise questions on the need to relook into the CPI's approach - its programme so to say - especially in the area of the possibilities of adapting Marxist premises in a multi-party parliamentary constitutional democracy.

It is necessary to stress here that these attempts to debate these issues within the party had most often assumed a theological shape - Marx and Engels could not have gone wrong with what they held about Parliament and such other representative institutions. The CPI, it may be argued, fought shy of coming to terms with the fact that the views of Marx and Engels on Parliamentary institutions were located in the context in which they were taking shape in Europe; this was in the aftermath of the French Revolution (1789) and the revolutionary upsurge across Europe during the 1830-1848 period; or Lenin's contempt for Parliamentary institutions were considered sacrosanct by the CPI leaders and hence not to be dismissed outright. Thus, the dominant tendency among the CPI's leadership was on attempts to read and assess the Nehruvian regime through such classical texts they came to possess and read in the aftermath of freedom and the lifting of the ban on such literature. Interestingly, a delegation of four leaders of the CPI had been to Moscow to have a programme prepared for the party in India.² Meanwhile, it is also important to note here that the

²(Ajay Ghosh, S. A Dange, Rajeshwar Rao and Basavapunnia were the four. The Soviet Communist leadership, meanwhile, is understood to have conveyed to them that the programme was best written by them based on a reading of the conditions in India than be scripted elsewhere. Javeed Alam, 'State and

CPI leaders were hamstrung, in a way, by the attitude of the Soviet Union towards Jawaharlal Nehru and his Government in India and the overtures in that context to ensure a friendly relationship between the two nations. The record of the Nehruvian regime on such initiatives as the Bandung declaration got the Soviet Union to develop and preserve closer ties and these could not but exert some impact in the making of the communist attitude towards the Nehruvian regime and the Congress party.

Thus, notwithstanding the several expressions of antagonism against Nehru's Congress and a certain tendency to treat the Republican Constitution with contempt because it was a handiwork of the Indian National Congress and hence a bourgeois instrument, there were earnest efforts to approach Marxism as a praxis and explore what could be done in the given reality. The Kerala experience between 1957 and 1959 did contribute immensely to this learning. The fact is that an attempt in this regard began, in real earnest, within months after the CPI formed its Government when Namboodiripad circulated a document within the party's echelons for discussion in May 1957.³ Namboodiripad did raise many issues and most significant among them was the need to revisit the party's approach to the nature of the independent state and Jawaharlal Nehru within the Indian National Congress and *vis a vis* the Congress.⁴

It is significant, from the scope of this study, that there was an element of forthrightness with which Namboodiripad introduced the document: He said

At the outset I want comrades to recognize the limitations of the report of the discussions. [The] main reason for this is that the Party is faced with a new responsibility calling for a new perspective, new methods of organisation and also new style of work of not only the entire Party but each Party member. *We must accept that we are groping on all these.* This Plenum

the Making of Communist Politics in India, 1947-57', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 45, 9 November 9, 1991, p. 2576.

³'Report of Comrade E.M.S. in the Plenum', File No. 1957/3.

⁴See Appendix 1 for the full text of the document (Report of Comrade E.M.S. in the Plenum held on 24-26 May, 1957 on Political resolution, CPI Documents, File No: 1957/3, ACH, JNU): It may be stressed here that nothing is available, as such, on the outcome of this document; there is nothing available in the archives as to whether this document was accepted, rejected or even discussed at all.

and discussion should be seen as a first step to evolve a new understanding on all these. I expect that discussion should continue on all levels simultaneously with work⁵ (emphasis added).

It is a fact that there was no blue print available anywhere in the world for an elected communist government and that the CPI was groping in the dark. This, indeed, was the condition when the elected communist Government began to function in full swing and enthusiasm in March - April 1957. By and large, the CPI's premise of class struggle,⁶ which Namboodiripad found to be 'an over-simplified and dogmatic conception of class struggle,' continued to dominate the thought process of its leaders as well as a large chunk of its ranks; those who guided the Party's followers at the lowest unit were influenced by this and it came to impact the functioning of the government and in many ways adversely. Namboodiripad also held the orthodox understanding that 'the State and bourgeoisie are weapons of class and unless we replace it by our own democratic machinery, we cannot proceed to carry out our reform' was a wrong conception in the new political milieu. He was confident that the bureaucracy can be revamped to cater to the CPI's ideals without having to defy the framework of the Constitution.

Therefore, Namboodiripad said in his report, that "there should be a break from the old understanding during and after the assumption of the office in this regard."⁷ The thesis emphasised the importance of redefining the Party's position *vis a vis* the Congress in the changed political context which was a major issue of contention later. Considering the fact that Congress's programme itself was radical,

⁵ 'Report of Comrade E.M.S. in the Plenum', File No. 1957/3, P.1

⁶ The thesis stated: "The basis of this assessment is that the C.P. government is the government of the working class party in a set up where in the rest of the States and Centre the Party of the bourgeoisie is in power. Since these are opposing classes and their programme and policies are opposed to each other, the bourgeoisie Party and its Centre will not and cannot tolerate the existence of and functioning of a government led by the working class. On the other hand as the Communist Government goes on implementing with its programme even within the limitations of the Constitution, as agrarian reforms are pushed through, class struggle in the countrywide is bound to increase and as a result of both headlong clash can be expected. Ibid, p.2.

⁷ Ibid, p.1.

Namboodiripad's thesis stressed that it was not able to implement it due to its class character and that the communists should implement the Congress party's programme as an integral part of the struggle against the colonial backwardness of the country. Once this was accomplished, it can fight for further new direction in this programme itself.

Namboodiripad's thesis held that the Communist government "has its very programme- which in essentials also by the character and composition has allies outside (our) own movement and *classes* and outside the geographical frontiers of (our) State." Therefore the Communist party need not work in isolation fearing the attack of bourgeoisie parties when it was 'pledged to work within the Constitution'. The biggest advantage of the Party, he held, was that 'it is closest to the people and the mobilisation of popular support for its programme is easier'. 'In a democratic set up' it argued, 'this is a major criteria for a successful government'. Hence, the CPI's major task, he held, was to mobilise its cadre and the masses to *participate* in the implementation of the programme of the Government.⁸

His thesis outlined a new understanding for the Communist Party for functioning in a parliamentary democratic set up. The core of the thesis was that the CPI ought to shed its sectarian understanding of the class struggle and reorient itself to the reality of functioning within a democratic set. In his own words:

We have to replace it by a dynamic understanding which takes note of the new situation, the new allies we have in our class struggle and there for the new opportunities. We have to resolve it in our favour that be a conflict with the Centre or bureaucracy. It is in this background of the present political situation that we have to evolve our programme so that they became a weapon in our hand to forge ahead the obstacles . . . In essence, it is the development of the best of the national tradition of the struggle for a new Kerala as part of new India.⁹

⁸The People's Planning Programme was an attempt to revive this concept.

⁹'Report of Comrade E.M.S. in the Plenum', File No. 1957/3, p.4.

However, the dismissal of the State Government, invoking Article 356 of the Constitution and after the ‘liberation’ struggle orchestrated by the top leadership of the Congress,¹⁰ seemed to prove wrong the basis on which Namboodiripad argued for a change of line. The dismissal seemed to establish that the earlier position of the CPI that there was no choice for the working class and the oppressed people than a class war; or, in a more concrete sense that Parliamentary Democracy and the Constitutional scheme did not provide the space for a radical transformation of the socio-economic structure that the communists sought for. This vindicated the sectarian conception of the class struggle and the 1951 political line gathered strength. After the split, the CPI (M) continued the old line and retreated further into sectarianism and consequently engaged in a battle with the CPI¹¹ rather than perceive the 1957-59 experience as an occasion for clinical diagnosis; in other words, the response, one may argue, was knee-jerk rather than a concrete analysis of the concrete situation as it ought to have been.

Notwithstanding this, it is also a fact that the experience in the two years between 1957 and 1959 had triggered an influential section within the CPI to rethink on some of the notions that prevailed among them of the role of a communist party and its government in a constitutional democracy built upon multi-party elections. In a similar way, the outcome of the 1960 elections to the state assembly, after the dismissal in 1959 (when the CPI failed to win a majority in the assembly), also led its leaders to think in a manner that the Party did not put all its eggs in the basket of electoral politics. The expectations that the dismissal of their government by the Centre would evoke passions in favour of the Party and it would be able to make use

¹⁰That the ‘liberation’ struggle was not merely the reaction of the Church and the landed gentry but orchestrated and even coordinated by important leaders of the Congress party has been discussed elaborately in the previous chapter of this thesis.

¹¹ When P Sundarayya was the General Secretary of the Party since the 7th Party Congress in 1964

of the situation to come to power in the Assembly election in 1960 turned out to be a myth. Though, the Party fared better in terms of the percentage of votes secured (from 35.28 per cent in the 1957 elections it went up to 39.14 per cent in the 1960 elections),¹² the number of seats came down from 60 to 29. The general sentiments of the Party found expressions in the election review report of the Kerala State Council of the CPI, 1960. Apart from the general criticisms involving the ‘government centred activities’ of the Party members, neglect in building the party and mass organisations, general lack of using the party agitprops and propaganda against the ‘political and ideological crusade’ of the opposition, and the tendency of falling prey to the degenerating tendencies of the bourgeoisie parties such as self-preservation rather than the ‘spirit of sacrifice, simplicity in life and continuous contact with the revolutionary masses of the people’, the party was specifically critical of the way the Education Bill was introduced and also specified the inadequacies of the Agrarian Reforms Bill.¹³

The defeat in the election and the outbreak of the Sino-Indian war brought to the fore the political and ideological differences which were prevalent in the Party, since the late 1940s, but glossed over during the couple of decades since then first due to the continuous oppression against the party by the colonial government, then the

¹² The Congress which contested in 80 seats got 63 seats with 34.42 percent of the polled votes in the 1960 elections and the PSP had larger gain which had won only 9 seats out of 66 contested in the 1957 election, gained 20 seats out of 33 contested.

¹³ The Review Report stated: “We would not have launched on Education Bill in the field of education which created the impression that we are out to end private management system in the educational sphere which gave the supreme opportunity to priest and vested interests to influence the religious sentiments of the Christian masses against the Communist Government and the Party; we would have limited our measures to evolve steps for the adequate protection of rights of teachers and students; and we would have utilised later opportunities we got to satisfy the sentiments of these sections by showing our preparedness to bring in changes in the Bill... We would have bestowed greater care and attention in evolving the provisions of the Agrarian Relations Bill, thus preventing our enemies from getting a handle to rally the entire small holders in Travancore area especially against us... In implementing the minimum wage scheme for the agricultural labourers, in saving the workers from the exploitation of contractors by forming labour contract societies, in implementing the provisions intended to protect the interest of the Kudikidappukars we would have taken pains and care to inculcate the understanding among the entire Party and workers that in all these we should not alienate the sympathy of the small owner and middleclass.” ‘Election Review Report’, File No: 1960/33, p. 5.

ban soon after independence and the flurry of election activities post-1951-52 and then the assuming of power in Kerala in 1957. The electoral victory in Kerala in 1957, in fact, had even led to the party's celebrated *Kerala Shows the Way* resolution in the Amritsar Congress in 1958. There were hardly any serious efforts to address the differences in the ideological and political domain within the leadership at any point of time; instead there was a lot of enthusiasm to arrive at compromise formulae to the satisfaction of all the factions. These unresolved questions in the Party led to the split in the Communist Party of India in 1964 which had far reaching implications for the CPI and the CPI (M) in Kerala.

This chapter will look into the split of Communist Party of India in 1964 that led to a kind of ideological and political stalemate as far as the communist experience in Kerala was concerned. It had its implications in the electoral alliances and other fields in Kerala. The concept of Left United Front (LUF) became history and the Left faction of the communists (as they were addressed to by others and also by themselves then and became CPI-M later) sought after an alliance even with the Indian Union Muslim League (which the party would describe as a communal party later) in order to challenge and curb the Right faction of the communists (as they were known as then¹⁴) in the 1965 elections to the Kerala State assembly.

The political realignments in the State in 1967 - the communists joining hands with a cross section of parties including some that were explicitly rallying forces on religious denominational basis and hence described communal in the context of the Indian political discourse - had changed the correlations of power in favour of the Communists. In this premise, the chapter will discuss the return of communists to power, after a gap of again 10 years, in 1967, heading a rag-tag coalition consisting

¹⁴The CPI (M) described the Right Faction as Right opportunists, revisionist, Dangeist and so on.

parties that represented classes that were defined alien even by themselves and the premature fall of that coalition government under its own weight in 1969. This was also the time when the wave of anti-Congressism had caught the polity across the nation and unlike in 1957 when the CPI headed the only non-Congress State Government across India, the Communist-led government in Kerala in 1967 was one among the ten non-Congress State Governments that came up in 1967. After Nehru's demise in May 1964, when the Constitution already stood amended many times and more particularly the First and Fourth amendments aimed at achieving agrarian reforms and anti-zamindari legislations, the Constitution Seventeenth Amendment Act was already before Parliament. That the Congress, under Nehru, had achieved this much was a factor that could not be glossed over by the CPI (as much by the Socialist Party) and such developments had caused unease against the tactical line of 1951 within the party.

The developments across the nation in the 1967 elections, the Swatantra Party upsurge in the beginning of 1962 and the consolidation of anti-Congress politics in the 1967 general elections, and the decline of Congress party's strength in the Lok Sabha were too important to be ignored. Similarly, the Supreme Court decision in the Golaknath case involving the Constitution 17th Amendment Act (seeking to legitimate acquisition of surplus lands for redistribution in Punjab) followed by pro-property judgments involving the Bank Nationalisation and the Abolition of Privy Purses (both measures being struck down by the apex court in 1970), the split in the Congress party in December 1969 and the zeal with which Indira Gandhi was steering the Congress party towards a socialist agenda were all aspects that left the communists –though divided as the CPI and the CPI (M) since 1964 – contributed immensely to the

confusion. It may be held that they were now groping in darker corridors than they were in 1957-59.

The Constitution (Twenty Fourth) Amendment, 1971 and the Constitution (Twenty Ninth) Amendment, 1972, dealt with aspects that triggered the dismissal of the first elected communist government in Kerala: Land Reforms Legislations which was among the factors that helped the Congress orchestrate the ‘liberation’ struggle and the dismissal. And here was a situation when the Congress party, in power in Kerala as well as at the Centre, pushing ahead with Constitutional Amendments that were initiated by the communists in 1958. And the majority verdict in the Kesavananda Bharti case threw wide open the possibility of such egalitarian measures as redistributing zamindari property to the cultivators from within the Constitutional framework. Meanwhile, the Constitution 26th Amendment meant to save such measures as Bank Nationalisation, also upheld in the Kesavananda case, opened up new vistas insofar as the possibilities of socio-economic change from within the Constitutional framework.¹⁵

Unlike the 1957-59 government, the 1967 government could bring the Land Reform (Amendment) Act without much ado. The highlights of this period was the Twenty Ninth Constitution Amendment Act, 1972, by which the Kerala Land Reform (Amendment) Act, 1969 and the Kerala Land Reform (Amendment) Act, 1971 were added to the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. Thus the Achutha Menon government could implement the land reforms programme smoothly as the Land

¹⁵Other progressive measures were the Twenty Fifth Constitution Amendment Act of 1971 which reversed the effect of the Supreme Court’s decision in the Bank Nationalization case, the Twenty Sixth Constitution Amendment Act of 1971 intended to overwhelm the Supreme Court’s decision, striking down the Presidential Order in Privy Purses Case. The Constitution 29th Amendment pertained to placing two of the agrarian reforms legislations passed in 1969 and 1971 in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution and thus rendering them immune from judicial challenges. Ananth, *The Indian Constitution and Social Revolution*, pp.237-302 for a detailed discussion on the amendments and the judgment.

Reform Acts were saved from further litigation and subsequent delay by the Constitution Twenty Ninth Amendment Act.

As for the CPI (M), the mayhem did not end with the first split in 1964. It suffered yet another split in the 1967-69 period. The emergence of the Naxalite group (Left adventurists in the vocabulary of the CPI-M) in Kerala during this period will also be dealt with in this chapter. Though not in power, the 1960s and early 1970s were indeed a period that the CPI (M) gained considerable strength through continuous peasant and workers' struggles (except during the emergency, when the struggles tapered to certain pockets) in Kerala. This agitational politics largely contributed to the strengthening of political democracy in Kerala which is unique in the country. This continued till the 1980s, from when the tendency to agitate and the tenor of being mere rebels against the system, began to wane and protests began taking the shape of rituals than spontaneous actions. It is not mere coincidence that this was also the period when the Soviet Union and the rest of the socialist bloc collapsed coinciding with the liberalisation-globalisation-privatisation experience since 1991. While the transformation of the Party's activities in this phase - in the 1990s --will be discussed in the next chapter, we shall look for the roots of these in this chapter.

The resistance put up by the communists, especially the Naxalites, against the emergency will also be discussed briefly. The chapter will further look into the electoral alliance of CPI with the Congress and up to the return of the Left Front to power in 1980 for a short while. From May 1982 onwards, a regular pattern become evident in the formation of the ministries - alternating between the Congress led UDF and the CPI (M) led LDF- in Kerala.

This chapter has six sections. Section I is about the split in the CPI in 1964; section II will deal with the mutual antagonism between the two communist parties reflecting in the charges and counters between the leaders reaching ridiculous proportions most often and pronounced so bitterly in the background of the 1965 elections to the Kerala state assembly; section III will analyse the second communist coalition government in Kerala in 1967 and its premature end due to the internal strife between the coalition partners in 1969; section IV discusses the split in the CPI (M) and the emergence of the Naxalites in Kerala; section V deals with Emergency and the communists and section VI is about the realignment of forces, that is the CPI and the CPI (M) as ‘natural allies’ since 1978, leading to the formation of the Left Democratic Front ministry in 1987 that lasted until 1991. The year 1991 is a watershed from the concerns of this research in the sense that the LDF ministry was not disrupted from outside nor from within as it happened in 1959 and 1969 respectively. It ran its course and lost elections in another circumstance. Since 1987, there has been a certain stability marking the elected communist led governments in Kerala as much as the pattern of alternate terms in power between the Left led LDF and the Congress-led UDF. The roots of this stability lay in the learnings that will be discussed herein.

I

There is no dearth of literature on the CPI split in 1964. While giving a general outline on the split for a background, this section will focus on the implications of the split in the political fabric of Kerala. At the outset, the argument here is that while the causes of the split as such may be attributed to the prolonged ideological and political differences within the Party, the influence of the Communist Party of Soviet Union in the matters of CPI in the making of the split cannot be overlooked. The genesis of the

split dates back to the 1947 June document¹⁶, if not beyond that. First and foremost, the document recognised India's independence from the colonial power. It said that "the new state formed was no longer an imperialist state but a national independent state in which the power was in the hands of the national leadership"¹⁷ and the national leadership represented the interests of the national bourgeoisie. However, it did not "specifically characterise the new government as one of the national bourgeoisie."¹⁸ Soon the party took a 360 degree turn and the second Congress of the Party in Calcutta, in February 1948, rejected this document as revisionist and right opportunist. The non-class approach of the document was subjected to severe criticism at the party's second Congress in Calcutta.

The party congress at Calcutta, in fact, read too much into the various struggles and instances of uprisings by the peasants and industrial workers in the aftermath of the World War II; the Tebhaga movement, Bengal Bakasht struggle in Bihar, the Adivasi revolt in Worli in Maharashtra and the unprecedented upsurge of workers strikes across the nation during 1946-47. All these led the CPI leaders, or a dominant section among them, to conclude that the time has matured for a revolution in India. And the Party jumped the gun to call for an armed revolution; thus the *Calcutta Thesis*, as it is known in the party's history, was born out of the premise that a revolution is the only lasting change.

The implications of the Calcutta Thesis, however, were catastrophic; many such localised armed struggles against the state machinery (the peasants uprisings and workers strikes in Kerala during the period is dealt in chapter II) and strikes by industrial workers provoked unprecedented repressions as well. It will be appropriate

¹⁶ The Central Committee Resolution on Mountbatten Resolution of June 1947. This was on the Mountbatten (Award)- partition plan of transfer of power.

¹⁷ Adhikari, *Communist Party and India's Path*, p.89.

¹⁸ Ibid.

to quote G. Adhikari, whose assessment of the Communist Party's history is known for its objectivity, on what the Calcutta Thesis did to the young party:

Instead of going forward from the Mountbatten resolution, correcting its reformist shortcomings and developing a correct policy and programme for the new stage by correctly applying the Leninist theory of national-colonial revolutions to the concrete conditions and revolutionary experience of our national liberation struggle, we made a false turn in our policy shift in our December 1947 resolution and in the second Congress of the Party in February 1948, which cost us heavily.¹⁹

It is also important to stress here that such criticism of the Calcutta line was done even earlier and it culminated in the rejection of the 1948 thesis and the adoption of the first ever programme of the Party and a new tactical line in 1951.

However, the Programme adopted in 1951 was fundamentally not much different from the stand of the resolution of the Calcutta Congress (1948) in its description of the nature of independence and the class character of the state and the government it represented. The major difference, between the 1948 and 1951 resolutions, being the assessment of the stage of the revolution; unlike that of 1948, the CPI resolution of 1951 held that the situation was not mature enough for an immediate people's democratic revolution. Hence, it called for a new tactical line wherein the legal possibilities like parliament and state legislative assemblies and local bodies were to be utilised and of forming a democratic front of workers, peasants, intelligentsia, middle classes as well as progressive sections of national bourgeoisie, while preparing the masses for a revolution at a later stage. Since then, the debate on the class character of the State and the role of the national bourgeoisie as the ruling class remained unresolved, though a temporary truce was achieved through the 1951 Programme. The fact is that this was warranted given the lack of time before the party's leaders on the eve of the first ever general elections in the country. Yet another unresolved question was about the "path of the working class in

¹⁹Ibid, p. 98.

the struggle to achieve hegemony so as to direct the whole development to the completion of the national democratic revolution and its going over socialist revolution.”²⁰

In short, the inner party ideological and political differences began with the debate on the class character of the Nehru government which had, definitely, inclined towards socialism; and this was pronounced most prominently in the foreign policy position and also in the structural changes effected by the Congress policies in the agrarian and the industrial sector. It may be pointed out here that the Constitution had already been amended once, on initiative from Nehru himself, to ensure that the pro-peasant zamindari abolition laws in United Provinces (present day Uttar Pradesh), Bihar and Madhya Pradesh were placed in the Ninth Schedule, also inserted by this amendment into the Constitution, and thus saved from vexatious litigations.²¹

In Kerala, as advocated by the Tactical Line, the CPI formed a United Front of Leftists (UFL) with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP) in Malabar²² and a United Front was formed in Travancore –Cochin State with the Kerala Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Socialist Party, to oppose the Congress party in the State;²³ these alliances did work and helped the CPI register electoral gains in the first ever general election itself in 1952.²⁴

Meanwhile, the Madurai Congress of the CPI in 1953, adopted the 1951 programme with some inconsequential changes. As a result, there were serious disputes and differences, arising out of fundamental differences within, on the nature

²⁰ Ibid, p. 125.

²¹ See V. Krishna Ananth, *The Indian Constitution and Social Revolution*, pp. 116-161 for a detailed discussion on the resolution of the conflict between Article 31 of the Constitution and the resolve to dismantle the institution of zamindari during the early years of the Republic.

²² However, at national level, the CPI ruled out an alliance with the KMPP.

²³ During the election, the CPI was banned hence they had to contest as independent candidates.

²⁴ In Malabar the Front won 19 (six seats for the CPI) and in Travancore - Cochin, the CPI won 29 (from 0 in 1948) seats out of 53 contested. The 1952 Congress government (in alliance with the Travancore Tamilnad Congress) fell in 1953 and an interim election was pending in 1954.

of the ruling classes. These were compounded by some of Nehru's policies such as the preference to planning, the concept of public sector industrialisation and with the Avadi session of the Congress Party resolving to commit itself to the Socialistic Pattern of society. These sent the Socialist Party (into which the Congress Socialist Party of the 1930s had metamorphosed in 1948 and emerged a strong electoral force against the Congress as much as did the CPI in 1951-52) going into a tailspin and some of its important leaders joining Nehru's Congress.²⁵ This was the context of the CPI's fourth Congress at Palghat in 1956. Taking place, as it did, with the second general elections on the cards, the leaders opted to push the differences under the carpet for the moment once again. The divisions were more pronounced then and the resolution of the 20th Congress of the CPSU that spoke of a 'Peaceful Transition to Socialism' added to the confusion. Nevertheless, a compromise was reached and for the first time the independence of the nation was recognised by the Party without any qualification and thus the debate on the nature of political independence was settled for ever.

However, the political resolution of the Palghat Congress emphasised that "this does not alter the basic objective and basic strategy of the Indian revolution."²⁶ And as for the character of the government it stated that the Congress government is "a government of the bourgeois- landlords, in which the former is the leading force, sought to develop capitalism in India."²⁷ With another general election round the corner, the CPI leaders found unity more important than a final resolution of programmatic issues.

²⁵ Among those was Ashoka Mehta, who left the Socialist Party to join the Planning Commission while Jayaprakash Narayan, who had been the party's Chairman, walked into retirement from party politics.

²⁶ Political Resolution of Palghat Congress, cited in Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, p. 550.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.535.

In the context of Kerala, the State Conference in Trichur on 22-24 June 1956 is very significant. This had charted out a programme known as ‘for Democratic and Prosperous Kerala’. The Party’s campaign for a Malayalam speaking Kerala State, preceding a similar campaign for a Telugu speaking Andhra Pradesh, a Marathi speaking Maharashtra and a Gujarati speaking State – the linguistic reorganisation of states – had begun as early as in 1950 in Kerala and the communists were in the forefront of this campaign as much as they were in the campaign for responsible government in Travancore and in Cochin. All these led them to gather popular votes in the 1957 election. In the resolution titled, ‘the Communist Proposal for Building a Democratic and Prosperous Kerala’, the CPI called for a united front of democratic forces including the progressive elements in the Congress. The resolution was forthright in spelling out the line. It said:

. . . as a basis for uniting these forces and building a democratic and prosperous Kerala the Communist Party puts forward a minimum programme before the people. The Party realises that there are Congressmen who do not either accept the programme in full or in accepting it in full belief that the Congress itself can implement it. To these Congressmen the Communist Party appeals: Let us work united on items of the programme to which you agree . . . The Party declares that after eliciting the views of the people and in consultation with other parties, it is ready to make necessary changes in the programme.²⁸

As has been discussed in the previous chapters, this clearly reflected that there were sections, within the CPI, that held Nehru and his government on a high pedestal and the fact that these leaders originally came through the INC and its radical section, the Congress Socialist Party, particularly in Kerala. This was also evident from the fact that at the time of the split in 1964, a large chunk of the leadership in Kerala remained in the CPI seeking collaboration with the Congress.

The Amritsar Congress, in 1958, was held in the backdrop of the first Communist Ministry in Kerala and adopted the Peaceful Transition to Socialism in its

²⁸ CPI resolution ‘the Communist Proposal for Building a Democratic and Prosperous Kerala’, cited in Fic, *Kerala: Yenan of India*, p.60.

political resolution. A considerable section within the Party was not in agreement with this transformation and it held this as evidence of revisionism in the party. However, the Kerala experience - an elected communist government in a state since April 1957 - was presented as a possible model for the future. Despite the charges and counter charges of either sectarianism or revisionism, in the Party congresses of Madurai (1953), Palghat (1956) and in Amritsar (1958), there was consensus and the party seemed to move ahead.²⁹ Differences on the 'correct understanding' on the role of the Indian national bourgeoisie and its leadership, the present stage of the revolution and the class strategy of the revolution - the central issues that led to the split eventually in 1964 - were not addressed in any concerted fashion and allowed to linger on.

This, however, seemed impossible in the wake of the Sino-Indian border disputes which began with the exodus of Dalai Lama and his followers to India in 1959. And things exploded at the CPI's Vijayawada Congress in April 1961. The ideological and political differences by this time took the shape of two separate lines - the Right communists or revisionists as they were called by those who resented cooperation with Nehru and his Congress party and attacked the idea of a national democracy and non-capitalist path³⁰ and the Left communists or the sectarians (as they were called by the former group) in favour of a people's democracy;³¹ two separate theses emerged. Accordingly, the CPI congress at Vijayawada had two draft

²⁹ Adhikari, *Communist Party and India's Path*, p. 127.

³⁰ A national democratic front is defined as a front that consistently anti-imperialist and anti-feudal (hence qualitatively different from the bourgeoisie) and it is an alliance of all patriotic classes and the leadership is shared between the proletariat and the national bourgeoisie. Its aim is not the immediate replacement of the national government but "a tactic of unity and struggle will be used vis-a-vis the national government and the national bourgeoisie - fighting against it to force it to change its policies in favour of the people, building a broad front alliance of all patriotic forces with a programme of carrying to completion the national democratic revolution. Ibid, pp. 147- 149.

³¹ According to the Left communists, the present Indian state is the organ of the class rule of the bourgeoisie and landlords led by big bourgeoisie, who are increasingly collaborating with imperialism in pursuit of the capitalist path of development. Hence, this should be replaced by a people's democratic government. Peoples' democracy is a transitional stage to socialism which is based on a "coalition of all genuine anti-feudal and anti-monopoly and anti-imperialist forces led by the working class on the basis of a firm worker-peasant alliance. This will replace the bourgeois -landlord state by a State of People's Democracy. Programme, Communist Party of India, Marxist, p. 22-31.

programme – the official one and an alternative one presented by the Left faction.³² Interestingly, there was a third one, which distanced itself from both the lines, by E.M.S. Namboodiripad. However, a decision on the matter was kept pending and discussion on programme was postponed to avoid a physical split. Meanwhile the strength of National council was expanded, a calculated move that one can say with the benefit of hindsight, to increase the strength of the ‘Right faction’ in the decision making body. All three factions agreed to this formula too. In the words of Nossiter, “in the newly elected and expanded 110- member National Council, 56 were said to support for the Right, 36 the Left and 18 [for] Namboodiripad.”³³

The crux of argument of the official draft was that the political reality of the country had undergone crucial changes between the Amritsar Congress in 1958 and the Vijayawada Congress in 1961. The birth of the Swatantra Party in 1959 and the emergence of right wing Bharathiya Jan Sangh as a strong disruptive force in politics, according to the official draft resolution, affected the correlation of forces and the emergence of the right wing as a threat, it held, was the crucial difference. ‘In this profound crisis the official draft resolution argued that ‘the blind anti-*Congressism* will only help the right wing, the real threat, becoming stronger’. The resolution hence stressed on the need for ‘an integrated understanding of the situation’.³⁴ It concluded that a myopic assessment that the Congress and the Right wing threat as one and the

³² A Draft programme prepared by S.A. Dange, P.C.Joshi and G.Adhikari another one by Bhupesh Gupta and P.Ramamurti, and a third document was placed by EMS Namboodiripad. <http://www.newageweekly.com/2012/02/amritsar-and-vijayawada-Congresses.html#!/2012/02/amritsar-and-vijayawada-congresses.html> accessed on 20/9/2016

³³ *Hindustan Time*, 17 April, 1961 cited in Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p. 182.

³⁴ See Mohan Kumaramangalam, *Review of the Communist Party Policy from 1947*, File No: 469, ACH, JNU. In Amritsar Congress, 1958, itself, Ajoy Gosh drew the attention of the Party about the emerging Right wing menace. He said: “It is necessary to note that it is not the left and democratic parties alone who are gaining ground. A disturbing phenomenon is that at places where our Party and the left have not yet become a powerful mass force, communal and separatist forces are gathering strength. The political and ideological vacuum created by the waning Congress influence of the is being used by parties like Ganatantra Parishad, the DMK, the Akalis and the Jan Sangh in a number of areas to buttress their own position, to divert mass discontent into disruptive and reactionary channels. *Ibid*, p. 38.

same will lead to an incorrect political line. As for the Left faction, by and large, it stayed put with the old 1951 programme that the bourgeois-landlord government at the centre remains the major threat.

Meanwhile, in Kerala, the CPI lost to the united opposition in the Assembly election in 1960. This defeat also contributed to the polemics. The Left faction in the CPI in Kerala engaged the cadre with agitational politics. The Land Reform Bill, the most important piece of legislation of the Communist Government, was the issue of contention. It was pending for assent from the President of India. The immediate provocation for the agitation came after the eviction of peasants from Ayyapankoil, Udumbachola Taluk in Idukki district, for the purpose of a government project. Around 10,000 people were evicted and dumped in Amaravati, a rocky uninhabited area, without proper rehabilitation. A. K. Gopalan (indisputably belonged to the Left faction) sat on a hunger strike for 11 days in June 1960 and there were large scale protests in Kerala including organised picketing of offices of the District Collectors in various parts of the State. Finally, the government relented and allotted alternate land for the families. Following this, the Karshaka Sangam in Kerala organised a state-wide stir. A *jatha* from Kasargod to Trivandrum was organised to protest against moves to dilute the Land Reform Act, already passed and awaiting Presidential assent in accordance with the demands of the Land Owners Association and the Nair Service Society. The *Jatha* was organised under the leadership of A.K. Gopalan (who was the All India President of the Kisan Sabha), C.H. Kannaran³⁵ and P.R. Pandalam and the march traversed a distance of 425 miles in 26 days of walking, the leaders addressing as many as 10 lakhs people and 35000 pamphlets explaining the issue were sold

³⁵C H Kannaran and A. K. Gopalan were among the eight leaders walked out the last meeting of the United CPI.

during its course.³⁶ The Karshaka Sangam continued its struggle even after the President of India returned the Bill without his assent and demanding that the State government act further on the Bill. This, along with a general strike on December 15, 1961, ended in large scale arrests and other forms of repression.

In the middle of this ideological and political mess, the CPI General Secretary Ajoy Ghosh passed away on 13 January 1962. By then, the inner Party conflict had reached its peak. As a compromise candidate, the centrist leader Namboodiripad was elected as General Secretary of the Party and a new post of Party Chairman was created to accommodate S. A. Dange, who represented the political line envisaged by the Right communists.

Meanwhile, the border conflict between India and China worsened and culminated in a full-fledged war. The National Council of the CPI passed a resolution³⁷ on November 1, 1962 supporting the war efforts of the Government of India. Inside Parliament, communist MPs including A.K Gopalan, spoke in praise of the stand of the Indian government and condemned China categorically.³⁸ Despite this, select communists from across the country were arrested and detained under

³⁶Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p.252.

³⁷The National Council Resolution passed two resolutions on the India-China conflict on 7th October and 1 November 1962. The November resolution categorically condemned the Chinese aggression and said: "socialist China has most grossly violated the common understanding of the 81 Parties Conference in 1960 in relation to peaceful coexistence and attitude to newly liberated countries and the question of war and peace. It has fallen victim of narrow nationalist considerations at the cost of the interests of world peace." Namboodiripad did not agree with this formulation and he accused National Council for making a revisionist assessment of the character of the Nehru government." Adhikari, *Communist Party and India's Path*, pp. 46-47

³⁸A. K. Gopalan said in a press statement on October 23, 1962 that he was deeply "deplored the attack against India and stated that the attack against India is an attack against world peace. The naked aggression and attack by China has shaken the conscience of all peace loving Indians at a time when we are talking about peace and disarmament. He also said in a press conference in Trichur on October 25, 1962 that it is time to "stand as one man behind the government" Indian Communists Condemn Chinese Aggression, External Publicity Division, Ministry of external Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, 1962 P. 2 File No: 403 B, ACH, 1962. The Communist MPs Bupesh Gupta, Prof. Hirek Mukerjee, Renu Chakravatty, PK Vasudevan Nair (an MP from Kerala), Jai Bahadur Singh had delivered speeches in the Parliament in similar lines. However, they had also expressed their anguishes over the large scale arrests of communists in various part of the country under the Defence of India Rule. 'Forward to the Defence of Motherland under the Banner of Jawaharlal Nehru', CPI, 1962, File No: 388 A, ACH, CPI, New Delhi.

provisions of the Defence of India Rules (DIR); these were preventive arrests and detentions were possible without charges as such. The number of communists arrested in the initial phase was about 500 and most of them were from the southern States of Kerala (130 persons), Andhra Pradesh and Madras.³⁹ There were acrimonious exchange of charges that it was the right wing of the CPI that abetted the arrests.

The confusion and prevarication did not continue for long. Namboodiripad resigned from the post of General Secretary as well as from the editorship of the CPI's official organ and the Central Secretariat of the party citing differences with the majority of the National Council members in February 1963.⁴⁰ In a statement he made it clear that his differences and the consequent resignation were on matters pertaining to the assessment of the economic, political, and social- cultural development in the country, rather than India-China relations or Sino-Soviet ideological conflicts."⁴¹ On April 11, 1964, in the National Council meeting of CPI in New Delhi, 32 members walked out of the meeting and they met at Tenali in Andhra Pradesh on 7-10 July 1964 to chart out an alternate path.⁴² Out of the 32⁴³ who walked out of the National

³⁹ 'Nationwide Swoop on Left Communists', *The Hindu*, 31/12/1964

⁴⁰ Along with his resignation letter, he presented a document Revisionism and Dogmatism in the Communist Party of India for discussion. Recalling his resignation, later on, he said that it was a mistake that he did not resign along with the others in November 1962. Namboodiripad, *Communist Party Kerala*, p. 648.

⁴¹ Appendix, Statement by Com EMS Namboodiripad', E M S Namboodiripad, *Revisionism and Dogmatism in the Communist Party of India*, Trivandrum, 28 February 1963, (New Delhi: Communist Party Publication, June 1963), p. 126. This statement was made in the context of his note titled "Revisionism and Dogmatism in the Communist Party of India," submitted to the National Council for discussion. He said "I am however, not vain enough to think that all that I say or write in the process of discussion will be accepted. I shall profit by criticism made by my colleagues, give up those positions which are found to be incorrect or harmful, and modify those which are found to be partly but not wholly correct. I am therefore, confident that this process of inner-party discussions will lead to unification of the Party on the basis of correct policy, rather than disruption of the Party which is hoped for by our opponents and feared by our friends." Ibid, p. 128. However, the document did not help the unification of the Party as hoped for but further led to disintegration. This document is important in the context of the second split in the late 1960s where the major issue was left sectarianism as the revisionism was supposed to be addressed in the first split in 1964.

⁴² Subsequently the CPI CEC decided to remove the 32 rebels and others who attended in the Tenali meeting from the Organisation in September 1964. The CEC asked the all Party Committees to strike off their names from the rolls of the party and "remain ever vigilant for guarding party unity against

Council of the CPI, only seven were from Kerala; eight others from the State stayed with the CPI.⁴⁴ Prior to this development, seven members of the CEC had resigned from their posts protesting the revisionist hegemony in November 1962.

The CPI (M) was officially formed in the Seventh Congress (as both the factions claimed the legacy of the Party), held in Calcutta from October 31 to November 7, 1964 much ahead of the Seventh Congress of the CPI which was held in Bombay in December 1964. Addressing a public meeting at the end of the Congress at the Monument Maidan in Calcutta, M. Basavapunnaih declared: “We are the Communist Party, the real Communist Party; the real Communist Party.”⁴⁵ A forty one member Central Committee and a nine member politburo were elected and out of the nine, two were from Kerala- A. K. Gopalan and E.M.S. Namboodiripad.⁴⁶ P. Sundarayya, the hardliner, became the General Secretary of the new Party.

The politburo met at the house of a communist leader A. V. Aryan at Trichur on December 28, 1964. And four members of the politburo – A. K. Gopalan, P. Sundarayya, Ramamoorthy, Basavapunnaih, and Surjit were arrested, Jyoti Basu and Namboodiripad⁴⁷ had also attended the meeting; but were not arrested. The first

their splitting activities,” Resolutions of the Central Executive Committee, Communist Party of India, New Delhi 10-15 September, 1964, Communist Party Publication, September 1964, p. 14.

⁴³ Seven members from Kerala were EMS Namboodiripad, A. K. Gopalan, A. V. Kumhambu, C. H. Kannaran, E K. Nayanar, V. S. Achuthanandan, E.K. Imbichibava. Others were P. Sundarayya, M. Basavapunnaih, T. Nagi Reddy, M. Hanumantha Rao, Venkateswara Rao, N. Prasada Rao, G. Bapanayya, Promode Das Gupta, Muzaffar Ahmad, Jyoti Basu, Abdul Halim, H K Konar, Saroi Mukerjee, P. Ramamurti, M. R.. Venkataraman, N. Sankariah, K Ramani, H S Surjeet, jagjit singh Lyallpuri, D. S Tapiala, Bhag Singh, Sheo Kumar Misra, R. N. Upadhyaya, Mohan Punamiya and R. P. Saraf. ‘Split in the CPI: Effect on Legislature Groups’, *The Hindu*, 17/4/1964

Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p. 198.

⁴⁵ Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p. 261.

⁴⁶ Others were P. Sundarayya, M. Basavapunnaih, P. Ramamoorthy, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Jyoti Basu, Pramod Das Gupta and B. T. Ranadive

⁴⁷ Namboodiripad made his position on Sino-Indian conflict clearly in his statement in Trivandrum on 28 February 1963. While explaining his resignation from the post of General Secretary, editor, Party organ and the Central Secretariat. He said; “on the question of India –China relations too, there is no question of my taking a ‘pro-China’ stand. On the other hand, I am fully convinced that the leaders of the Communist Party of China have done damage to the cause of freedom, democracy and socialism throughout the world by launching the massive offensive which they did on October 20th and by their earlier armed actions. Under these circumstances, it was correct and necessary, according to me, for the

Central Committee meeting after the formation of the new Party scheduled at Trichur did not take place due to the arrests and detention of the leaders in Kerala. Large scale arrests of the Left Communist leaders followed and almost all the leaders were behind bars in no time. State Secretariat Members, District secretaries, editor of the Party newspaper- none of them were spared.⁴⁸

In the context of the split, the last Kerala State Council meeting of the united CPI was held in January 1964 and two major points came up for discussion; hovering around two inimical views. A.K. Gopalan persisting with his anti-*Congressism*, argued publicly for an electoral understanding with the Indian Union Muslim League; his single point programme was to ensure the rout of the Congress. On the other side, within the party was an article (Congress-Communist Unity) by K Damodaran, one of the ideologues of the Communist movement in India where he also extolled the Indian Path to socialism. Both these ideas were rejected by the meeting on the ground that both were incompatible with the Party's policy.⁴⁹

It is evident that there were two distinct and opposing strands of political and ideological understanding within the State Council and this indeed was what led to the split soon after. And a majority of the State Council members from the united party stayed back in the CPI after the split insofar as the Kerala unit was concerned. It is also significant to note here that out of the 146 leaders who met at Tenali, after their suspension from their CPI positions on April 15, 1964, only 20 were from Kerala⁵⁰. In

Communist Party of India to join hands with other patriotic elements in the country in defence of the territorial integrity of the nation." Namboodiripad, *Revisionism and Dogmatism*, p. 127.

⁴⁸ M. P. Kunhiraman, S. Kumaran and M. V. Vasu and R. Krishnan, E. K. Nayanar, M. Govindan Kutti, Chathunni Master, P. C. Raghavan Nair, Mrs. Gowri. Mrs. Sushila Gopalan, O. J Joseph, P. K. Kunjachan, S. Govinda Kurup were some of them. 'Nationwide Swoop on Left Communists', *The Hindu*, 1/12/1964.

⁴⁹ EMS Namboodiripad, *What Really Happened in Kerala; The story of the Disruptive Game Played by Right-Wing Communists*, (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1966), Pp.11-12

⁵⁰ A. K. Gopalan says that the revisionist notions have grown since 1957 (since the formation of Kerala Government) in the Party as a whole and in Kerala in particular. Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p. 270.

the midst of serious political differences, the State Council had unanimously agreed on the formation of United Front of all the Left parties for the forthcoming elections in 1965. However, this did not materialise as the Party split into two and the later developments pushed both the communist groups in different fronts in Kerala.

The split was further formalised when the MLAs in the State Legislative Assembly occupied separate rows beginning November 2, 1964. Here too the majority of the MLAs (19 out of 29) stayed with the Right communists and among the 10 who went to the CPI (M); six were in jail under preventive detention.⁵¹

More than a political and ideological question, the impact of split on individuals was emotional. Many hearts were broken. The impact of the split was felt most in the KPAC, the theatre group of the communists. While a majority of the members remained in the CPI along with the famous script writer Thoppil Basi for the time being, some of them like Sulochana, KS George went to CPI (M) and a few resigned and became inactive in the long run. In the words of G. Janardhana Kurup, one of the pillars of the KPAC, “the split in the party shattered me emotionally. I was indecisive and maintained silence for almost a year.”⁵² Thoppil Basi had this to say: “In the battle between national democratic revolution and people’s democratic revolution, both the groups forgot about the liberation of the millions of the poor and marginalised in India.”⁵³ Basi’s words below represents the agony and despair of his generation of communists:

In 1964 when the Communist Party split into two, it was a huge shock for a person like me who had dedicated his life and family for the Communist Party since 1948. There were lakhs who felt the same way. Those who dedicated their lives for the activities of the party, who were willing to sacrifice their lives for the cause suffered greatly in the split. The fact that

⁵¹ ‘Communist Party Split’, *The Hindu*, 3/9/1964

⁵² G. Janardhanakuruppu, *Ente Jeevitham* [My Life, autobiography, Malayalam], (Thrissur: Current Books, 2004), p. 258. He was one of the organizers of workers in Travancore area and also an active participant in the Left people’s theatre group- KPAC.

⁵³ Thopill Bhasi, *Thopill Bhasiyude Theranedutha Kruthikal*, (Thiruvananthapuram:Prabhatam Printing and Publishing House, 2014), p.526.

those who were responsible for the breakup of the party into Left and Right cannot refute the sacrifice of an array of cadre who have faced break up of families, faced dangers and even died in the process . . . Many leaders who contributed immensely for the organisation and growth of the Party went into silence.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, and quite ironically, seven members of the National Council from Kerala, in a statement, expressed the view that the rift in the Communist Party need not and should not affect in any way its stand in the coming general elections in Kerala. They said that neither the developments at the National Council meeting nor what might follow in Kerala, were going to deter them from their efforts to build up a 'United Front' against the Congress. The signatories included Namboodiripad and A. K. Gopalan.⁵⁵ However, the efforts failed as the UF did not materialise notwithstanding some display of such intentions by way of meetings and negotiation that lasted for few months.

The impact of all these public spats and sham display of attempts to unite was evident in the debacle in the 1965 elections. The CPI ended up with only 3 MLAs in the State assembly (as against 29 the undivided party had won in 1960 and among whom 19 had stayed back in the party after the split). As for the CPI (M), formed only a few months before the elections in 1965, it was a phenomenal victory. The party won as many as 40 MLAs in the assembly; this was up from the mere 10 MLAs who went from the undivided party to its fold. In less than a year after the split and notwithstanding the fact that a majority of the erstwhile State Council members as well as the elected MLAs remained in the CPI at the time of the split, the elections to the assembly in 1965 revealed that the fledgling new party – the CPI (M) – emerged more popular than the CPI to establish itself as the bulwark against the Congress in Kerala.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.518.

⁵⁵ 'Split in the CPI: Effect on Legislature Groups', *The Hindu*, 17/4/1964

This turned out to make the CPI (M) a bigger partner and the leader of the non-Congress formation in Kerala in 1967 as did the Socialists in Bihar or the Bharatiya Jan Sangh in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh or the DMK in Tamil Nadu or the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab or the Swatantra party legacy in Orissa. In other words, the polarisation in Kerala was between the Congress and the Communists and the latter platform was led by the CPI (M). It may be held that in the midst of a large narrative marked by the decline of the Congress across the country culminating in the formation of non-Congress governments in nine states across India, the CPI's line of a Congress – Communist unity was out of tune with the national mood and this was evident when the CPI (M) emerged stronger of the two communist parties.

II

After the split, the mutual antagonism reflected in each and every action of these parties. The charges and counter charges between the leaders were reaching ridiculous proportions most often and pronounced so bitterly in the background of the 1965 elections to the Kerala state assembly.

The politics of numbers came to occupy the core of the CPI (M)'s thinking, at least in its Kerala unit, immediately after the split; The CPI (M), thanks to the presence of A.K. Gopalan in its fold, scored over the CPI in this regard. The reception accorded to Gopalan in Trivandrum airport was an indication of where did the cadre stand after the split.⁵⁶ And in any case in Malabar, these leaders were household names and the cadre stood firmly behind them. Ideological and political questions –

⁵⁶This was mentioned during the Election Review of the CPI after its election debacle in 1965. Election Review of CPI, 1965, Communist Party, Kerala State Council Publication, 1965. AK Gopalan also proudly mentions about this welcome accorded to him in Thiruvananthapuram in his memoir In the cause of the People. Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p.278.

whether national democracy or people democracy- were secondary for the cadre there. For the leadership, it was a war for hegemony, like the one they carried out in Kerala during the Congress Socialist Party days and finally the successful hegemonisation of the national liberation movement.

The war between the two factions to hegemonise the communist space in Kerala reached new heights. Both claimed the legacy of the historical peasant uprisings and epochal workers' struggles in the State. It went to the extent of capturing the infrastructure of the party that was built up over a period of time- the party offices, newspapers, magazines and so on were bones of contention. Fight was on for the ownership of newly built State Committee office at Trivandrum and other such buildings, Party Newspaper *Deshabhimani*, *Janayugam*, publication houses, *Prabhatam* Book House and so on. Since the CPI had the majority in the State Council, they could get the ownership of most of it.⁵⁷ In this context, A.K. Gopalan writes: "As far as Kerala was concerned, the Party workers knew for certain that the rightists had started functioning as parallel group. Following this, the State Council leadership gave green signal for rightists of Palghat and Calicut district councils to function as parallel group. It was to be expected that this policy would be pursued in other districts as well as in lower units."⁵⁸ He accused that the real parallel organisation was the rightists who did not represent the majority of the people.

The Hindu reported extensively on the feud over assets and related tensions that prevailed all over Kerala which began in mid-1964, immediately after the split when the Leftists tried to take over *Deshabhimani*, the party's daily newspaper in Malayalam language. Finally, it went to the CPI (M). E M S Namboodiripad justified

⁵⁷Namboodiripad, *Communist Party Keralathil*, p.682.

⁵⁸Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p. 274.

the act saying that ‘he exercised his legal right.’⁵⁹ Mutual recrimination reached its height when the Right wing Communist leader M. N. Govindan Nair said that ‘any attempt, to take over the properties forcibly would be met with force’.⁶⁰ It was reported that Namboodiripad staked his claim to all the immovable assets of the Party in Kerala⁶¹ citing that they have the moral right because the overwhelming majority of those who contributed to the institutions were with the Leftists in Kerala. He also said that if physical might was allowed, then confiscation of the properties will not be an issue. “Govindan Nair (CPI) had strongly repudiated the claim of the extreme faction on the ground that though anyone had the right to leave the Party, he had no right to claim its property. He said that no one who had left the Congress organisation had made any such claim. He would not concede that the leftists had the backing of a majority of the Communist Party members in Kerala.”⁶²

In this context, the 1965 elections to the state assembly was a battle for both the communist parties to prove their mettle to settle the question as to where the majority of the cadre stood. A half-hearted attempt was made to form a united front by both the factions to the fight the elections on a common minimum programme in the midst of the continuous mud-singling and public spats against each other. In this context, the Left wing communists bent over their backs to clarify that they were not intending to carry out anything radical but ‘to carry out a minimum programme of relief to the people.’⁶³ The negotiations for the united front began as early as in August 1964, before the mourning period of the split was over and it continued for sometimes. On the issue of an electoral understanding with the Indian Union Muslim

⁵⁹ ‘Communist in Kerala; Feud Over Assets; Tension Mounts’, *The Hindu*, 24/11/1964

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ ‘Left Communist Plan in Kerala’, *The Hindu*, 30/8/1964. A call for a joint front with all Communists, socialists' and radical democratic elements to defeat the Congress in the coming general election in Kerala was made by the Central Organising Committee of the Party.

League, an idea put forward by the CPI (M), the two parties disagreed. It should be recalled here that both the factions disagreed on the same issue in the last joint meeting of the CPI State council meeting a few months before the split. It was obvious that the CPI did not want to have anything to do with a communal Party such as Muslim League which was having an alliance with another communal party – the Kerala Congress. The CPI (M), meanwhile, persisted with exploring the possibility of an alliance with the League, knowing very well that this was unacceptable to the CPI. While the CPI (M) struck an alliance with the IUML in the end, it also sent a clear signal that the party was keen on mustering a majority in the Assembly. An era of electoral understanding on non-ideological basis began and it continues till today.

When the election results came out, a jubilant Namboodiripad wrote, ‘the result of the election therefore was as much a shock to the right-wing Communists as it was to the Congress. ‘Far from being ‘routed’ as the right-wing Communists had hoped, the left-wing Communists came out as the biggest single party in the new Legislature. Furthermore they themselves were exposed for what they are- nothing but a rump of the great Communist Party of India . . . the number of seats for the right-wing Communists or allied candidates lost their deposits, and in the process brought about the defeat of the left wing or allied candidates, is 11- the same number by which the left-wing Communists and their allies were short of securing an absolute majority!’⁶⁴

Meanwhile, if one resorts to simple arithmetic and adds up the votes polled by the CPI and the CPI (M) in the 1965 elections, a communist victory without having to take help from the IUML as did the CPI (M), was possible. This, however is a far too

⁶⁴Namboodiripad, *What Really Happened in Kerala*, pp.58-59. In the 1965 elections was the first ever election to the Kerala Assembly after the split in the Communist party in 1964- the CPI contested in 79 seats and won only 3 seats and secured 8.30 percent of the votes polled. It forfeited deposit in 54 seats. (Election Commission of India). Whereas the CPI (M) contested in 73 Assembly segments and won 40 seats with 19.87% of vote share.

simplistic way of looking at political developments and elections. But then, it may be placed on record that in at least 18 constituencies, both their votes added made it much larger than the votes secured by the Congress candidates. Then history is not if and buts.

III

The rout of the CPI in the 1965 election and the fact that no party or alliance could form a stable government in the State led Kerala into another bout of Presidential rule; both the communist parties – CPI and the CPI (M) – began to introspect their earlier positions and another Left Democratic front became a reality. Also the parties had proved their mettle and the CPI realised that their cadre base was incomparable to the CPI (M). In its review of the election results, the CPI accused the CPI (M) of being responsible for their defeat by ‘diverting the anger of the people from the Congress to the CPI and also for opposing the Left unity. And blamed the Congress for the indiscriminate arrests of the Left communist leaders on the eve of elections and thus creating sentiments in favour of the CPI (M) leaders. Interestingly, the concept of peaceful transition to socialism also came under the review. The CPI candidly admitted that the political line did not percolate to the cadre adequately. “They [cadre] still followed the old line [1951 programme]. They do not have the patience for the peaceful transition as their burden increases day by day. What they need is an immediate solution. And our propaganda was did not reach them.”⁶⁵

More importantly, the CPI did acknowledge that a lot of cadre base had gone to the CPI (M). It said that, “the traditional vote bank of the CPI voted for the CPM, the reason being that there was a general perception among the cadre that the CPI (M) was the real Communist Party and the people perceived the CPI as having been

⁶⁵‘Election Review of the CPI, Communist Party Kerala State’, Council Publication, March 1965,p. 14

responsible for the split by tailing behind the Congress.”⁶⁶ They also blamed themselves for having made heroes of such leaders like A.K. Gopalan and Namboodiripad and it reached a stage that the cadre identified the Party with them. Moreover, the CPI (M) could reach the masses with their propaganda machinery better than the CPI could. Further, the CPI conceded that in a larger context where the people were looking for an alternative to the Congress, the CPI (M) stood a better chance than themselves.⁶⁷

The CPI, which was at loggerheads with the CPI (M) on the issue of electoral adjustment with Muslim League in 1965 and even took its opposition to such an alliance as reason to walk out of any talks for a united front, was now weaker than it was and hence was in no position to oppose any such alliance in 1967, when elections were held again. And thus the Muslim League became an *official* partner of the Left Democratic Front. The *Sapta Katshi* (seven Party- CPI (M), CPI, SSP, Muslim League, RSP, KTP, and KSP) alliance was yet another experiment by the Communists in Kerala to defeat the Congress and wrest power with any means. This changed the correlation of forces in class terms very substantially. And as the leading force behind this politics of the art of the possible, the CPI (M) had to pay heavily in order to accommodate all sorts of political parties under a single umbrella. The existing debate on theory and political praxis within the CPI (M) became wide open. The Party had to sacrifice some of its basic positions to accommodate parties like the IUML. The Common minimum programme did not provide anything radical like the Election Manifesto of the CPI in 1957. In other words, Nossitter’s description of the post 1967 phase, is indeed appropriate. He holds:

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 10

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 11-12. The CPI was self- critical that it lost touch with the base- the agricultural workers - like in the past. They were also concerned that they were not able to penetrate to the trade union front adequately. Direct dialogue with these sections were missing. However, the CPI (M) had the backing of these sections. While the CPI(M) had got 15 lakh vote the CPI could secure only one third of it.

Eschewing ideology and embracing shibboleth, it omitted any reference to those issues which divided the parties at the national level, a relatively easy task since only the CPI and CPM were national parties of any moment; and like the genre it was long on panaceas and short on practicalities. As a concession to the Muslim League, the preamble made no reference to socialism and justified the formation of the front as the means of defeating Congress and restoring political stability in the State.⁶⁸

The policy statement of the Seven Party alliance did not contain any ideological axioms and its primary motto was to ‘stop the misrule of the Congress and to provide a stable Government in Kerala’. Political issues that directly affected the lives of the people in Kerala such as rising prices, food scarcity, corruption, black marketeering, red tapism, taxation, wrong economic policies and autocratic tendencies of the government at the centre were the major highlights in the joint declaration.⁶⁹

The Seven Party coalition, especially the CPI (M), succeeded in its aim; the Congress was routed in the 1967 election to the state assembly. The Congress party was left alone to contest and managed to win only nine assembly seats out of the 126 contested. The Kerala Congress also met with a similar fate; its strength reduced from 24 in 1965 to 5 in 1967 out of 61 seats it contested. The *Sapta Katshi Front* won in a big way. 113 seats for the front; the breakup was CPI (M) -52, CPI 19, the SSP 19, Muslim League 14, RSP 6 and KTP 3. Namboodiripad took over as chief minister of Kerala for the second time on March 6, 1967; for the first time as the chief minister of the CPI and now heading a coalition of different ideologies, interests and political stances. Meanwhile, ideologically and organisationally, this was not the best ever time for the CPI (M). Problems were brewing within the Party. Therefore, to satisfy different factions in the Party, it adopted the path of rule (govern) and struggle. In just a week after the government was sworn in, the chief minister courted controversy saying that Indian judiciary was merely “an instrument of oppression”

⁶⁸Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p. 205.

⁶⁹To ‘stop the misrule of the Congress; To Form a Stable Democratic Government in Kerala. Policy Statement of the Seven Opposition Parties, (Trivandrum: Prabhat Book House, 1966).

and described the Judges as those whose minds are "dominated by class hatred, class prejudices", "instinctively" favouring the rich against the poor. He also stated that as part of the ruling classes the, judiciary "works against workers, peasants and other sections of the working classes" and "the law and the system of judiciary essentially served the exploiting classes".⁷⁰ He was indeed reflecting the radical face of the Party as an extreme left wing was emerging within the party questioning the parliamentary path.

While this remark led Namboodiripad to conviction under the law of contempt of court and some stern strictures were passed against him by Justice M. Hidayatullah along with a fine (which the CPI-M leader arranged to be paid by someone on his behalf), the coalition was marked by mutual suspicion and carping among the leaders. There were allegations from the partners that CPI (M) had not only appropriated to itself all the important portfolios in the cabinet but also of interfering into the affairs of other ministers. The CPI expressed this in strong words: The Central Executive Committee of the CPI which met in Trivandrum in mid-July 1969 held the CPI (M) responsible for the crisis in the United Front government. It unequivocally stated:

The CPI (M) has been consistently using its strength, and position to browbeat, weaken, if not eliminate the other partners in the Front. Big-party bossism, disdain for its allies, baseless charges and interference and dictation seems to have become its code of conduct. The general pattern of its behaviour defies even elementary norms, which one must observe in a coalition.⁷¹

⁷⁰E. M. Sankaran Namboodiripad vs T. Narayanan Nambiar on 31 July, 1970. 1970 AIR 2015, 1971 SCR (1) 697. The Chief Justice Hidayathulla was too harsh on Namboodiripad and said that "either he does not know or has deliberately distorted the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin for his own purpose. We do not know which will be the more charitable view to take. Marx and Engels knew that the administration of justice must change with laws and changes in society, there was thus no need to castigate the judges as such beyond saying that the judicial system is the prop of the state. . . It is obvious that the appellant has misguided himself about the true teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. . . As regards sentence we think that it was hardly necessary to impose heavy sentence. The ends of justice in this case are amply served by exposing the appellant's ignorance about the true teachings of Marx and Engels (behind whom he shelters) and by sentencing him to a nominal fine of Rs. 50. In default of payment of fine he will undergo simple imprisonment for one week. With this modification the appeal will be dismissed.

⁷¹C.P.I Executive Condemns Marxist "Bossism in Kerala", *The Hindu*, 13/7/1969. The statement further blamed that "the U.F. Co-ordination Committee, of which the only convener is a Marxist, has been rendered ineffective. Its meetings are called mostly at the pleasure of the CPI (M), which

Interference in the administration by the cadre of CPI (M) was also alleged. Add to this, in the cases of the charges/allegation of corruption against some ministers, some partners in the coalition accused the CPI (M) of being partial in their approach to corruption.⁷²

The situation worsened in the latter part of 1969 and the united front remained only in name; it was an *un-united front* in all senses. By August 1969, A. K. Gopalan, who was in charge of the Ministry in the absence of Namboodiripad, found the political situation of the united front too critical. He regretted that the Muslim League, whose entry in to the United Front owes to the CPI (M), had also joined the Right communists to 'slander' the Marxists. There were only two options left before the Party; either to find out a reasonable formula to carry on with the work of the Front and the Government or to quit the front. He declared that the CPI (M) was prepared for both.⁷³ The League and the CPI left the Front and soon the CPI (M) led government was reduced to a minority in the House even after the KTP and the KSP, two minor parties in the Front, remained with the CPI (M) till the end.

The brickbating continued while the coordination was almost paralysed; no effort was taken to rectify it. Even the cabinet meetings became irregular. The absence of the Chief Minister, Namboodiripad, who was away in East Germany for treatment, made things worse. The front partners behaved like opposition from within and there were fights between ministers and the speaker on the floor of the

considers itself free to disregard even the unanimous decisions of the committee. This crippling seems to be an aspect of the Marxist line, to substitute party domination for collective leadership. The crisis in the Kerala U.F. is in no small measure due to the reckless mudslinging by the CPI (M) against its partners."

⁷² It was alleged that when a corruption charge was erupted against the ISP minister P K Kunju, after constituting an enquiry EMS made him to resign. When it comes to similar charges against the KTP Minister Wellington, allegedly the Chief Minister was not too keen to get his resignation since the KTP was a big time supporter of the CPI (M) in the cabinet.

⁷³ 'A. K. Gopalan Criticises League's Stand', *The Hindu*, 27/8/1969

House.⁷⁴ More ominous was the CPI (M)'s plan, at that stage, to 'go to the people' and mobilise support for its fight against the 'conspiratorial move' of the others in the coalition. The CPI (M) Politburo's charge was that the support promised by the Muslim League, CPI, RSP and ISP to an opposition sponsored resolution demanding an enquiry into a charges of corruption as being "nothing but a conspiracy to break up the United Front and form a new Ministry without the CPI (M)"⁷⁵ was all that was needed to put the nail on the coffin. The front was dead.

The Economic and Political Weekly editorial summed up the entire situation in the following words:

The Cabinet which rarely meets, and the Assembly which has seen many dramatic conflicts, have learned to live with this state of affairs. So has the Kerala public which regularly witnesses spectacular demonstrations organised separately by the different parties of the United Front and by the opponents of the UF. But in spite of the normality of crises, what is happening now is something new and different. So far each crisis had fizzled out and some working agreement had been reached among the different parties of the UF. Now the situation is different; very soon there will be a reorganisation of the Government. Some of the Ministers will have to go and others will come in. The new Cabinet may continue to be headed by the leader of CP(M), though there is also the possibility of CP(M) being left out of the new Government, in that case the Government may include representatives of Kerala Congress and even Congress may be persuaded to support it from the outside⁷⁶

Meanwhile, the Central Committee of the CPI (M) reacted to the crisis sharply:

At a time when all the democratic forces must stand united in the struggle against the vested interests and big bourgeois-landlord policies of the Congress, the Kerala United Front Ministry stands paralysed and virtually collapsed, the partners being looked in an endless combat. The Muslim League, the revisionists and other parties, in criminal repudiation of their basic duty towards the masses, have joined hands with the Congress and Kerala Congress to charge the United Front Minister with corruption. Now these parties have come out with an open threat of deserting the UF... This open revolt against the United Front, the shameless act of joining hands with the Congress and Kerala Congress by these four parties, constitutes an act of betrayal of the people of Kerala.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ 'Split in Kerala U.F. Widens: Marxist Plan to go to People' *The Hindu*, 27/8/1969. For instance K R Gouri, Marxist Revenue Minister and the speaker of House had an open fight in the house as she accused that the Speaker was undermining her position of the floor leader.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ 'Moving Towards a Poll', *Economic and political Weekly*, 18 October 1969, p. 1658, also see 'Split in Kerala U.F. Widens: Marxist Plan to go to People' *The Hindu*, 27/8/1969.

⁷⁷ 'PB Statement on Kerala and West Bengal Situation, October 13, 1969', CC Resolutions and Statements of the CPI (M) from Feb 1969 to April 1971, pp. 29-30.

However, in the midst of all these, commitment towards the peasants was not forgotten. The Land Reform (Amendment) Bill was passed on October 17, 1969.⁷⁸ But, then it went through many litigations before the court. The landlords organised hate campaigns and also contested the Constitutional validity of the Act in the courts.⁷⁹ However, it is important to note here that the Act did not meet with the same fate as that was met with the Kerala Agrarian Reform Bill which was passed by the first Communist Ministry while in power in 1957-59.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ The right given to a 'kudikidappukaran' (Hutment dweller) to purchase his 'kudikidappu' (home-stead) is among the salient features of the Bill. The purchase price is fixed at 25 per cent of the market value of the land, and the 'kudikidappukaran' need pay only one-half of this price, the other half being met by the Government. Wider definition has been given to the terms 'Kudikidappukaran, Hut, etc.', to benefit more people. The ceiling limit on land has been reduced as compared to the existing Act. The exemption from ceiling limit in the case of contiguous lands not exceeding 20 per cent of the plantation areas reserved for future expansion, cashew estates, pure pepper and arecanut gardens, 'kayal padasekharams' (reclaimed backwater lands) in the Kuttanad area and waste lands, has been taken away. Under the legislation, religious institutions will receive only a reduced annuity from the Government for vesting their rights in respect of their holdings. The annuity payable to an institution will be equal to the fair rent, instead of the annual rent, to which the institution was entitled to, under the parent Act. 'Kerala Assembly Passes Land Reforms Bill', *The Hindu*, 19/10/1969.

⁷⁹ A letter to editor that appeared in the *Hindu* was specimen of such hate campaign against Land Reform. "Sir,—The Kerala Agrarian Reforms Act of 1970 was enacted to fulfil the slogan 'land to the cultivator'. It had a twofold effect, viz. dispossessing thousands of landowners who had the misfortune to lease their lands, and create a new class of tenant land-owners in their place. A new slogan has now been propounded in the place of the old by the KPCC President. The slogan this time is, land to the actual tiller. I.e., the farm labourer. Implementation of the new slogan will result in the liquidation of the landowners brought into existence by the Act of 1970 and the creation of another class of land-owners in their place. If the physical act of tilling the soil is to be the criterion for ownership of land as implied in the new slogan, then buffaloes and bullocks should have top priority. It is unfortunate that our politicians quite often do not know what they say or realise its impact on the illiterate masses. Continued reiteration of hollow slogans and appealing by impossible promises tend to encourage laziness and create the impression that the lazy and indolent have the right to seize their neighbour's properties, and the greedy are heirs to other people's wealth. Even well-meaning people sometimes become bad as a consequence of these slogans. G. Rama Iyer. N. Parur (Kerala). 'Kerala Agrarian Reform', *The Hindu* 12/7/1974, [Letters to editor].

⁸⁰ The political situation had changed for better soon. The 29th Constitution Amendment, 1972, placing the amended act in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, made it possible that the Act no longer had to suffer vexatious litigation against its implementation every time. Two acts the Kerala Land Reform (Amendment) Act of 1969 and the Kerala Land Reform (Amendment) Act of 1971 were placed in the 9th Schedule then. The Amendment was upheld by the Supreme Court as valid in the famous *Kesavanda Bharathi vs State of Kerala*, case, in April 1973. (Kesavanada represented a religious mutt whose property was acquired for redistribution under the land reform programme and he challenged this act of Kerala Government in the Court in 1970. In the process it also challenged the Twenty ninth Constitution Amendment Act. And the Supreme Court upheld the Amendment Act valid). The case involved a challenge against the Constitutional validity of the Kerala Land Reform Act, 1963 as amended by the Land Reform (Amendment) Act of 1969 on grounds that it violated such fundamental rights guaranteed under articles 25, 26, 14, 19 (1), and 31 of the Constitution. (Ananth, *The Indian Constitution and Social Revolution*, p.247) The Court upheld the validity of the Act and the Achutha Menon ministry implemented the Act without any interference

It was simply kite-flying for the CPI (M) to expect that the parties like Muslim League would help it “run the ministry as an aid to the revolutionary struggle of the masses” or that such parties will work for the change of ‘bourgeois-landlord’ constitution or disrespect the ‘bourgeois’ courts or fight against the bourgeois-landlord regime at the centre.”⁸¹ It was also naïve on the CPI (M)’s part to expect from a party like the Muslim League, wedded so much to denominational politics, to support the struggle of agriculture workers for land. And yet the CPI (M) ended up lending such a front when it struck an alliance with it so as to⁸² spite the CPI and the Congress at one go. The impact was far reaching the whole concept of the United Front of Leftists (UFL) broke down for ever in Kerala and the new concept of Left Democratic Front was born; the guiding principle now being collaborating with bourgeois democratic parties other than the Congress.

This line, initiated by the CPI (M) in Kerala, was the premise on which the CPI (M)’s political line of striving for transient electoral alliances with anti-Congress regional platforms in order to expand its own base in parts where the party was weak or a marginal player that was enunciated at the Salkia Plenum (1978) as a strategy for expansion and building a mass revolutionary party.⁸³ This, in many ways, was distinctly different from the concept of Left Front practiced in West Bengal.

The CPI (M) was confident of returning to power in the 1970 Assembly elections. They expected that the people of Kerala will defeat the CPI for betraying

⁸¹ Ibid, p.31.

⁸² Interestingly, the CPIM) always blamed the Congress for taking the Muslim League into their fold in 1960 thus giving legitimacy to a communal party when they formed an all opposition parties alliance against the Communists after its dismissal in 1959. However, within short span of five years the Muslim League became respectable to the CPI (M) even to the extent that breaking the UFL to accommodate it.

⁸³ However, the Plenum highlighted the weakness of the Kerala Party such as the political campaigns in the State have not brought about any significant changes in the correlation of political forces. ”The anti-CPI (M) coalition forged in 1969 continued to block the advance of the Left and democratic forces... This weakness of our Party should be noted while evolving the political –tactical line for the State...” ‘Salkia Report on Organisation cited in M Basavapunniah, Salkia Plenum Decisions and After’, Documents on Party Organisation- 1964-2009, CPI (M), 2015, p. 512.

the trust of the people. However, it turned out to be a wrong reading of the situation. The people in Kerala were not averse towards an electoral understanding between the CPI and the Congress. However, practically, there were three fronts- the Mini Front (*kurumunni*) as Namboodiripad named them while they were in the same coalition in 1967-69- consisting of the CPI, RSP, PSP and Muslim League, People's Democratic Front consists of CPI (M), SSP, KSP, ISP and KTP and the Democratic Front consists of Kerala Congress, Congress (O), Jana Sangh and the Swatantra Party. The ruling Congress contested alone. The Mini front which won 32 seats was supported by the Congress from outside. The Congress formally joined the government in 1971. Thus the thesis of the CPI (M) on the collaboration between CPI and the Congress was vindicated. And contrary to hopes, that such a front will collapse sooner than it was formed, the collaboration provided the longest stable government in Kerala until elections were held in 1977. The combine retained power in Kerala in the 1977 elections too.

The acceptance of the new ministry was an indication of the exasperation of common-man in Kerala. They relied their hopes in the second Left led ministry and elected the coalition with huge mandate to deliver. Subsequent instability of the Left Democratic Front ministry and the CPI (M)'s inability to lead a stable coalition angered them. Unlike in 1959, when the government was dismissed by resort to Article 356 of the Constitution, the fall of the Namboodiripad Government in 1969 was due to its inability to bear its own internal contradictions. The people chose the CPI this time against the CPI (M), as they did as earlier in 1965 (when the latter was only a fledgling party). This was yet another learning for the CPI (M) in the parliamentary path. Despite the charges of supporting the Emergency, the Achutha Menon government delivered the Left agenda and this was one of the major reasons

that the same coalition came to power in Kerala once again in 1977, after the emergency when the rest of the nation had sent the Congress and the CPI into oblivion.

IV

As mentioned in the earlier section, during its stint in power, the CPI (M) was facing another threat of split in the Party similar to the one in 1964. However, this time, it was the leadership of the CPI (M) that was accused of revisionism and Right opportunism by a faction in the Party. The core of this challenge was on the question of the relevance of the parliamentary path and on the strategy and nature of the revolution. The rebels despised the parliamentary road and argued that the Chinese model of armed revolution should be the right path for the Indian revolution; organising liberated areas and bases was the key to this. They had the support of the Chinese and Indonesian Party then. However their political praxis failed sooner than they could organise themselves as a force. This section deals with the emergence of the extreme Left, known as Naxalites, their romantic existence (it indeed rekindled the Kerala polity for a short while) and their premature death in Kerala.

The debate on the path of revolution had engaged the Party since its inception. Sharp debates on this and compromise formulae were made available time to time to avoid a split. When the Party adopted the line on peaceful transition to socialism in the Amritsar Congress, the chasm between those who were for a parliamentary path to the transition to socialism and others increased. The major questions, then, was the character of the Indian State and the leadership of the government in the Centre and consequently on the stage of the revolution, and on the nature of the democratic revolution. And as already discussed, this led to the split in the Party in 1964 and the so called 'revisionists' stayed with the CPI while an amalgam of others -- extreme

Leftists, Leftists and the centrists – came to found the CPI (M). In the new configuration, the extreme left were strong supporters of the Chinese line and they were the cadre who insisted upon keeping a portrait of Mao Tse Tung along with Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin at the venue of the Tenali convention of the Party in 1964;⁸⁴ a symbolic expression that Maoism is an integral part of the CPI (M) ideology.

In the 7th Congress of the CPI (M) in Calcutta, in 1964, hundreds of amendments⁸⁵ were suggested to the draft report on the programme; this was a clear indication of the discordant notes within the new Party. Interestingly, in the Calcutta Congress, the Central Committee presented a document titled *Struggle against Revisionism* and this document clearly indicated the fight against sectarianism as an inseparable element in the fight against revisionism. The argument was that they were two sides of the same coin. However, this document was not distributed in the State Committee meetings (especially in Kerala at Alapuzha in October 1964) for discussion. The delegates were aware of the existence of such a document only at the venue of the Party Congress in Calcutta.⁸⁶ All this indicate that some care had been taken not to submit the controversial document for a discussion in the State Committees to avoid further confusion at the very early stages of a young party. A strong view had prevailed, among a section of the Party, that the decision to take the parliamentary path, even if as a tactical line only in 1952 was wrong and their view was vindicated with the dismissal of the democratically elected government in Kerala. A. K. Gopalan's reaction to the dismissal of the government was that,

The Marxist principle that the bourgeoisie will resort to any means to prevent transfer of power to another class was confirmed by this experience. The bourgeoisie swears by

⁸⁴Namboodiripad, *Communist Party Keralathil*, p. 683.

⁸⁵Ibid, p. 686.

⁸⁶Ibid, p. 686.

democracy only as long as the balance of power remains in their hands. When it begins to slip away, they will resort to anti-democratic and fascist methods to retain it.⁸⁷

The CPI (M), as we have seen in the previous section, had in fact, set out on such an opportunistic electoral alliances and the compromise it had arrived with the IUML in Kerala was an instance of this. There was a section who genuinely believed that the CPI (M) too was taking the revisionist path and sacrificing its revolutionary agenda for electoral gains. However, this issue was not taken for a serious discussion as the Party had to deal with challenges from out-side, especially from the Centre at the time of its birth. A number of its leaders were in jail in Kerala and so much so 21 of them contested the Assembly election in 1965 from the jail. In 1965, CPI (M)'s sole aim was to rout the Congress as well as the CPI to establish itself as the real communist party, in Kerala. The 1965 electoral adjustment and politics deepened the frustration of the extreme Left; further, the Party justified the 1967 seven Party alliance as the correct policy while criticising the sectarian and dogmatic tendencies on the one hand and revisionist line on the other that existed in the united Communist Party. The ideological and theoretical differences were kept under the carpet for some time; but not possible after the uprising of the extreme leftists, who advocated the Chinese path of revolution within the Party. The Naxalbari line, as it is known in the party's history, after a section of the CPI (M) leaders set out on occupying land and resisting the state intervention with arms (what began in the Naxalbari village in North Bengal soon spread across Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Kerala like a prairie fire) forced the CPI (M) to carry out some theoretical and ideological campaign within the fold.

Two important documents - The Tasks on the Kisan Front and the Tasks on the Trade Union Front - which were adopted in October 1966, in the Party's own

⁸⁷Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p.234.

admission, were part of its struggle to liquidate the reformist and revisionist tendencies in the party.⁸⁸ There were criticisms in the Party that by and large, it failed to build up the Kisan and Trade Union front in the lines of the Tactical line of 1951, the basic document of the Party. It was blamed that the revisionist tendencies and parliamentary illusions remained in the Party and that prevented action on these fronts.⁸⁹ The Central committee resolution on New Situation and Party's Tasks, April 1967, had rendered some justification, in ideological terms, to the compromises in the course of the parliamentary path though. The document said:

A dogmatic, sectarian and wrong attitude towards political parties like DMK, Akalis, Muslim League, etc. persisted in the once united Communist Party. The revisionists for long, dogmatically persisted in it doggedly opposing even any sort of electoral adjustments with these parties, let alone joining hands with them for forging united fronts against Congress. An attitude of 'touch me not' and keeping them at arm's length was considered to be a revolutionary virtue. These parties had come to be looked upon as embodiment of nothing but rank communalism, castiesm and disruption. Our Party correctly and courageously took the lead in discarding this erroneous attitude and boldly fought for electoral agreements and adjustments, united fronts and finally, even for participation in United Front Government with such Parties on an agreed governmental programme.⁹⁰

This line did not appeal to the extreme Left faction. Meanwhile, by the end of 1967, the CC adopted an important document on *Our Tasks on Party Organisation* in which the Party critically assessed the situation and it admitted that the revisionist tendencies still persist in the Party and "some broad necessary steps to liquidate these evils legacies" were called for urgently.⁹¹ The document further said that Party's concentration became electoral politics and the strategy of organising and revolutionizing the masses for a larger cause- the people's democratic revolution was skirted. It said:

⁸⁸ CPI (M)'s Statement on Policy and Its Implications, adopted by the CC on July 20, 1976', cited in *Documents on the Party Organisation, 1964-2009*(Kolkata: National Book Agency, 2015), pp. 322 - 328.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 322.

⁹⁰ CC Resolution on New Situation and Party's Tasks, April 1967, cited in Review Report' Adopted by the Tenth Congress Jullundur April 2-8 1978, *Communist Party of India (Marxist)*, 1978 , p.25.

⁹¹ Our Tasks on Party organisation, adopted by the CC at its Calicut Session, October 28- November 2, 1967, cited in *Documents on the Party Organisation*, p.149.

Starting with the general elections in 1952 held under the new Constitution of the Indian Republic, the greater part of Party's energy, resources and time was spent in periodical general elections, midterm elections, by-elections and elections for the village Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and the like, with the result that the work in the class and mass fronts, building their organisations and leading their day-today struggles were practically paralysed. In short, the Party's main work was reduced to parliamentary work. The parliamentary and assembly leadership at different levels began exercising a predominant influence on the Party's political line, the militant and revolutionary TU leaders were gradually replaced by 'new talents' who were adept at representation, 'experts' in the niceties of the law in the 'industrial tribunals', arbitration councils', 'tripartite conferences' and similar other bodies.⁹²

Kerala was practically a lab for the experiments in electoral politics, construed from real practices. However, with the Naxalbari uprising in May 1967 - when the peasant base of CPI (M) organised an uprising under the leadership Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal (Local leaders of the CPI (M) in Teri area of North Bengal) -- within months after Party came to power in West Bengal as a part of the United Front in 1967, exploded into a serious debate within the CPI (M). The West Bengal Government, where the CPI (M) exerted immense influence and Jyoti Basu was handling the Home portfolio, suppressed the movement using force; the repercussion in Kerala was a further split in the CPI (M). Initially these groups came under an All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) which later evolved into the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)- CPI (ML).

A State organising committee of the CPI (ML) was constituted in Kerala under the leadership of Ambadi Sankarankutty Menon, Arayakandy Achuthan, and K.P.R. Gopalan (a firebrand leader of the CPI (M), the one who escaped the noose in the Kayyur peasant revolt in 1941 and a CPI-M MLA at that time) and another leader of the Party A.V. Aryan, who too was disillusioned with the electoral politics and 'manoeuvring' of the CPI (M). Among them, for K.P.R.Gopalan more than extremism, his opposition to CPI (M) pushed him to the other end. He "continued to

⁹² Ibid, p. 155.

attend the Assembly as Communist Revolutionary MLA until its dissolution in 1970 and also supported the CPI-led Mini front Ministry against the CPI (M) in 1969-70”⁹³

The Naxalite activities were centred around *actions* against feudal vestiges prevalent and thus take the battle to the state and its instruments. A prominent leader of this movement was Kunnikal Narayan (a former CPI (M) leader from Kozhikode). The Pulpally police station attack in Wynad in November 1968 was the first such attack against the ‘repressive government machinery; this was followed soon by a murderous assault on a feudal lord at Thalassery in Kannur, police station attacks in Kuttiyadi in 1969 and in Thirunelly in 1970. The Naxalites carried out attacks on feudal lords at Kongad and Mundur in Pallakad district soon and these were held as acts to liberate the peasants and tribal. The attacks were planned on the lines of the Chinese model of liberating bases, hence the location was mostly Northern Kerala, from where a retreat too was possible. However, they could hardly translate any of these into establishment of liberated zones as did the communists earlier in the course of the historic Telengana liberation struggle. The Kerala actions remained isolated acts of terror that were invariably followed by brutal repression by the state.

Meanwhile, Namboodiripad, who was then Chief Minister of the State, heading the Seven Party coalition, was held responsible for letting such ‘lawlessness’ by the then leader of opposition and Congress MLA, K.Karunakaran. Participating in the discussion on the Governor's Address, Karunakaran said: “the Tellicherry and Pulpally incidents had taken place with the knowledge and connivance of the Chief Minister and his party. The 'dark hands' of the Chief Minister were behind the incidents.”⁹⁴ Since then, every party in power in Kerala competed with one another

⁹³Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p. 359.

⁹⁴ ‘Charges Against Marxists; E.M.S. Challenges Central Govt. to Order Enquiry’, *The Hindu*, 10/1/1969.

claiming that they were ahead of the other in striking at the Naxalite movement at its roots and eliminating the threat.

A number of reasons contributed to the defeat of Naxalism in Kerala. The class character of the leadership (who predominantly came from petty bourgeois lineage) and ideological background were important factors. The Naxalites comprised of a non-cohesive group - Maoists, anarchists, existentialists – and such persons in the leadership of these groups were in a hurry to change the world in their own times. This led to a number of splits in the Party within a short span of time. The romanticism of the movement faded away when they met the harsh realities. After the legendary attack of the Pulpally police station in Wayanad, those who participated in it including, Kunnikkal Naryanan and his daughter Ajitha, then in her teens, faced serious police repression; however once out of the jail, they splintered to the extent that one of them became – Philip M Prasad- a devotee of Sai Baba.

Secondly, there was hardly any space for individual annihilation, the programme that was central to the line put forward by Charu Mazumdar and Kunhikkal Narayanan, the face of the movement in Kerala. In the aftermath of the Calcutta thesis too (in 1948), Kerala witnessed many instances of armed uprising of the peasants and working class and while their martyrdom was celebrated, the political line was dumped as Left sectarianism soon. However, through the legacy of these struggles, Kerala developed a political culture with firm roots in political democracy and thus the space for individual acts of terror lost its popular appeal in the society as such. In other words, the deep roots that political democracy had taken in Kerala was too strong to rouse the large sections of the peasantry and the middle classes (a product of the much talked about Kerala Model of Development), to resort to individual annihilations and attacks on few police stations. And the Communists,

especially the CPI (M), had established a well- knit cadre-based organisation with everyday contact with the people across the state.

Another major factor was that by the late 1960's the passage of comprehensive land reform legislations that had rendered restructuring of the agrarian structure a possible agenda from within the framework of the Constitution. The peasants were organised under the Kerala Karshaka Sangams and Minimum Wages for the agricultural workers were ensured by the first communist ministry. And the CPI (M) captured the space for agitation in constitutional methods. While in power, in 1967-69, and later in the opposition in the 1970s, the Party resorted to radical actions in the agrarian front.⁹⁵ According to them, the mass agitation was the only way to overcome the "obstruction from the Constitution, the courts and the Central and the State Governments." ⁹⁶ Direct actions such as occupation of surplus land for distribution to landless tillers were resorted too. This sort of large scale mobilisation and radical actions, foreclosed the scope for organising these classes for a guerrilla struggle as practiced by the Naxalites and such methods became next to impossible.

Yet another reason was that the CPI (ML) was banned at very early stages itself and some of its leaders were in jail for long terms. The government used all its arms to suppress the Naxalite movement in Kerala. When the Congress officially joined the CPI headed Government in 1971 and when K. Karunakaran became the

⁹⁵ The Karshaka Sangam's call for the implementation of the Land reform Act from below in its conference in Alleppey December 14, 1969 was an indication that now the Party was into an agitational mode in a big way. The conference had declared that "peasants and "Kudikidappukars" (homestead occupiers) should "seize their rights" under the Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act taking it that the measure would come into effect from January 1 next." 'Kerala Minister Warns Marxists Against Move for Forcible Land-grabbing', *The Hindu* 15/12/1969. The declaration was made even before the Bill had got the assent of the president. The importance of the Alleppey conference evident from the fact that this conference was attended by the CPI (M) General Secretary P. Sundarayya, Hare Krishna Konar, West Bengal Revenue Minister and the architect of the land reform movement in West Bengal, E. M. S. Nambudiripad and A. K. Gopalan, the all India President of the Kisan Sabha. The popular media called this surplus land occupying movement land grab movement.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

home minister of the State (1971-77), the methods of suppression were ‘upgraded’ and the culmination was the Emergency period, when the young Naxalites were brutally tortured in various torture camps set up across the State with the sole brief to remove the *Naxal menace* from the soil of Kerala once and for all. That was one of Karunakaran’s major ‘achievements’ in his own words.⁹⁷ Moreover, all the mainstream parties did not shy away from claiming credit for eliminating the Naxalites.

The CPI (M) too did not fight shy of claiming credit for this while in power. At the Ninth Congress of the CPI (M) in Madurai from June 27 to July 2, 1972 the party's General Secretary, P. Sundarayya held out loudly that the Party’s biggest achievement was that ‘it had quite successfully thwarted the danger of left adventurism - a disruptive force that had threatened the unity of the party.’⁹⁸

An attempt to revive the legacy of Naxalism was made in the 1980s with Janakkeeya Samskara Vedi (People’s Cultural Forum), a front organisation of those who launched the movement in the late 1960s. That was a period of cultural renaissance in Kerala; writers like K.G. Shankara Pillai, K. Satchidanandan, Kadamanitta Ramakrishnan, D Vinaya Chandran, Civic Chandran and many others led the cultural movement. Their literary contributions revolutionised the college and university campuses in the 1980s. However, the difference in the line of the Party - especially on the question of individual annihilation of who were considered class enemies - led to many splits in the movement again. Since then, Kerala witnessed a number of splits in the Naxal parties. In the recent past, the groups are seen

⁹⁷ Interview with K Karunakaran (2003). See also *Peoples Democracy*, 24 April and 22 May 1977.

⁹⁸ ‘CPM Policies Effective’, *The Hindu*, 3/7/1972.

supporting peoples' agitations in Kerala. The Maoists were also active in some parts of the Kerala but have hardly been able to supplant the CPI (M)-CPI combine.

V

The National Emergency was declared on June 25, 1975 by the Indira Gandhi Government. By its very nature, the Emergency foreclosed the democratic space for any organisational resistance in the country; so it was in Kerala. The only party which was capable of putting up an organisational resistance in Kerala was CPI (M) with its strong rural base; this did not take place. However, this does not mean that there was no resistance at all. People who held democracy as an ethical question protested against it from across the political spectrum in Kerala.⁹⁹ As the May Day declaration of the CPI (M) on May 1, 1976 rightly pointed out, "the threat of MISA and DIR hanged, like the sword of Damocles, over every honest person trying to defend the interests of the exploited sections of society, trying to defend democratic and fundamental rights."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ For example a Sarvodaya worker, K Radhakrishnan was arrested and jailed in Calicut. Socialists like Beneher were arrested in Calicut. A young girl Sulochana (a SFI activist) was picked from Calicut and tortured to know the whereabouts of two Naxal leaders who were in underground- Madhu Master and Damodaran Master- on August 28, 1975. She was in jail for 18 months. Another SFI activist, president of the Pathanmthitta Taluk (Quilon district) of the SFI was also arrested on part of the Naxalite haunt in Kerala. (*Peoples Democracy*, 24 April and 22 May 1977). CPI (M) MLA and the editor of the Party Paper *Deshabhimani*, P. Govindan Pillai was taken into custody for questioning about the whereabouts of the Naxal leader Venu as he took shelter at the Place of Govindan Pillai for a few days. (Interview with P Govindan Pillai and K Venu, 2003). A large number of Naxalites and Naxal sympathisers were hunted down. CPI (M) cadre, mostly from Northern Kerala were arrested and tortured. Young people from many campuses were arrested and either send off after questioning or kept in the torture camps. People who were no way connected to any kind of political activities but happens to be a friend or relative of an activists were tortured. Innocent people like rubber tapper Rajan and his wife Devaki committed suicide in Calicut fearing further torture. (Interview with the survivors of the Emergency torture, 2003). The list is exhaustive. Well known economist K N Raj had written to the Chief Minister Achutha Menon that "...unless the policies were reversed, some of us who had kept out of the political arena and remained silent after the imposition of emergency would be forced to react in a manner that could create more problems." Letter of Dr.KN Raj to the Chef Minster Achutha Menon, in September 1975, the letter was released on June 17, 1977 in Trivandrum, cited in *Peoples Democracy*, June 1977. He was reacting to the arrest of Sarvodaya worker K Radhakrishnan.

¹⁰⁰ 'May Day Manifesto of the CPI (M), May 1, 1976', reproduced in David Selbourne, *An Eye to India: The Unmasking of a Tyranny*, (New York: Penguin, 1977), p.413.

As far as the CPI was concerned, it was in the ruling coalition along with the Congress in Kerala with C Achutha Menon as the Chief Minister. And the fact that the coalition ruled for six years (as the term was extended under Emergency rule) without much discomforts shows that the CPI in Kerala had taken an axiomatic position of accepting Emergency with an *un-communist* eloquence. It may be noted here that the CPI's national leadership had stood by Indira Gandhi's Congress even before the Emergency was declared and even lent ideological defence to such measures as suspension of civil and constitutional rights in the name of defending the Constitution against what they described a semi-fascist challenge from the JP movement. The fact remains that, in Kerala, the coalition stayed put for some time after the post Emergency elections in 1977 when Central leadership of the CPI had shown signs of criticising the Emergency days as information of the 'excesses' were pouring out.

Initially the CPI welcomed the Emergency whole heartedly. According to them, this measure was necessary to prevent the Right wing advance in the country. For them, the JP movement was a disruptive "Right reactionary, neo-colonial and counter revolutionary force"¹⁰¹, masterminded by the CIA,¹⁰² which was trying to destabilise the progressive measures that were taken by Indira Gandhi government such as Bank nationalization, abolishing Privy Purses and so on. The JP movement, according to the CPI was the culmination of rightist protests and the core of this movement was the RSS and the Jan Sangh. The victory of the Janata front in Gujarat

¹⁰¹ It was like almost endorsing a document which was circulated among the partymen in the Narora session of the Congress (November, 1974). The document said: "Behind the facade of a partyless democracy lurk dark forces of Indian fascism well-organised and well-poised to destroy the democratic institutions and impose a reign of terror." cited in V Krishna Ananth, 'From Narora to Pachimarhi', *The Hindu*, 2.10/1998. Interestingly, this is what the Congress did –destroying the democratic institutions- by adopting Emergency.

¹⁰² 'National Emergency and Our Tasks, Resolution adopted by the Central Executive Committee', CPI, 30 June to 2 July, 1975. *Communist Party Publication*, pp.2-3.

on 12 June 1975 was the beginning of the hegemony of the rightist threat and the threat of it taking over the nation became close to a reality. Hence the Emergency was primarily a measure to curb the Right menace. The 20 point programme,¹⁰³ the most ambitious socialist project of Indira Gandhi to tackle rural poverty and towards building an egalitarian society, had impressed the CPI enormously; this, they saw as closer to the idea of a national democratic government. In a Resolution adopted by the Central Executive committee of the CPI on July 2, 1975, just a week after the declaration of the Emergency, the party assessed the political situation of the country and found that Emergency was a fight between the progressive bourgeoisie and the reactionaries and this will lead to a closer step to the national democratic revolution and thus have to support the Emergency. It said,

The recent developments inside the country signify that political differentiation and conflict inside the bourgeoisie has reached a new stage, unprecedented since Indian independence. This stage is characterised by the fact that those representing the anti-imperialist democratic sections of the bourgeoisie have been forced into using the repressive organs of the state power against those representing the pro-imperialist and most reactionary, pro-monopoly, pro-feudal and anti-communist sections. The situation opened up the most favourable possibilities for strengthening the united front of the working class, peasantry and other toiling sections with the anti-imperialist democratic national bourgeoisie in common struggle against right-reaction, and for moving this section of the bourgeoisie into more radical socioeconomic positions in the very interests of this common struggle. This the process through which progressive shift in state power can be brought out in a national –democratic revolution.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ [1] Accelerated efforts to bring down price of essential commodities, increase production, speed up procurement and streamline distribution of essential commodities [2] Implementation of agriculture land ceilings and quicker distribution of surplus land [3] House sites for landless and weaker sections [4] Abolition of bonded labour [5] Liquidation of rural indebtedness [6] Revision of minimum wages for agriculture labour and their enhancement wherever necessary [7] Five million more hectares to be brought under irrigation [8] Further generation of 2600 megawatts of power [9] Special help for handloom industry and protection of weavers [10] Improvement in quality and supply of cloths for the common man [11] Socialisation of urban and urbanised land- ceiling on ownership and on plinth area of new dwelling units [12] Prevention of tax evasion, summary trials and deterrent punishment to the offenders [13] Special legislation for confiscation of smugglers' properties [14] Liberalisation of investment procedures and action against misuse of import licences [15] New scheme for more effective participation of workers in industries [16] Removal of constraints on the movement of goods by trucks- national permit system to introduced [17] No income tax up to an annual income of Rs. 8000 [18] Supply of essential commodities at controlled prices to students in hostels [19] Provision of text books and stationery for students at controlled prices –also book banks and [20] New apprenticeship schemes to enlarge employment and training, especially of weaker sections. Selbourne, *An Eye to India*, p.377.

¹⁰⁴ 'National Emergency and Our Tasks, Resolution', p.6.

In Kerala, the Achutha Menon Government took all efforts to implement the 20 point programme of the Congress thereafter. He was all praise for the Prime Minister's 20-point economic programme and hailed the fact that the 'land reforms had pride of place' in it. The Chief Minister felt that "only after all the tenants gained ownership rights and all the surplus lands were taken over and distributed could they claim to have brought the entire programme to full fruition. In this task, the declaration of the Emergency and the 20-point economic programme were powerful incentives and it should be their endeavour to utilise this opportunity effectively and complete the "social revolution".¹⁰⁵ It justified their being in the Congress coalition that they were putting into practice of the CPI theory of peaceful transition to national democracy and then to socialism by sharing power with the progressive national bourgeoisie. The implementation of this Programme was a major step in that direction. "In fact, one reason why the CPI had welcomed the 20 Point Programme so enthusiastically was the expectation that its implementation would, apart from bringing out revolution in the agrarian structure, give the Party an opportunity to mobilise the people and thus extend its influence."¹⁰⁶

However, the realisation came sooner that the Emergency was not only against the Right wing reactionaries and it was also against Trade Unions and the masses. Despite its support to Emergency, wherever the CPI tried to protest against the excesses, its cadres too faced repression. "A year into Emergency and the mood of the people began to change. By mid- 1976, 'the glow began to fade' and there was a considerable discontent at the level of both the masses and the intellectuals. Many including the Congress's ally CPI, had begun pressing to call off the Emergency."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ 'Agrarian Reforms in Kerala', *The Hindu*, 8/1/1976.

¹⁰⁶ Bipan Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy, JP Movement and Emergency* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 187.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 184.

However, this was not possible in the existing conditions. When Indira Gandhi's son, Sanjay Gandhi took over the *de facto* authority and introduced his five point programme¹⁰⁸, the CPI opposed it much to the chagrin of Mrs. Gandhi¹⁰⁹ and "the CPI was virtually side-lined and was hamstrung and thwarted in its efforts to take up popular grievances; people resorting to agitation on their own was out of question."¹¹⁰ In less than a year and half, the Central Executive Committee of the CPI revised its attitude towards Emergency and said in October 1976 that:

The CEC is constrained to note that while the government correctly started by delivering stinging blows against the reactionaries, the emergency powers are now being used more and more against the democratic forces and the common people. There are increasing number of reports of highhandedness of officials, of harassment of innocent people, of collision of officials with landlords, money lenders hoarders and profiteers to frustrate the implementation of the 20 point programme, of repression against the landless and sharecroppers seeking to establish rights over their tiny patches of land, of attack against the workers and the trade union for carrying on normal trade union activities, of gruesome violence and coercion against weaker sections of the population by overzealous officials seeking to fulfil sterilization targets.¹¹¹

The large scale arrests of the communists (CPI (M), Naxalites and even CPI cadre), the anti-workers policies like curbing their rights, impounding DA instalments and bonus cut, eviction of small shop owners in the name of widening the roads, demolition of houses and settlements in the name of beautification of the city, censorship of media, compulsory sterilization programme and the fact that the much acclaimed 20 Point Programme to alleviate the rural poverty remained only on paper

¹⁰⁸[1]Increase adult literacy [1] Abolish dowry, [3] End caste system, [4]Beautify the environment and [5]a radical programme for family planning. "While the first three of the five points did not receive any great attention, the Emergency establishment was indeed enthusiastic with the idea of making the cities beautiful and containing the population." Ananth, *India Since Independence*, p. 170. The serious consequences of the implementation of the last two points turned the CPI against the Congress.

¹⁰⁹ Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy*, p. 200. Indira Gandhi was critical of the interference of the CPI in the internal matters of Congress, especially in West Bengal and Orissa. "Mrs. Gandhi has made it plain that she will brook no further interference or dictation from these self-styled monitors of Congress policies and actions, Editorial, *The Hindu*, 27/12/1976.

¹¹⁰Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy*, p. 188.

¹¹¹'Report and Resolutions of the Meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of India', New Delhi 24-27 October 1976, *Communist Party Publication*, November 1976, p. 36

made the CPI re-think on its unconditional support to the Indira Government.¹¹² The royal welcome accorded to the World Bank President Robert McNamara in New Delhi was an indication of the economic policies of the so called 'progressive' elements in the Congress.¹¹³

Upon this realisation, the CPI opposed the activities of Sanjay and his caucus and refuse to involve itself in the 5 point programme propagated by Sanjay Gandhi which irked Indira Gandhi. It opposed the proposal for the presidential form of government and the misuse and excesses in the Emergency. In the process, some of its cadres got arrested in many states. The CPI's assessment of its own past, as done in December 1977, said it all. It stated:

In the beginning it looked as though Emergency was declared only to meet the extreme rightist threat. But soon Indira Gandhi's other aims began to unfold. One, to curb the activities of Left and democratic parties and forces and to solve the capitalist crisis at the expenses of the common people, to the glee of monopolists and imperialists. Two, to undermine the parliamentary democratic set up of our country, change our Constitution to presidential system, establish her personal rule and make her son Sanjay Gandhi her successor.¹¹⁴

As for Kerala, where they were in power along with the Congress, had hardly any implications nor witnessed any instance of direct confrontation between these two parties. The myth was that K. Karunakaran, the Home minister (and Indira Gandhi loyalist) was more powerful than the CPI Chief Minister C. Achutha Menon and a lot

¹¹² As realising the threat from within the Congress, C Rajeswara Rao said "Since the split in the Congress the main danger to our secular-democratic set up has come from reaction and fascist forces outside the Congress. But now it is coming from the reactionary caucus inside the ruling party, which has taken shape and has grown under the conditions of Emergency . . . This is also because a section of reaction and fascism are also infiltrating to the Congress and Youth Congress. . . The reactionary caucus' inside the ruling party conspires to capture power through its activities behind the scene, burroughing in the central government apparatus and capturing the states by putting its stooges in power." C Rajeswara Rao, *New Age*, 14 November 1976.

¹¹³ 'Draft Political Review Report for the Eleventh Party Congress Adopted by the National Council of the Communist Party of India', New Delhi, 24-28, December, 1977 and 'Critical Notes of S A Dange and others', pp.3-4

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.3. The CPI members who opposed the ways of Indira- Sanjay combine and the caucus around them were put in jail in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, UP, Rajasthan, Haryana, Assam and Himachal Pradesh.

of things happened behind the Chief Minister's back. He was kept in dark in what was happening in the State.¹¹⁵

Protest or no protest, the CPI had begun to be seen as a party that supported the semi-fascist emergency that curbed all fundamental rights and pushed the masses into untold miseries. Moreover, the Party, at any point of time, including when its own Trade Union had been put to suffering, demanded the lifting of the Emergency. In 1977, when the Party lost heavily (except in Kerala where they came back to power once again in alliance with the Indira Congress), the Party regretted its mistakes and said that their main mistake was supporting the Emergency itself.¹¹⁶

Interestingly, the CPI (M) which was prophetic about the authoritarian rule of the Congress at the Centre did not put up an organised resistance against the Emergency when it became a reality. The 9th Congress of the CPI (M), in Madurai in June 27-July 2, 1972, had clearly spoken about the semi-fascist tendencies of the government at the Centre under the leadership of Indira Gandhi and it gave a call to "expose and fight the growing danger of authoritarianism and dictatorship of the Congress Party..."¹¹⁷ It also warned that the huge majority that Congress secured in the Parliament and the States does not mean stability in the deteriorating economic conditions in the country and called for a fight to protect civil liberties and democratic rights fighting the monster dictatorship of Indira Government.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ For instance when the Engineering College student P Rajan was picked up by the police and later was killed in one of the torture camps which was set up in Kerala to suppress the Naxalites, his father approached the Chief Minister to know the whereabouts of his son. Up on his enquiry the police chief briefed the Chief Minister that Rajan is absconding and so no such arrest took place. Achuthamenon, *Darikirippukkal*, pp. 49-50.

¹¹⁶ Draft Political Review Report for the Eleventh Party Congress (Adopted by the National Council of the Communist Party of India, New Delhi, 24-28, December, 1977 and Critical Notes of S A Dange and others, p.13.

¹¹⁷ 'The Political Resolution of the Ninth Congress of the CPI (M)', cited in the *Review Report Adopted by the Tenth Congress Jullundur April 2-8 1978*, Communist Party of India Marxist, 1978 p. 3.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

The Emergency was a period of trial for the CPI (M). Being in the opposition, with a strong cadre base, ideally, the CPI (M) could have resisted it in a better way.¹¹⁹ However the initial assessment of the Party was that the Emergency was an attempt by the ruling bourgeois Party against bourgeois parties of opposition¹²⁰ though the dictatorship and authoritarianism of the Indira Congress was highlighted by the Ninth Party Congress. The Party itself admitted in 1978 that there was a huge gap between the various statements and resolutions of the Polit Bureau and Central Committee and in actual practice. This was attributed to the ‘stiff resistance’ on the part of the Party’s leadership “to reassess the role of the bourgeois opposition parties when most of these parties, in practice, were slowly giving up their earlier programmatic and policy positions, and moving towards the programme of Jayaprakash Narayan and his resistance movement.”¹²¹ Moreover, severe inner-party ideological differences, constrained the Party to plunge into action. The Salkia Plenum Assessed the situation as:

The concept of contiguous areas, political bases, etc.[The tactical line advocated by the Sundarayya faction] in the 1973 Resolution was based on the immediate and direct application of the Perspective Tactical Line, it hampered the Party’s intervention in the democratic struggles sweeping the country, and did violence to the understanding of the class tactics of the Perspective Tactical Line. The Central Committee took a long time to disentangle itself from the errors in the resolution. It was bogged down for month in debates, more than a year of the Emergency period being absorbed by them.¹²²

The CPI assessed the JP movement as Right reactionary and to be fought whereas the assessment of the CPI (M) was that it contributed considerably to the people’s movement during the era; however, the CPI (M) was infested with ideological and political differences and could not take a decision on the support for

¹¹⁹This was not to understate the sacrifice of some of its leaders like Jyotirmoy Bosu and Dinesh Joarder, MPs from West Bengal, Noorul Huda, an MP from Assam, VS Achuthanandan, P K Chandranandan, Pinarai Vijayan and APKurian MLAs in Kerala out of 59 opposition Legislators arrested in 1975.

¹²⁰ Review Report Adopted by the Tenth Congress Jullundur April 2-8 1978, Communist Party of India Marxist, 1978, p. 30.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.34.

¹²² Report and Resolution of on Organisation, Adopted by the Salkia Plenum, December 27-31, 1978’, *Communist Party of India (Marxist)*, p. 63.

the movement. It assessed the period as “the victory over the dark forces of the dictatorship has, no doubt, become possible due to the new political alignment of democratic forces it took place during the course of people’s struggles in the years between 1972 and 1977, the JP movement between 1974-1978 making the biggest contribution.”¹²³ Its stand was that:

Our Party which was extending sympathy and support to the JP movement, characterised it as a resistance movement against Congress misrule, was principled and correct in rejecting the proposal of the Jana sangharsha Samities and in refusing to go into JP’s National Coordination Committee. Thus it jealously guarded its independent identity, and the proletarian class view point, while refusing to accept the terms stipulated by the National Coordination Committee and its sole leadership of Jayprakash Narayan.¹²⁴

However, it also added:

We had failed to project the platform of defence of democratic rights and civil liberties, and that we did not boldly give a call for wider mobilization around it or our pointing out of the short comings in adopting a completely correct tactical line to JP movement- a line that could have enabled us to have proper rapport with the masses behind JP movement. . .Our PB and CC did not do all that was necessary to defend bourgeois democracy when it was being rapidly eroded; that it did not adequately utilise the inner conflicts divisions of the bourgeois-landlord parties in furtherance of the struggle against the Congress government and its drive towards authoritarianism; and that it did not strive to rally the forces that could be rallied on the political platform for the defence of democracy, while all the time laying exclusive emphasis on the building up of the Left and democratic front.¹²⁵

As the Party admitted later, subjectivism and sectarianism that prevailed over the Party leadership prevented the Party from taking a correct political line towards the JP movement and Emergency.¹²⁶ In fact, the inner-Party conflicts were rampant which led to the resignation of the General Secretary of the Party, P Sundarayya, from the position he held since the party’s foundation in 1964. He resigned from the post of General Secretary and also from the Polit Bureau in August 1975. He cited the first

¹²³‘Tenth Congress of Communist Party of India Marxist’, Jullundur April 2-8 1978,p. 7.

¹²⁴Ibid, P.14.

¹²⁵Ibid, pp. 29-30.

¹²⁶ A considerable section of the leadership from the Centre to the State were in favour of taking part in the JP movement to fight the Indira Congress and resist the Emergency. For instance, Jyotirmoy Bosu, an MP from West Bengal defied the Party and attended the meeting of the Opposition Parties held on June 25, 1975. As a matter of fact he was one of the few leaders of the CPI (M) were arrested and was imprisoned during Emergency. P. Sundarayya, *Why I resigned from G.S and P.B*(New Delhi: India Publishers and Distributors, 1997), pp.8 -17.

and foremost reason for his resignation was in protest against the decision of the majority of the CC members to support the JP movement. He said:

My resignation is due to the fact that the CC majority has decided for joint actions with pro-imperialist Jana Sangh with para-military fascist (storm-trooper like RSS) as its core in the name of fighting emergency, which I consider very harmful to our party; both among democratic masses in our country and abroad, we will be getting isolated from the anti-imperialist and socialist forces.¹²⁷

There were a list of political and ideological reasons for his resignation beginning from the political line towards Emergency to the strategy of revolution, role of Trade Union and on the strategic importance of partisan struggles, and equal significance of legal and illegal (parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities) of the Party and so on.¹²⁸ Sundarayya, known as a hardliner, was unhappy with the pronounced shift towards constitutional and parliamentary path since the Kerala and West Bengal experience and undermining the importance of ‘building unexposed units, in every village, in every factory, workshops and training of voluntary corps, etc.’¹²⁹ His resignation exposed the major ideological and political struggle in the Party since 1967 which did not come for discussions in the highest body of the Party-

¹²⁷ Ibid, p.1.

¹²⁸ Other ideological and political factors resulted in his resignation quoted were the failure of the PB to ‘concretise the tactical line, its application to TU, Kisan and other mass fronts, and its application in building the party organisation, open and secret sections.’ He was also critical of the independent functioning of the TUs and the State Committees bypassing the Party Centre and criticized the neglect of the peasant front; forging the unity of the poor, middle peasants and agriculture workers. He advocated for a strategy of building up the peasant movements in the contiguous areas of the industrial working class centers as political bases first then to guerrilla areas to develop this into liberation areas. The working class centers was to take the initiative to develop such areas. For this purpose priority areas to be marked and to develop them as political bases. The activities of the party can be extended from these bases. He further accused that the PB was no longer working as a collective body. He alleged that “when in the PB, there cannot be frank discussions about major Party units like Bengal, Kerala, or T.U front, before the PBMs of these States and fronts, and when the two PB members, BTR and myself, are at loggerheads on many issues, and with no prospect of improving the situation, it is better to resign from the post of G.S and P.B instead of further damaging the Party.” As far as Kerala is concerned, there were difference of opinion in the PB about forming a united front including Kerala Congress, proposed by the Kerala State Committee and ‘joint action committees with all India Right reactionary forces like Congress (O), B.L.D and Jana Sangh. . . (Ibid, pp.2-3.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p.55. While accusing the Party for its unpreparedness in the event of attack from Landlord – bourgeois parties like in West Bengal, he said, “as a serious revolutionary party wedded to the cause of successful revolution, we forget that our party is bound to be attacked by our class enemy and we must always consciously build a secret part of the party, and a secret apparatus. Keeping this in view, we must always keep as many PMs [Party Members] and contacts as possible unexposed, in every mass organisation, in every place, village or factory or institution.” Ibid, p. 106

the Party Congress- anytime since then.¹³⁰ When the Emergency was declared on 25 June 1975, due to the internal strife, the CPI (M) was not prepared to resist it in an organisational manner. Bipan Chandra sums up the situation as follows:

The CPI (M)'s relationship with the JP movement had been complex. It had refused to join the movement because of the large presence of right-wing and communal parties. At the same time it had given the movement support because of its objective of bringing down the Congress regime. The CPI (M), too, was unprepared politically for the promulgation of the Emergency. . It was convinced that the Emergency regime would go all-out in repressing the Party and its front organisations, and that a tough, long-term and protracted struggle lay ahead of it. But the party had neglected underground work and was not prepared organisationally for an immediate struggle against the government. The immediate task, therefore, was to avoid premature confrontation with the regime, to preserve its forces for the time being, and to avoid large scale arrests of its cadres. The Party, therefore, decided to keep a low profile for the time being and not to organise any protest movements against the imposition of the Emergency, or later against its excesses. A reason for the paralysis of the party was the continuous- almost one-year-long- internal division on the question of joint political work with the Jan Sangh and other rightist parties in the struggle against the Congress and the Emergency. This led to end, to the resignation by P. Sundarayya from the post of General Secretary, because he was opposed to such cooperation. Nor did the latter materialized.¹³¹

However, this confusion that prevailed in the Party's central leadership affected the lower units as democratic centralism was in practice. The central leadership failed to reach the correct message to the units and thus naturally the units were not clear about the nature of resistance to be organised. Hence, the lower units acted according to their understanding of the situation. It is true that the Central Committee of CPI (M) gave a call to the nation to mobilise the broadest sections in struggle for democratic right in a meeting which was held in Calcutta in July 15-20, 1976. It emphasised on the Left and democratic unity for a Left alternate policies. Though it did not give a call to the CPI directly,¹³² it hoped that "the ranks and followers of the Right Communist Party would awaken by the experience of the past

¹³⁰ Interestingly, the CPI (M) continues to deny any such document having been circulated by Sundarayya. There is, however, evidence of this document now after it was published by some groups closer to the CPI (ML) and also from veiled reference to it in the CPI (M)'s debate since then.

¹³¹ Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy*, p. 219.

¹³² The CPI (M) did not give a direct call to the CPI as a Left Party as the relationship between the two parties were still hostile and mudslinging continued by both. A CPI (M) leader remarked that "for any unity or united front between the CPI (M) and the Right CP since the two fundamentally divergent political ideological policies adopted are such that *unity and united front* between the two are simply inconceivable (emphasis original)." M Basavapunnaiah, 'Why are They Afraid of United Action', Rejoinder to Right CP, *Peoples Democracy*, 22 August 22 1976.

and particularly of the last one year of internal emergency, to the dangers of the policy pursued by their leadership and their help in forging of the unity of the Left and democratic forces.”¹³³ It also fervently made appeals to all parties, groups, individuals interested in the preservation of democratic rights to come together and bring about the broadest mobilising of (our) people in this sacred struggle irrespective of their Party affiliations.¹³⁴ However, these were not put into practice as the Party itself was suffering from inner strife.¹³⁵

In the midst of this confusion, in Kerala two district committees took part in the United Committees against Emergency which included the Jana Sangh. And the State Committee asked these district Committees to withdraw from those at once. There were clearly two understandings in the Party; one to join the opposition front against Emergency with all parties irrespective of the political character of the parties to fight the authoritarian government of Mrs Gandhi and other to keep off from any front involving the Jana Sangh and RSS as they were Right reactionary communal parties. A Polit Bureau statement which was sent to the units on June 26, 1975 said that the Party’s stand was that the ban on RSS and Naxalites by the Indira government was correct.¹³⁶ In Kerala these were the two organisations resisting the Emergency and the Polit Bureau resolution created confusion on the stand that should be taken on this front. Hence, in Kerala, the CPI (M), by and large, missed the bus while the RSS, Jana Sangh and the Naxalites and individual members of CPI (M) resisted the Emergency there.

¹³³ *Peoples Democracy*, 1 August 1976.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*

¹³⁵ Politburo members of CPI (M) including E.M.S. P. Rama Murthi, HarkishanSingh Surjeet, A.K. Gopaln and Jyoti Basu met the prime minister and submitted a 13 page memorandum on April 9th 1976 on the development of the country since the declaration of Emergency. “The Party has been warning for long that pro-landlord and pro-monopolist policies would lead the country into a crisis and has been making alternate policies which alone would solve the crisis. *New Age*, 25 April 1976.

¹³⁶ Sundarayya, *Why I resigned from G.S and P.B*, p. 20.

As far as the CPI (M) is concerned, the resistance was limited to some pockets in the Northern districts such as Kozhikode and Kannur and out of 200 persons arrested from on July 10, 1976 in the State for breaking prohibitory orders, a considerable majority were from this part of the state.¹³⁷ There were stray incidence of arrests of CPI (M) leaders in Kerala; in Alleppey, the trade union centre of the Party, V.S.Achuthanandan and P.K. Chandranandan were arrested; A.P. Kurian was arrested in Ernakulam and Pinarai Vijayan and M.V.Raghavan were arrested in Kannur under MISA in June 1975. Though the “CPI (M) organised a few demonstrations in Kerala; however, it soon gave up when its leaders were arrested but soon released.”¹³⁸

A.K. Gopalan was one of the CPI (M) leaders who organised resistance against Emergency in Kerala. He found a new way of defying the IPC 144 which was issued in the area by house to house campaign taking three to four cadre with him at a time. His first reaction to Emergency was his famous statement, ‘a woman Hitler has born’ describing the fascist tendencies of Indira Gandhi. In his speech in the parliament, opposing the motion for the approval of Emergency moved by Jagjivan Ram, he said, “Indira Gandhi and her party reduced this parliament into a farce and an object of contempt. I was in jail for a week. My Party members Jyotirmoy Bosu¹³⁹ and Nurul Huda are in jail . . . On behalf of the CPI (M), I oppose the declaration of Emergency and also the adoption of the same by the house. . . How can one justify this murder of democracy. . . There is no district, village in Kerala where 144 is not declared. Hence more than 5 people cannot walk together, most of the cinema theatres have called of the second shows for the situation is so bad; nobody is able to walk out

¹³⁷ *Peoples Democracy*, 20 July 1976.

¹³⁸ Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy*, p. 171.

¹³⁹ Who had raised the Maruti scandal and earned the wrath of Indira Gandhi and her establishment

after 8 PM.”¹⁴⁰ It was reported in the *People’s Democracy* that the Congress goondas and police attacked party offices, establishments and their homes in Kannur district.”¹⁴¹ Gopalan was leading this political campaign in this district.

The Emergency was a challenge to the very existence of the Trade Unions. Hence, the unions, including the AITUC, protested against the draconian rules. In Kerala, the CITU protested against the Bonus ordinance, DA cut, layoffs, retrenchment and other un-worker measures. However, the protest could not be developed into a nationwide one; except some pockets in the country. The CPI (M) criticised this inability in a document adopted by the Central Committee of the CPI (M) in New Delhi on 10-16, December 1983 on the Task on the Trade Union Front criticised the *economism* of the trade union front of the Party and its inability to go beyond the Left –democratic consciousness- not revolutionary consciousness. This drove them to “the mute acceptance of the Emergency, except in the case of Kerala where a call for strike was given.”¹⁴²

However, the CPI (M) had learnt a lesson here too. During a veritable crisis like Emergency, when the civil liberties were taken away and common masses suffered heavily, the Party must have gone for a united front against the authoritarian regime in a minimum programme to bring down such a government in power. Mao’s thesis of the principal enemy is relevant here. On the basis of this, during the Chinese revolution, the CPC went for a united front with Kuomintang for the second time against Japanese imperialism despite the fact that Kuomintang was responsible for white terror and thus annihilation of the communists in 1927-28 which led to the historic Long March. This indeed was also “the lesson drawn by the world communist

¹⁴⁰ *AKG’s Speech in the Parliament on July 21, 1975, Opposing the National Emergency*, (Calicut: District Committee Publication, 1975) [Malayalam], pp.7-11.

¹⁴¹ *Peoples Democracy*, 6 February 1977

¹⁴² ‘Tasks on the Trade Union Front adopted by the CC of the CPI (M) in New Delhi on 10-16, December 1983’, cited in *Documents of Party Organisation*, p. 453.

movement from the victory of fascists in Europe and recorded clearly by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci and Bulgaria's Georgi Dimitrov; the phrase "United Front" itself was Dimitrov's contribution to the political lexicon.”¹⁴³ The CPI (M) lost in identifying the principal enemy- Congress government then and became a part of the resistance movement. As far as electoral gains were considered, CPI (M), had left far behind of those who opposed the Emergency.

It might sound an irony, but, during the national Emergency, the Naxalites in Kerala fought for the protection of the ‘bourgeoisie’ democracy. They were the one mocked at the parliamentary democracy and raised the slogan that election is the festival of asses, revolution is the festival of masses and so on; this may have been true in normal times. Emergency had taught many of them of the importance of democracy, even if it was a bourgeois one. They, though small in number, resisted emergency; challenged the government through waging attacks on its apparatus. Three major illegal torture camps were opened in three districts- Kakkayam in Calicut, Edapally in Cochin and Sastankotta in Trivandrum- exclusively to torture the Naxalites who were ‘picked up from various places with or without any charges. The notorious Rajan case was part of this.¹⁴⁴

Even after many years Karunakaran was proud that he could suppress the Naxalite menace in Kerala successfully. However he denied that his government used force to achieve this.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the Naxalite movement was short lived in Kerala even though a serious effort to revive the movement had taken place after

¹⁴³V Krishna Ananth, The Left and the Congress I’, *The Hindu*, 5/5/1997

¹⁴⁴Rajan, a final year student of the Regional Engineering College (presently christened as National Institute of Technology) was picked up by the police from the college along with another student Joseph Chali on March 1, 1976 for his alleged involvement in the Kayanna police station attack. He succumbed to the torture in the Kakkayam torture camp. The persistent effort of his father Echara Warrior could finally establish his death in police custody and the then home minister K. Karunakarn who became the chief minister in 1977 was forced to resign upon the strictures passed by the Kerala High Court

¹⁴⁵Interview with K Karunakaran 2003.

Emergency was lifted in 1977. Though the Marxists claimed that the CPI-Congress combine government instituted torture camps mainly to torture the Marxists and other opponents of that front government¹⁴⁶, in practice, these camps were meant to finish off the Naxalite menace for once and for all.¹⁴⁷ To sum up as Krishna Ananth holds:

The story of the resistance to Emergency will not be complete without recalling the actions, from underground, by the Naxalites in Kerala. For most part, the Naxalites consisted of young boys, still in their teens, and students in some of the best colleges, willing to put their life in line to defend democracy. Of significance, here is the resistance in Kerala where the state government was headed by C Achutha Menon of the Communist Party of India (CPI). The Emergency provided an opportunity to K Karunakaran, the home minister, to prove that he was as good as Bansi Lal and V C Shukla when it came to handling any resistance.¹⁴⁸

VI

The leadership of the CPI (except for people like Dange), was very critical of the Emergency even while it was only a few months after India was pushed into a phase of *unfreedom*. Naturally, it was expected that the CPI in Kerala will break its ties with the Congress in the 1977 elections¹⁴⁹ and return to the CPI (M) led Left and Democratic Front. Reading the message on the wall, the CPI (M) had given an open call for such an alliance in Kerala, provided that the CPI broke its ties with the Congress. However this did not happen and the CPI, instead, laid down the condition that the CPI (M) distance itself from the Janata Party, which had by now come to formally include the Bharathiya Jan Sangh too. According to them it was an amalgam of Right wing reactionary parties. The CPI (M) laboured hard to explain the

¹⁴⁶ *Peoples Democracy*, 28 May 1978.

¹⁴⁷ Rajan case and the Vijayan Nair case (he was missing since the police arrested him on March 5, 1976) in Kerala were not two isolated tragedies- these were shocking and irrefutable evidence which go a long way to prove that a diabolical conspiracy for terrorisation, torture and liquidation of political opponents, younger elements in particular, was being pursued systematically by Karunakaran, his political allies and servitors and his cronies in the state administration. The authoritarian shield of the Emergency provided immunity from exposure of these terrible crimes. *Peoples Democracy*, 24 April 1977.

¹⁴⁸ Ananth, *India Since Independence*, pp.178-79.

¹⁴⁹ In the 1977 election the ruling alliance included- Congress, CPI, Kerala Congress, RSP and Muslim League and the opposition alliance CPM, Kerala Congress (B), Janata and Muslim League (Opposition).

difference between the Congress and the Janata Party and that the need of the hour was to defeat the Congress regime which was responsible for the miseries of Emergency at any cost.¹⁵⁰ It stated that, for the CPI the Janata was right-reactionary, anti-people and pro-imperialist'; however, despite its class character, it cannot deny the "historical role it is playing in defence of democracy and against authoritarianism." The CPI (M)'s argument was that "the congress party is bourgeois-landlord party led by the big bourgeoisie and collaborating with foreign finance capital" and authoritarian too.¹⁵¹

This war of words continued through the Party newspapers and public speeches by the leaders of the two Parties justifying their stand as the correct political line. Finally, the CPI made it clear that they were going ahead with the Congress-led front in Kerala. Dismissing the possibility of deserting the ruling front, a CPI leader in Kerala said that "What applies to the Rama Rajya there need not necessarily apply to the Parasurama Rajya here."¹⁵² This made it clear that the CPI will have two different lines -- one for the national and another for Kerala.

In general, the mood across the country was that only a united opposition against the Congress party will help salvage democracy. The fact is that the Emergency was yet to be withdrawn and hence the imperative was for a grand unity of all forces opposed to the Congress and Indira Gandhi and the Emergency to gather

¹⁵⁰ The CPM resolution said: "The CPM while entertaining no illusions about the Janata Party and its programmatic pronouncements and while consistently striving to forge unity of left and democratic forces, does take into serious account the present stand of the Janata Party on the issue of Emergency rule, on the 42nd Constitution amendment, on the Congress Party's drive towards authoritarian rule, etc. It is in this situation that the CPM is entering the polls with a view to mustering the maximum number of votes in protest against the Emergency rule of the Congress and the authoritarian regime of the Congress Party and to inflict a defeat on the Congress. . . the CPM is of the view that the snap election is a challenge to all the people and the Opposition political parties and in particular to the left and democratic parties and considers it its bounden duty to mobilise all the popular forces that can and must be mobilised to register their strong protest and irreconcilable opposition to the ruling party's drive towards one-party dictatorship and authoritarian rule."¹⁵⁰ 'Marxist Party to Seek Electoral Adjustments', *The Hindu*, 31/1/1977.

¹⁵¹ *Peoples Democracy*, August 7, 1977.

¹⁵² 'CPI Stand will Not Affect Kerala Front', *The Hindu*, 5/2/1977.

around. In Kerala, the CPI (M) organised large demonstrations, highlighted the various instances of high-handedness during the months after June 1975 and held the Achutha Menon ministry responsible for all that went wrong with civil rights.¹⁵³ Its hopes were raised when stalwarts like C. Achutha Menon, the outgoing chief minister of the CPI and the Industries Minister T.V.Thomas and M.N Govindan Nair and 12 other sitting MLAs, including the State Secretary N.E. Balram, announced their decision to not contest the elections in the state assembly in 1977; though they did not spell out anything against the Emergency for this decision, it was presumed.¹⁵⁴ It was a fact that there was a severe inner-party crisis within the CPI leadership in Kerala and hence the CPI (M) expected that ‘a sizable number of people from the CPI and the Congress’¹⁵⁵ will revolt against their respective parties which will be in favour of the CPI (M) led front. After a gap of eight years, the CPI (M) had a good prospect to win the Assembly elections. Namboodiripad was confident of revolts within the Congress and other parties and the CPI (M) was on the lookout for these rebels.¹⁵⁶ There were, indeed, murmurs within the Congress too with A.K. Antony, a prominent youth leader of the Congress, already raising, what may be held a banner of revolt even in the days of high sycophancy at the Guwahati session of the Congress; Antony had spoken against Sanjay Gandhi’s role then.

¹⁵³Namboodiripad said that “the stand of the opposition parties was that not only chief minister Karunakaran but all those ministers who were also ministers during Emergency were responsible for the atrocities committed by the police as had been revealed in the Rajan case. All of them should resign.” *Peoples Democracy*, 24 April 1977.

¹⁵⁴ While refuting the claim of Achutha Menon that the ruling coalition will win the forthcoming election, EMS Namboodiripad said; “No realistic observer of the election scene in Kerala however will share his optimism. The leaders of the ruling coalition themselves had realised that the opposition including the CPI (M) has become stronger since the two previous elections. That was precisely why they made hectic efforts to rope in the political party of the Nair Service Society, the NDP and that of Ezhavas the SRP.” *Peoples Democracy*, March 13, 1977.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Marxist Party to Seek Electoral Adjustments’, *The Hindu* 31/1/1977.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

However, the ruling coalition retained power in Kerala in the 1977 elections even while the Congress and the CPI were simply mauled across the country. In Kerala, the CPI increased its number of assembly seats from 16 in 1970 to 23 in 1977 with the highest margin of vote share the CPI ever secured (9.94 percent). Whereas the CPI (M)'s seats were reduced from 29 to 17; it also lost its vote share marginally. The CPI (M) drew a blank from Kerala insofar as Lok Sabha seats were concerned for which elections were held simultaneously in 1977. This was, perhaps for the first time in its history, that the CPI (M) went unrepresented in the Lok Sabha from Kerala. This indeed was a vote for the governance of the Achutha Menon government¹⁵⁷ and also for providing a stable government which was rare in the history of Kerala hitherto.

However, in the larger spectrum, the mandate against the Emergency affected the CPI too. Being and seen as being a supporter of Emergency, the Party lost considerably in the general elections. In 1971, CPI had 23 MPs (4.73% votes) in the Lok Sabha which reduced to just 7 members in 1977 elections with a low 2.82 percent of votes. Of these seven, four came from Kerala and three from Tamil Nadu, where too the CPI was part of the winning alliance consisting of the AIADMK, Congress and CPI; it may be noted that Indira Gandhi's Congress party did well across Southern India – Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala – even while the party lost big time in the Northern, Western and Eastern India. And among those

¹⁵⁷ Even though the Kerala Land Reform (Amendment) Act was passed in October 1969, just before the EMS ministry resigned, the credit of implementing the Act on June 1, 1970 onwards went to the Achutha Menon Ministry. The Ministry also took over 22000 hectares under the occupation of British owned Kannan –Devan Hills Produce Company in favour of agrarian reforms. Nationalization of forest land, Intensive Paddy Development project in the Kole in Trichur, Kuttanad development scheme, Kerala Agricultural Workers Bill, 1972 by Congress Agriculture and Labour Minister, Vakkom Purushothaman in November 1972 (The Act came to effect in November 1975), one Lakh Houses scheme for the poor landless workers which was launched in October 1971 were few of the progressive measures taken by the ministry headed by Achutha Menon. Achutha Menon Ministry proved that what an extent a Communist Party could act in a democratic set up even while in an alliance with bourgeoisie party.

who lost elections in 1977 included Indira Gandhi herself, Sanjay Gandhi and all those who were in the cabinet during the Emergency (but had not left the fold as did Jagjivan Ram).

The CPI (M) too did not gain from its stand against Emergency, insofar as Kerala was concerned. It had high expectations. In Parliament, its seats came down from 25 in 1971 with 5.12 vote share to 22 seats with 4.29 percent of vote share. The defeat was baffling. This was a major set-back for the consolidation and expansion scheme of the CPI (M). The stagnation in the party membership became a major point of discussion in the Party Congress after the Emergency. Despite the strikes and peasant mobilization and other radical activities from 1972 to 1977, the Party membership increased from 107000 to 118000 only.¹⁵⁸ Though not in power, the CPI (M) mobilised a large number of peasants for the land reform movement and Kerala also witnessed a surge in the number of workers' struggles during this period. However, the Party was conscious that not being in power for a long time will sap the morale of its cadre.

As for the country as a whole, the Party's influence was waning. There was not any visible changes in the correlation of forces in the country. A realignment of political forces became necessary. The failure to return to power in Kerala, though the situation was favourable for a comeback, added to the Party's concern. This was the immediate context for the CPI (M) to think about revamping the organisation and the Tenth Congress of the Party (April 2-8, 1978 at Jullundur) had decided upon to hold a party plenum to look into various matters affecting the Party. The political

¹⁵⁸. 'Task on the Trade Union Front, Document adopted by the CC, September 10-16, 1983, New Delhi', cited in *Documents on Party Organisation*, p.451. "Since 1966 every year more than a million and half workers have been going on strike. In 1972, the loss of mandays in strikes and lock-outs was 20.5 million, in 1976 it was 20.6 million. In 1974, the year of Railway strike, it was 31.2 million; in 1975 by June when the Emergency was declared, it was already exceeded 16 million . . . in 1978 it was 27 million, in 1979 43 million; in 1980 21 million, in 1981 25 million and in 1982 62 million including the Bombay Textile strike. Ibid, pp.451-52.

resolution of the Congress laid down “as the foremost task of the Party, the bringing about of a radical realignment of political forces in the country, a realignment that brings into existence of a united front of the Left and democratic forces which constitutes at present the only progressive alternative to the two bourgeois landlord combinations.”¹⁵⁹ It further emphasised the need for bringing about the broadest possible elements together who need not support the economic programme of the Party or the Left and democratic front to fight against a larger danger - authoritarianism.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the Party was trying to recover from the sectarian onslaught of the Sundarayya days and it was imperative now for the party, after his resignation. It may be noted that the resignation, even if submitted in 1976, was not accepted by the party immediately!

Organisational weakness of the Party was evident now than ever before. The plenum was held in this context where the challenge was to retrieve the party from the confusion that marked its stand during the emergency and also hamstrung its cadre from launching an all-out resistance to it while at the same time remain conscious of the rising strength of the Jan Sangh. The spirit of the debate and the resolution then was “while emphasising the political line pursued by the Party as correct, the ‘need and urgency of expanding the Party organisation in a big way to discharge the responsibilities facing the Party today- the responsibility of forging the unity of the Left and democratic forces on a national scale and of bringing about a realignment of political forces in the country.’”¹⁶¹ There was also concern about the ‘erosion of popular votes in certain important pockets such as Palghat and Allepey districts,

¹⁵⁹ ‘Political Resolution, 10th Congress’, cited in *Salkia Plenum*, pp.3-4.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Documents of the Eleventh Congress of the CPI (M), Viayawada, January 26-31, 1982’, *Communist Party of India(Marxist)*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 38.

¹⁶¹ *Salkia Plenum*, p. 1.

strong bases of the Party hitherto¹⁶² in the 1977 elections. The reading of the Plenum on the political situation of the Kerala in this context was:

As a matter of fact, our political campaigns have not made any significant change in the correlation of political forces in the State. The anti-CPI (M) coalition that was forged in 1969 continued to block the advance of Left and democratic forces; the little rift and fissures that came out on occasions did not lead to any major change in the political situation of the State. The weakness of our Party should be noted while evolving the political tactical line for the State and in working out appropriate forms of building the mass organisations, leading struggles and consolidating mass movement into well organised and developing party of the working class in the State.”¹⁶³

The call for building up a *Mass Revolutionary Party* by the Plenum¹⁶⁴ was taken seriously by the Party while most of the organisational problems like federalism, constraints posed by the structure of democratic centralism, the cardinal principle of the Party were left to continue without qualification. Two organisations came into existence at the all India level- the DYFI in Ludhiana founded in November 1980 and the AIDWA in Madras in 1981. And an Agricultural Workers Union was set up in October 1981 from Vijayawada. There was considerable growth in the party membership and membership in the mass organisations in all the communist bastions and modest growth in the Hindi speaking areas after the Salkia Plenum and upto the Eleventh Party Congress in 1982 at Vijayawada; the Party membership in Kerala increased from 67370 to 104,085 in 1982. And the total membership of the mass

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 16.

¹⁶³ The plenum identified the weakness of the Party in Kerala as that it lacked ideological and political activity despite that fact that Kerala has 67366 members (42000 members+26000 candidates), 8054 branches, 803 local committees, 81 Area Committees. “What this system of Party Organisation lacks is the process of reporting from the higher to the lower committees and vice versa, so that the entire Party is involved in the evolution and implementation of policies... Looking at the problems of recruitment and education of Party members on a large scale and making them function as disciplined members of a revolutionary party from the narrow routine point of view, isolated from the ideological –political work among Party members, is bound to raise innumerable organisational problems. This weakness of the Party organisation has to be rapidly overcome; otherwise the Party in the State is in a big trouble.” Ibid, p. 18.

¹⁶⁴ In short the Plenum called for building a mass revolutionary party and expand into weaker areas such as Hindi speaking States, building up a strong Centre and developing all India mass organisations, strengthening the cardinal principle of the Party- democratic Centralism and fight federalism and bureaucratization rampaging the Party

organisations stood at 22 Lakh.¹⁶⁵ Thus the CPI (M) became a mass revolutionary Party in Kerala.

As the Plenum had given a serious call for strengthening the bases and expansion of the Party to the other areas, especially to the Hindi speaking states, the CPI (M) was ready to have talks with the CPI for a broader Left Democratic Front even while the CPI was still in the United Front government in Kerala. Interestingly, every instance of scuffle in the united front was highlighted by the CPI (M) organs¹⁶⁶ as it was clear that the government was not going to stay for long; and it was only a matter of time before the CPI returned to the fold.

The CPI too was in a reconciliation mode; it had begun to think aloud that supporting the Emergency was the biggest mistake. And the Party was ready to have an open discussion with the CPI (M). However, in the beginning, it was not prepared to leave the A.K. Antony led government¹⁶⁷ and asked the CPI (M) to join with the progressive elements within the Congress; while the CPI (M) repeated its stand that only after severing the ties with the Congress, they will think of an alliance with the CPI - electoral or otherwise. The CPI (M) State Committee statement on the CPI's State Council's call to the Party to cooperate with other Leftists forces without preconditions, said that "the Right CP's condition that the CPI (M) should give up its opposition to the Antony Government is not acceptable to it. And as long as the Right

¹⁶⁵'Draft political Organisational Report, CPI (M), Vijayawada', p.4. The total membership of the Party at the time of the 10th Congress was 161000 and at the time of the 11th Congress it had increased to 271000. Kerala and West Bengal together accounted for 186000 (around 69 percent) and 85000 from all over India.

¹⁶⁶For instance the *Peoples Democracy* was consistently highlighting the rifts and fissures that came up in the United Front.

¹⁶⁷A.K. Antony, who had raised his voice against Sanjay Gandhi even in the midst of the Emergency had replaced K. Karunakaran as Chief Minister after it became known that Rajan, the student from the REC Calicut was done to death while in police custody and hence made to resign.

CP continues its partnership in that Government, the question of the CPI (M) cooperating with the Right CP does not arise.”¹⁶⁸

This polemics continued for some more time. The Bhatinda Congress of the CPI in 1978, meanwhile, carried out a self-criticism and in the new political context, the political resolution of the Congress called for larger unity with the CPI (M) also for a patient and persistent effort for building a broader unity of the Left. It said:

In the new political situation that faces us today, that task of uniting the left forces in the country and in particular of developing united mass actions and closer relations between the CPI and the CPI (M) assumes special importance. This is increasingly desired by the working class and working people, by the radical middle class, by the youth and students, by all the democratic forces in the country. So long as the masses and the progressive sections in other parties do not see the two left parties- the CPI and the CPI (M)- seriously come to closer, they cannot develop adequate faith in the possibilities of a left and democratic alternative.¹⁶⁹

Not everything was fine with the ruling front in Kerala since 1977. Four Chief Ministers in the 32 months between March 1977 and October 1979: K Karunakaran and A K Antony (Congress), P K Vasudevan Nair (CPI), C.H. Muhammad Koya (an IUMML leader was Chief Minister for two months in the late 1979) before Kerala came under another spell of President’s Rule. The State witnessed major political realignments and in the January 1980 general elections, the CPI was back to the Left Democratic Front after a gap of 11 years. The LDF then consisted of the CPI (M), CPI, Congress (U), Kerala Congress (Mani Group), Kerala Congress (Pillai Group), RSP and the All India Muslim League, which had broken away from the IUMML after the Emergency. On the lines of the Salkia Plenum, the CPI (M) in Kerala was turning into a mass Party. Strangely, the 1951 line continued to remain as the precept and a revolutionary transformation remained there on paper. This, aside the concept of a mass revolutionary party remained the major contradiction if it had to be seen from

¹⁶⁸ *Peoples Democracy*, 20 November 1977.

¹⁶⁹ Documents of the Eleventh Congress of the Communist Party of India, Bhakna Nagar, Bhatinda- 31 March to 7 April 1978, *Communist Party Publication*, New Delhi, 1978, pp.36-37.

the precepts of Marxism-Leninism, a phrase that remained central in the party's vocabulary.

The United Democratic Front consisting of the Congress (I), IUML, Kerala Congress (Joseph Group), the PSP, NDP and the SRP was, strangely supported by the Janata Party. Since the 1977 elections, one of the factions of Kerala Congress became part of either of the Fronts and when the Kerala Congress splintered into more factions the leaders chose the front according to their whims and fancies.

The CPI (M) led LDF returned to power in the Assembly elections on 22 January 1980. For the Marxists it was after a gap of 11 years since its government was forced to resign in 1969 due to the internal rivalries in the coalition. The CPI (M) registered an impressive victory winning 35 seats (from 19 in 1977) in the 1980 elections. The LDF secured 93 seats in the 140 member Assembly. The LDF won 12 out of 20 Lok Sabha seats in the 1980 elections. However, the E. K. Nayanar led government too could not complete its term. It fell following the withdrawal of support to the government by the Kerala Congress (M) and the Janata (S) in 1981. The CPI (M) reacted; "what the Congress (I) was unable to achieve through its slanderous propaganda, its exploitation of the activities of the RSS and Naxalites, was achieved by the defection of a section of the Congress (S) from the Ministry, followed by the desertion of the Kerala Congress (Mani)." ¹⁷⁰

The Kerala unit of the Party was in self-consolation mode during the Vijayawada Congress in January 1982; it said that it could not be expected to display the same unity of common purpose that was expected of a Left Front Ministry... the class basis of these parties prevented them from identifying themselves with the

¹⁷⁰Documents of the Eleventh Congress of the CPI (M)', p. 36. The CPI (MP blamed that these parties were curbing the progressive measures such as decentralization, disbursement of pensions for agricultural workers and also the democratic functioning of the labour department. Ibid, p.37.

policies and measures undertaken by the Ministry in the interests of the people, policies which were agreed to in the common electoral platform.”¹⁷¹ However the fact remains that despite such concrete analysis of the partners, the Party continued to strike electoral alliances with them and it remains the case to this day. This was indeed the fallout of the Salkia Plenum line. The line set out at the Salkia Plenum had, indeed, taken away the radicalism of the 1970s from the Party. The Party had to pay for collaborating with communal and bourgeois parties without an alternative direction as discussed by Namboodiripad in his 1957 document. Gradually, the CPI (M) in Kerala, as elsewhere, lost its biggest advantage of being closest to the people. The Party’s major task to mobilise its cadre and the masses to *participate* in the implementation of the programme of the Government has remained only on paper.

The twelfth of the CPI (M)’s Congress had decided not to have any truck with communal and casteist parties in the elections in Kerala.¹⁷² As a consequence, for the first time, since 1965 elections, the LDF experimented with new political alignment; it did not have any alliance with any of the communal parties in Kerala in the 1987 elections. However, a huge debate was going in the party in the 1980s on the alliance with the IUML; M.V.Raghavan, a top ranking leader from Northern part of Kerala put an alternative document seeking revival of the alliance with the Muslim League as an effective tactic, not only for the electoral politics but also as a response in the growing Hindu communalisation of the polity. He had supporters in the State Committee for

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 37. It further said that “In Kerala the CPI (M) was engaged in running a Ministry which represented a combination of several parties including the Congress (S) and local parties of similar types like the Kerala Congress. Some of these parties were part of anti-Marxist coalition (1969-79) and have neither outlived their class outlook nor their anti-CPI (M) bias. Their biased outlook and sense of rivalry towards our party created difficulties in functioning of the government and discharging its responsibility to the people. Ibid, pp. 46-47.

¹⁷² Political line adopted by the 12th Congress in Calcutta’, cited in *Documents of the 15th Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)*, Chandigarh, April 3-8 1995, p.97. Prior to that the 11th Congress also taken a line that the Left and democratic forces will fight all divisive and secessionist forces which undermine national unity in the context of Khalisatn and Kashmiri secessionist movement.

this. However, the Party dismissed the thesis and the CPI (M) expelled M.V. Raghavan from the party on charges of indiscipline.¹⁷³ Consequently, he launched a new party, Communist Marxist Party (CMP) and it became a permanent ally of the Congress-led UDF in every election since 1991. However, his Party remained a negligible force as there was no space for another communist Party in Kerala without an alternate agenda. Meanwhile, the All India Muslim League returned to the IUML in August 1985.

When the CPI (M)-led LDF was in power between 1980 and 1981 and subsequently between 1987 and 1991, it is true that Party reached relief to the poor. An array of welfare schemes such as Fishermen cooperatives, pension to agriculture workers, old age pension, Pension to widows, circus artists, journalists' pension, Unemployment Relief scheme, Relief to workers in the crisis industries- cashew, coir and handloom. The Public Distribution System was revamped and 15000¹⁷⁴ retail outlets of Fair Price Shops as well as a new chain under the Maveli Cooperative stores were set up across the state. The 1987-91 LDF government had taken the initiative for group farming in rice cultivation to redress the stagnation in the agriculture sector and constituted the District Councils which was long overdue in Kerala. The success achieved in the literacy campaign by the KSSP was yet another noticeable achievement.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ To make the Kerala unit of the Party to understand the importance of building up an electoral front without the Communal parties, the PB with the help of the CC had to carry out a persistent campaign against such an alliance. Perhaps most of the State Committee of Kerala were in favour of such a wrong line before the Party Congress. This attitude was developed due to giving undue importance to the parliamentary path at the cost of the revolutionary aims of the Party. The Kerala unit could rectify it but the fact that the whole unit had to fight Raghavan shows that how deep rooted the problem was. Report on Political Development, adopted by the CC April 9-12, 1987, cited in *Party Rekhakal, 1985-88, Calcutta Muthal Thiruvnthapuram Vare* [Malayalam], Kerala State Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxists), 1988, p.151.

¹⁷⁴ E.K. Nayanar, *The Left Democratic Alternative*(Trivandrum: Department of Public Relations, Government of Kerala, December, 1980),p.48.

¹⁷⁵ Of nearly three lakh instructors, master trainers, resource persons and other project personnel involved in the campaign, 99 per cent were unpaid volunteers.” Thomas Isaac and S. Mohana Kumar,

The Assembly election was held a year ahead of the schedule, concurrently with the Lok Sabha elections, in June-July 1991. The LDF (justifiably) counted on its governance record which was also reflected in its substantial victory in the first ever District Council elections in October 1990; it had won 13 out of the 14 District Councils in Kerala. However, the IUML's reunion with the UDF and more importantly, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in the midst of the elections in May 1991, created a favourable wave to the Congress led UDF. The LDF also misread the Christian minority support. "The Christian bishops, well known for their anti-communism, were extra-ordinarily quiet. Some of them issued statements decrying the threat of the BJP to the minorities and appealed to the faithful to vote according to their conscience. These were encouraging signals to the LDF."¹⁷⁶

The next chapter will look into the challenges posed by the Liberalisation and the globalisation and the response of the communist parties (mostly CPI (M)) in India in general and Kerala specifically to the new objective reality. The early 1990s the twin tragedy struck the communists in India- the open up of economy in the pet name liberalization and the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Eastern Blocs. The latter had impact on the communist movement all over the world and the Left in some of the third world countries began to experiment with different strands of socialism like the one 21st century socialism while some of the Communist parties went down to further dogmatism and sectarianism.

'Kerala Elections, 1991: Lessons and Non-Lessons', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 47
23 November 1991, p. 2699.

¹⁷⁶Ibid, p. 2670.

CHAPTER V

LIBERALISATION AND GLOBALISATION: ITS IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS ON THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

The central concern of this chapter is the challenges posed by the shift away from Nehruvian Socialism to Market Economy and the adoption of the Structural Adjustments Programme since 1991 by the Government of India and the response of the communist parties in India (especially on the CPI (M) as the prominent Communist Party in India) to the new objective reality. And the narrative will be set in the larger context of other socio-economic and political dynamics – the disintegration of Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc in the international context and the unprecedented upsurge of the BJP in the domestic arena – and its implication for the Left as a whole. In this chapter, the attempt will be to explore the various attempts by the Communist parties to reinvent itself to respond to the new challenges. The focus of this will be with reference to the CPI (M) in the theoretical, ideological and political domains given the fact that it continues to remain the most prominent among the communist parties. In doing so, it will look at the extent to which the Party could ensure the foregrounding of its larger agenda – building up a People’s Democratic Front – in the new reality and how much of these were drawn from its own experience.

The context in which the Communists came to power, their fight for adaptation of their radical programmes into the existing parliamentary set up and the measure of success within the framework of the Constitution were discussed in the chapters hitherto. It is important to stress here that they had learnt some lessons too in the process. The various amendments to the Constitution, particularly in the domain

of property relations, which were in tune with Article 39 (b) and (c) of the Constitution directly leading to such provisions as Article 31 A, B and C being added to the Constitution and the approval to these by the Supreme Court (culminating in the decisions in the Keshavananda Bharti case and subsequently in the Minerwa Mills case) ensured such an adaptation natural and easier. This course, however, was disrupted by the shift away from Nehruvian economic principles to that of market principles in a pronounced way since July 1991, when the Union Government announced the New Economic Policy.

This chapter will look into the two decades of the Liberalization policy - 1991 to 2011- that impacted the Left in a major way. However, the central concern here will be the impact of these changes in Kerala in tune with the focus of this study. The whole exercise is to place the activities of the CPI (M) in Kerala in the abovementioned time frame to understand as to how far the Left could engage with the changing reality (since the changes were of a fundamental nature) and whether it could formulate an alternative development strategy from within the parliamentary set up which could be seen as aiding the building of a People's Democratic Front. It is necessary to stress here that the CPI (M)'s strategic understanding of the building of a People's Democratic Front remains unaffected even in the changed circumstances. It is also important to stress that the two decades since 1991 has been the most difficult times for the Left in general. Hence, it is pertinent here to draw the specific context where the communist Party, especially the CPI (M), had to operate at the national level before getting into a focused discussion on the Kerala unit of the Party and its travails.

The 1990s was the most challenging if not chaotic period for the Communist parties all over the world. The changes across the world due to its transformation, by

and large, into a unipolar system, had grave implications in the ideological and political arena for the communists. As discussed in Chapter I of this study, the decline and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc in the late 1980s was also interpreted as the end of history; scholars condoled the death and paid homage; and many argued that there is no alternative (TINA) to capitalism. Postmodernism came to dominate scholarship in social sciences and the Washington Consensus was thrust down the throat of a whole lot of the third world nations and such ideas as the Bandung spirit and Non-alignment were rendered obsolete.¹ In India too, there seemed a consensus to dump all that Nehru represented or sought after and his own Congress party led the caravan within and outside Parliament. The Public Sectors began to be portrayed as inimical to national interests and development. It was ironical; but the Left parties turned into defenders of all that was dumped by the Congress party. Naturally, it had implications for the Indian Left. The CPI (M), however, took a while before responding to the changes that shook the world.² The political Resolution of the 14th Congress of the CPI (M) in January 1992 underscored this need in its assessment of the international situation and stated:

The international situation in the period after the 13th Party Congress has been stormy and difficult one for the forces of socialism, national liberation and the working class movement. The reverses suffered by socialism in the Soviet Union and earlier in Eastern Europe have altered the world balance of forces in favour of imperialism for the present. The process of restoration of capitalism in the countries of Eastern Europe, the course of dismantling socialism in the Soviet Union and the breakup of the USSR in its old form are accompanied by a new imperialist offensive. This has grave repercussions for the socialist countries and

¹ Even prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, since late 1950s, when Stalin's enormities began to sink in, a rethinking and a debate on the nature of existing socialist models, began in the intellectual circles, academia and in the public discourse. A large section of them distanced themselves from Soviet model of socialism.

² Consequently, the CPI (M) had corrected its position on the existing contradictions in the world. However, as late as 1988, when the writing on the wall was clear that Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse, the CPI (M) continued to uphold its position on the existing contradictions on the world. An "understanding of the world situation based on the central contradiction of (our) time- the camp of socialism versus the camp of imperialism. The development of recent years have further shifted the balance against imperialism in favour of the forces standing for Socialism, democracy, national liberation and Peace". 'Draft Resolution, Thirteenth Party Congress, December 27, 1988 to January 1, 1989' (Adopted by the Central Committee Meeting New Delhi, October 2-6, 1988), *Communist Party of India (Marxist)*, p. 53. This was, indeed, a wrong reading of the situation.

the communist movement, the struggle to safeguard the national independence of the third world countries and for the forces of peace and democracy.³

The discussions that ensued in the Party platform reflected the general mood and a section within the Party strongly argued for comprehensive changes in the Party programme.⁴ In general, there was a strong demand in favour of amending the programme in the changed context; however, the majority was against bringing any changes in the core areas – the stage of revolution, strategy and class nature of the Indian State, class alliance and objective of the People’s Democratic Revolution – holding on that the party’s line on these were valid even in the new reality as it was earlier. The resolution *on Certain Ideological Issues* that was meant to strike a compromise between the two ends within the Party’s leaders, said this all. The basic structure of the Party too remains unaltered.

In a self-criticism mode, the Party admitted that it mechanically applied the 1960 thesis that the new stage of general crisis of capitalism will dig its grave soon.⁵ And that it failed to understand correctly the statement in the Communist Manifesto that “the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production and thereby the relations of production and with that of the whole relations of the society.”⁶ Hence, the collapse of capitalism is not an instinctive and natural process. And despite this admission, the party took another decade before it made some revision in its programme in the changed context of the World.

Apart from the major setback to socialism as an alternative to capitalism, India was facing another challenge in the political domain; the rise of the BJP as a Party of

³ ‘Political Resolution of the Fourteenth Congress’, January 3-9, 1992, Madras, (New Delhi: A CPI (M) Publication, 1992), p. 1.

⁴ Ibid, p.49.

⁵ ‘1960 Moscow Conference Statement’, cited in *On Certain Ideological Issues*, Resolution adopted by the Fourteenth Congress, CPI (M), p.94.

⁶ Ibid, p.95.

national implication and the significant surge the Party recorded in the elections since 1989 and its arrival as the leading party in the opposition in 1991 seemed to vindicate the thesis of the CPI since the mid-1960s - that the rightward shift of the polity and the emergence of the Bharathiya Jan Sangh, which represented that surge in the political domain - was the main threat to be challenged. Since the 1980s the religious and regional identities gained a forceful entry into the political spectrum. The Bharathiya Jan Sangh, along with those who made the Swatantra Party in the 1960s and merged into the Janata Party in 1977 to exert a major influence on its affairs, soon revived with the formation of the Bharathiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980.⁷ This not only changed the correlation of the political forces in the country but also challenged the whole secular fabric into which the nation was woven over a period of time. The National Front experiment of 1989 was a culmination of the process that began in 1967 (all out unity against the Congress). What should be specifically noted here is that the anti-Congressism of CPI (M) reached its peak, when it decided to support the V P Singh led National front Government from outside along with the BJP in December 1989.⁸

However, soon the Ayodhya controversy involving the Babri Masjid⁹ became a core issue in the public sphere along with the decision of the V. P. Singh government to partly implement the Mandal Commission Report. The BJP withdrew its support to the government and the government fell in November 1990. The phenomenon where a government was held in place with support of the two

⁷ In fact the space was created during the Janata rule in 1977 after it defeated the Congress in first general elections after the Emergency was lifted. Though it could secure only two seats in the Lok Sabha elections of in 1984 in the backdrop of the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, it secured 85 seats in 1989 elections and increased to 120 in 1991 elections. In 1996, the BJP combine could form a government at the Centre for the first time with 161 seats, though the government was short-lived- perhaps the shortest government- for 13 days (May 16, 1996). In 1999, the BJP came to power with 182 seats as the single largest Party in the house.

⁸ Janata Dal got 143 seats, BJP- 85 and the Left Front secured 52 seats in 1989 elections.

⁹The Babri Masjid was pulled down on December 6, 1992 (in February 1, 1986, the lock of structure was opened during Rajiv Gandhi's regime) when Narasimha Rao was in power at the Centre.

ideologically antagonistic parties - CPI (M)-led Left with 33 MPs and the BJP with 85 MPs to the same government, the latter gained politically. This was evident from the results of the general election in 1991, held over a period of three months (April to June 1991 caused by the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperambudur in Tamil Nadu in a bomb blast in the middle of the election process and hence disrupted for a while) when the BJP won 120 seats in the Lok Sabha to emerge as the main opposition party. It may be held that the factor that prevented the BJP's march further in the 1991 elections was the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendation that ensured the Janata Dal win 60 seats in the Lok Sabha, primarily from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, both states being the BJP's potential areas for shoring up its strength further; the set of new dynamics to the political discourse of the country brought about by the Mandalisation of the political discourse, however, is not central to the concerns of this thesis.¹⁰ However, it must be said that it contributed to the realignment of political forces in the two major Hindi speaking states. Another notable change was that this also pushed in the era of coalition politics at the national level bringing an end to the single party rule of the Congress. This had implications for the Left parties as such given the developments in 1996 and the possibility of a Government headed by Jyoti Basu doing the rounds for a couple of days. The point is that this had repercussion in Indian politics with regional parties became major players at the Centre and so on. After a short stint of the Chandra Sekhar ((Janata Dal, Socialist) government (November 1990 to March 1991), fresh elections was held in 1991. The Congress, now was forced to cobble up a coalition and this was necessary

¹⁰ “The assertion of the OBCs as a social group and their emergence as a powerful factor in the political discourse since 1990 have to be seen in elaborate detail rather than in the cursory manner the CPI (M) has chosen. ‘V Krishna Ananth, Too Little, Too Late’, *The Hindu* 12/10/2000.

even to form a minority government under P.V. Narasimha Rao with Manmohan Singh as the Finance Minister. And a new era began.

Dr. Manmohan Singh, the architect of the liberalization programme in India, announced the new economic policy of Liberalisation in July 1991.¹¹ As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, it was a discernible shift from the economy of the Nehruvian era. The much celebrated socialist planning platforms in the 1950s - 1970s vanished without trace and the economic structure of the country was transformed irreversibly. This had a devastating effect on the protection policy which was developed since 1950s. Despite the assurances from the government, in no time, the ‘unfettered free-market capitalism swept’¹² the country. This had a profound impact on the Indian Left and the trade union movement of the country.

Since the economic reforms, introduced in 1991 (Liberalization, Privatisation and Globalisation), there has been a fall in employment in the organised sector in general and more importantly, it changed the face of trade union activities drastically. The major shift in the macroeconomic policies had changed the structure of industrial relations consequently and the future of trade unions, which certainly was the mainstay of the mainstream Left in general and the CPI (M) in particular, in a big way. The policies of liberalisation clearly contravened the rights of the working class and consequently reduced the space that was available for the trade unions in the pre

¹¹ Though officially declared in July 1991, liberalisation of economy began in the 1980s itself with an IMF loan in 1981. This along with the liberalisation of imports and the VP Singh’s Union budget for 1986-87 were indicators that where the country was heading to. The socialist pretensions of Mrs. Gandhi began to wither away in the 1980s itself. The 80s were a dress rehearsal for what was there in waiting. Attempts had begun to restructure the ‘unprofitable’ public sector units. During her last term in office, Indira Gandhi “moved away from *garibi hato* to creating an environment in which the industrial sector will take a lead in economic development . . . For the first time she down played redistributive concerns, the significance of planning and planning commission, and public sector industries encouraging private investment and supporting business groups to achieve this goal”. Zoya Hassan, ‘Economic Liberalization and its Discontents’, *Indian Economy Polity and Society*, 2013, p. 54.

¹²The usage is borrowed from Perry Anderson, ‘Renewals’, *New Left Review (NLR)*, January-February, 2000, p.10.

liberalisation era in India. The fact is that the trade unions were not equipped to fight the onslaught of the liberal economic policies that have also led to retrenchment of existing workforce. However, the 1990s saw considerable industrial conflicts in the public sector,¹³ especially in the banking, insurance, and transport sectors. Those were the last attempts from the trade unions in the public sector to hold on even while it was more or less clear that it will not go on for long. In the words of a contemporary critique:

The only region where the Left trade unions (have) managed to retain their hold are the industrial centres in West Bengal, where again political consciousness has been the worst casualty. Too much of stress on the economic demands of the workers leading to the trade union leadership restricting its activities to the new "white collar" sections has come to mark the scene, whether it be the AITUC or any of its offshoots, particularly the CITU. The CMM [Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha] experience has been one of an antagonistic clash between the AITUC and the CITU, both of which were consciously restricting their scope to the public sector employees, whose "white collar" nature has come to determine their perception on labour.¹⁴

The impact of the new economic policy was not only restricted to the public sector and the trade union front but it also extended to other areas such as land policy (where even CPI (M) led state governments ended up dispossessing farmers of their land in the name of public purpose to give to the multinationals like in Singur and Nadhigram, leave alone such dispossession in various other states). The government had ended up withdrawing the welfare schemes and subsidies on the prescription of the World Bank, IMF. It made the poor poorer. The only class that benefitted out of it

¹³ For instance, the national strike on November 27, 1991, a week-long nationwide Telecom strike from June 16, 1992 on issues related to the privatization of telecom sector, strike in June 1995, the December 11, 1998 strike to oppose the move to open up the insurance sector to private (including foreign) companies. However, the nature of the strikes and protests had changed sooner than it was expected. "For many years now, strikes have been confined, with a few exceptions, to just one-day or two-day token strikes, even though the working class has suffered greatly in the recent period. And the great peasant movements and rallies are largely a thing of the past (except occasionally against local SEZs, or a few other localized movements like in Rajasthan or Andhra Pradesh). The entire period of the agrarian crisis has been marked by an enormous wave of *peasant suicides* rather than *peasant struggles*. Of course, protest movements are there, but they no longer acquire, or even threaten to acquire, the dimensions that such movements used to acquire in the past." Prabhat Patnaik, 'The Private and the Public', <http://www.pragoti.in/node/3603>, accessed on 18/8/2016

¹⁴ V. Krishna Ananth, Trade Unions Grappling with New Realities', *The Hindu*, 2/5/1996.

is the non-committal middle classes. Along with the economic and political changes, the neoliberal policies broad-based a consumer culture too.

The communists had to operate in the midst of these which sought for responses that were beyond the canonical Marxian texts. In the new context, imperialism is no longer being the highest stage of capitalism, as Lenin perceived in his historical context. It revolutionized its instruments of production further to transnational finance capital. And this new situation called for new definitions of struggles and new political praxis to resist the onslaught and present alternatives; it must be said that such attempts have been made from many quarters under different nomenclatures. These are as divergent as - 21st century socialism, socialism with human face, participatory socialism, renewals or reconstruction of Marxism, and number of resistance movements against neo-liberal policies all around the world, etc.

For instance, in the late 1980s and early 1990s the Latin American countries witnessed the emergence of a New Left, conceptually and ideologically different from the existing dogmatic communist parties in those countries. New slogans emerged according to the new situation and Marxism was extended beyond the narrow economic concept of the class struggles and contradictions. This new class angle and anger was apparent in the indigenous movements, squatter's movement for land livelihood, workers movement, gender and environment movement in Latin America. Most often it took the shape of struggle between the core and peripheries. New ways to fight the neo-liberal policies and its puppet governments were sought. The Porto Alegre experiment in Brazil, was one such attempts to find an alternative. In the same breadth, in search for an equitable society, the available socialist models were appraised and reappraised to reinvent a new kind of socialism – Socialism with more

democracy and humanism. In the process, a quest to seek more space for participation of the community was one that was most common.

In this context the Left in India was going through an identity crisis. In short, the decline of socialism world over and the ascendancy of liberalisation and globalisation and also the rise of communalism have had a direct bearing on the working of the Communist Parties in India. However, the Party was not equipped to face these challenges.

This chapter will have four sections- Section I will look into the socio-economic and political backdrop of Kerala in the larger context of Liberalisation and globalisation; section II will discuss the Peoples' Planning Campaign, an alternative presented by the Left in 1996 while in power (in some ways, as orthodox Marxists would suggest, it was a departure from the radical phase of the Party in its early days); section III is a discussion on the various peoples' movement for land for livelihood in Kerala and the environment protection movements, with which neither the CPI (M) nor the CPI was directly involved or concerned and Section IV deals with the updating of the programme of the CPI (M) in 2000 and its implications in the organisation and also for Kerala.

I

It is important to look at the socio-economic and political situation of Kerala in its historical sense to make proper sense of the impact of the liberalisation-globalisation policy in the state and its politics. At the outset, the much celebrated Kerala Model¹⁵ was crumbling under its own weight in Kerala. In this context the attempt by the Party

¹⁵ Kerala's unique development experience with a low economic growth in terms of the per capita income growth but high achievement in terms of basic human indicators index (physical quality of life) was known as 'Kerala Model. However, since the 1990s, a reverse trend was indicated in terms of parity of income, equitable access to education, health facilities – the privatization deteriorated public services. The democratic space created by the continuous public action was also shrinking. See also M. A. Oommen, 'Reforms and the Kerala Model', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12 January 2008, pp. 22-25.

to expand political and economic democracy in the State will be looked into. This will also serve as a background to place the resistance of the Party to the neo-liberal challenges – new initiatives such as People’s Plan Campaign by the Left Democratic government led by the CPI (M) - in perspective. The fate of the campaign, the changes in the development concerns of the Party and the localized issue- based movements that began to emerge in the 1990s in Kerala will be looked into in this context.

In the economic arena, stagnation in the agrarian sector was a major cause for concern. The agrarian reforms programme of redistribution of land was implemented across Kerala, albeit with its limitations, in the 1970s. Though radical land reform measures removed the landlord class from the agrarian structure in the state, there remained a large section of landless agricultural workers. The various land ceiling legislations were frustrated by the landholders by way of manipulation of records and thus remained on paper. Meanwhile, restructuring of agrarian relations did not help enhance productivity in the agrarian sector. An un-intended consequence of this was that agriculture ceased to be a sustainable option; fragmentation of landholdings in the hands of small landholders had its own adverse impact on the economy. While this could have been surmounted by way of collectivisation of farming, which was certainly on the agenda of the Left, it did not take place. This led to a situation where people began to withdraw from farming as it was no longer remunerative and looked for other vocations. In many cases it also led to leasing land for farming which led to excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers, intense and unregulated water extraction and subsequent environment hazards.¹⁶ Yet another outcome was speculation on land and the burgeoning of the real estate business which began with the advent of the

¹⁶ See also K N Nair, Vineetha Menon, ‘Lease Farming in Kerala Findings from Micro Level Studies’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 June 2006, p. 2737.

liberalisation programme in the 1990s. This mainly affected the paddy cultivation. Kerala became nearly dependent on the neighbouring States for food-grains and vegetables in addition to pulses and oilseeds.¹⁷

In the cash crop sectors such as rubber, coconut and pepper, which were another source of agrarian income, the liberalisation era, which was also accompanied by the shift from the GATT regime to WTO, meant a sharp fall in prices of these products thanks to the unregulated import of these and the imports substitution of the market enjoyed by the domestic sector. The volatility of the world markets have had adverse impact on Kerala's economy. "The steady decline in the price of crops like rubber and coconut during the second half of the 1990s" according to a study, had the effect of "driving back the agricultural sector in the state to its decade-long state of stagnation." This had its adverse effect on jobs in the state, where the "small industrial sector was too weak and stultified to offer additional employment and absorb labour displaced from agriculture."¹⁸ The nexus can be explained in the following words:

The agrarian crisis and farmers' distress in Kerala are closely linked to the neoliberal policy regime implemented in the country in the recent past. The association between the two is more in the regions of the state that are heavily dependent on export-oriented crops such as coffee and pepper. The worst affected are the small farmers, as they are more vulnerable to crop losses and price declines. Unless the plight of farmers is addressed in terms of changing the macro-policies regulating taxes, prices and imports, the condition of the farmers cannot be improved on a sustainable basis, either by increasing the availability of institutional credit or providing some alleviatory sops to the victims of suicide families.¹⁹

Though, the agricultural labourers benefitted from the implementation of minimum wages and other welfare measures such as statutory pension for agriculture workers, the agrarian crisis led to reduction in the number of working days, physical

¹⁷ According to the Reserve Bank of India report there is steep decline in the growth of the production of rice and other food grains in Kerala from in the early 1990s (1993-94), the rice production was 1004.0 thousand tons, pluses -33.3 thousand tons and other food grains 1044.4 thousand tons; this has been reduced to 942.9 thousand tons, 5.1 thousand tons and 548.7 thousand tons respectively in the year 2010-11. State-wise Production of Foodgrains and Major non-foodgrain Crops, Handbook of Statistics on the Indian Economy, <http://dbie.rbi.org.in>, p. 69.

¹⁸ S Mohanakumar, 'From People's Plan to Plan sans People', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20April 2002, p. 1492.

¹⁹ S Mohanakumar & R K Sharma, 'Analysis of Farmer Suicides in Kerala', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 April 2006, p. 1553.

shrinkage of agricultural land and so on; these affected the agricultural workers adversely. The crisis is directly linked to the inability of the Left in Kerala to traverse beyond the formal implementation of the land reforms legislations during the 1970s.²⁰ Alongside this crisis in the agrarian sector was the crisis, in many ways of a larger dimension, in the industrial sector in Kerala.

The retarded industrial growth in general and the crises in the traditional industries in particular, together contributed to the volatility in the economy of the State. “Traditional industries of Kerala like coir, cashew and handloom have been in the throes of a crisis due to scarcity and escalation of prices of raw materials and increased competition in the product markets either from cheaper production outside Kerala. Employment and output in these industries have been declining.”²¹ This forced the closure of many units. It must have been a worrying factor for all those who were at the helm, which included the communists (between 1996 and 2001 and then between 2006 and 2011), that the State Domestic Product (SDP) was lower than the national average for most parts of this period - and the stagnation prevailed in the manufacturing sector, even while growth was shown in the secondary sector, which could be attributed to the construction industry. This, in fact, was the symptom of a larger malaise involving the decline of agriculture and the increasing conversion of agricultural land into real estate. This problem was acknowledged in a considered study by T.M. Thomas Isaac:

²⁰T. M. Thomas Isaac and S. Mohana Kumar analyzed this factor in the context of the stagnation in agriculture in Kerala and said: “An important weakness of the left movement in Kerala today is the virtual stagnation of the peasant and agricultural labourers movements from the latter half of the 70s. The peasant movement has lost most of its former vigour and militancy while the struggles of agricultural labourers for increase in wages have tended to dwindle sharply in recent year. .. With the implementation of land reforms the land question ceased to be an important issue of mass mobilisation. Surplus lands, though not taken over, have today virtually disappeared through illegal transaction.” T. M. Thomas Isaac and S. Mohana Kumar, ‘Kerala Elections, 1991: Lessons and Non-Lessons’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 47, 23 November 1991, p.2693.

²¹ ‘Pyarelal Raghavan, Traditional Industries in Kerala: Need for New Approaches’, *ICKS-A*, Vol.2, pp. 30-31, cited in Thomas Isaac T M and Michael Tharakan P K, ‘Kerala: Towards a New Agenda’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 5-12 August 1995, p. 1995.

From an economy characterised by low production, low investment and low consumption during the 50s, Kerala has been (today) transformed into a low production and low investment but high consumption economy thanks to the inflow of remittances. The export surplus of the 50s has been converted into an import surplus that in 1980-81 came to around 25 per cent of the SDP.²²

Meanwhile, socially, despite the democratic culture that was cultivated over a period of time, the Kerala society was clearly moving towards a caste based identity consolidation and fragmentation in the 1980s itself. This was evident when two of the communal organisations -the SNDP and the NSS - also floated political parties: the Socialist Republican Party (SRP) and National Democratic Party (NDP) respectively.²³ These were apart from the strong presence of communal parties like the Indian Union Muslim League and the Kerala Congress that had been important allies of the LDF and UDF at various points of time. Though the SRP and the NDP were short-lived outfits, the remnants of these parties remained, actively polarizing the political domain during elections. And the SRP, an Ezhava Backward Class Party, metamorphosed as Bharat Dharma Jana Sena joined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance in the 2016 elections.²⁴ Related malevolent revivalism in the State altered the social fabric of the Kerala society; even the Left was not completely out from the grimes of this canker. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI.

Yet another feature of the Kerala society was the high level of consumerism which began when the remittance based economy picked up in the late 1970s and accentuated with the advent of liberalisation with the choices it offers for the chunk of the population, which in Kerala is from the middle classes. Though Kerala accounts for only 3.2 per cent of India's population, the State consumes over 10 per cent of

²² Isaac and Kumar, 'Kerala Elections', 1991', p.2693.

²³ National Democratic Party (NDP) contested even before the 1987 elections and it won two seats in the 1982 election.

²⁴ I have discussed this in some detail elsewhere. See E. K. Santha, 'Saffron Headway in Kerala', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11 June 2016, Vol. LI, no 24, pp. 20-23.

consumer goods produced in the country.²⁵ “The phenomenal growth in gold and jewellery shops in Kerala (some of them with branches in the West Asian countries), particularly after the liberalisation of imports of gold cannot be misconstrued as the barometer of its turnaround.”²⁶ This was reflected in all walks of lives and influenced the thought process of the Malayali community as well. This also explains why the agitational politics, so prominent in the state, began to register a downward slide and was gradually replaced with token forms of protests. A close look at the share of personal loans to total bank credits in Kerala in relation with the All-India figures from 1985 to 2000 substantiates the argument about the consumerism:

It is interesting to note that in Kerala, the share of personal loans in total loans which was only 5 per cent in 1985 rose to 10 per cent in 1989-90 and thereafter to 24 per cent in 2001. Out of this, the loans for the housing sector rose from 4 per cent in 1990-91 to 10 per cent in 2001. At the all-India level, personal loans had formed only 3 per cent in 1985 and rose to 8 per cent in 1990- 91 and only to 12 per cent in 2001. That is a little below one half of Kerala’s percentage share. The high proportion of personal credit in total credit and a high proportion going into housing had its linkages to the construction and trading sector.²⁷

The response of the Communist parties to this new reality, however, was not the one they practiced earlier- by way of combining public action along with the governmental intervention; this indeed was the policy of the Left, especially the CPI (M) - while in power and unique to its political praxis in Kerala. In other words, this strategy ensured that the communists succeeded in creating a space for themselves, while in power and out of it. This also produced a vibrant democratic culture which was distinctive to Kerala. By and large, there has been a continuity in the policies of the governments (the Congress government too was forced to follow the welfare

²⁵ Sebastian, Jose, ‘What We Malayalee Produce and Consume: Mapping the Local Priorities in the Consumer Goods Market of Kerala’, Occasional Paper No 1, *Institute for Entrepreneurship Development*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003, cited in M A Oommen, ‘Is Kerala Changing from a ‘Crisis’ to a ‘Turnaround’? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 April 2005, p. 1917.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1918.

²⁷ “This is only indicative. If one adds to these figures, borrowings from large lending institutions like HDFC, ICICI, HUDCO and several other private institutions and from schemes offering credit for housing and consumer durables and spending in general with various incentives, the proportions become much higher.” Mohan Pillai and N Shanta, ‘Kerala’s Turnaround in Growth’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8 October 2005, p. 4483.

policies of the Left - led government) and this kept the Kerala Model going. This, however, ran aground in the 1990s.

Such areas as education and public health, which was central to the Kerala Model, were exposed to bear the brunt first. There is empirical evidences that under the new dispensation, these two sectors have suffered a lot.²⁸ Privatization encroached the education sector in a big way and a large number of professional colleges mushroomed since the 1990s. The last of the agitations against privatization of education was carried out in the 1980s by the Students Federation of India (SFI), the CPI (M)'s student organisation. This prolonged agitation was against the introduction of private Polytechnics in the State. In the health sector, the large number of private nursing homes, hospitals and specialty centres that have come up in Kerala have excluded the very poor who have been priced out and pushed to depend on the public health facilities that is collapsing due to shortage of public spending in the context of the new regime.²⁹ The much celebrated Public Distribution System too suffered.

²⁸ It is significant that the percentage of public spending on education to total government expenditure which was as high as 29.28 per cent in 1982-83 declined to 23.17 per cent in 1992-93 and to 17.97 per cent in 2005-06. . . While public expenditure on education as a percentage of total expenditure during the pre-reform period (from 1980-81 through 1990-91) decreased at the rate of (-) 0.97 per cent a year, the decline has turned much sharper at the rate of (-) 2.13 per cent a year, during the post-reform period. Equally sharp has been the fall in the public expenditure on health both as percentage of total expenditure and as a percentage of SDP. . . The public expenditure on health and family welfare which reached 11.67 per cent as a percentage of SDP in 1983-84 fell to 9.94 per cent in 1989-90, during the pre-reform period, declined to 6.36 per cent in 2005-06. M A Oommen, 'Reforms and the Kerala Model', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12 January 2008, p. 23. Also see Oommen, 'Is Kerala Changing from a 'Crisis' to a 'Turnaround'? p. 1917.

²⁹ Kunhikannan, T P, K P Aravindan (2000): 'Changes in the Health Status of Kerala 1987-1997', Discussion Paper No 20, KRPLLD, *Centre for Development Studies*, Thiruvananthapuram, cited in Oommen, 'Is Kerala Changing from a 'Crisis' to a 'Turnaround', p. 1917. Also see P G K Panikar, 'High cost of Medical Care in Kerala: Tentative Hypothesis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6 June 1992, p. 1180. In the article the author explains the failing public health system before the private sector. He states: "The expansion of allopathic medical care Institutions in the public sector has been exceeded by that in the private sector, according to the results of a recent KSSP survey. As of 1989 the number of institutions of modern medicine under the government and private sector came to 1370 and 3548 respectively, the corresponding number of doctors were respectively 4804 and 7637. Similar differences were also observed in the number of beds and size of para-medical staff."

However, in the political front, since 1987, the State has witnessed stable governments. The LDF and UDF have won elections and stayed on in power alternatively, completing their terms without disruption. The government formation, in this period has been on the basis of narrow margins for both fronts. An important factor to be recorded during this period was the emergence of the BJP, though marginal but in a consistent way. Insofar as the BJP's political history is concerned, the late 1980s – the party's ascendancy, riding the Ram Mandir campaign and the consequent polarization across the country – was evident in Kerala too. For the first time, the BJP's vote-share doubled from 2.75 per cent in the 1982 Assembly election to 5.56 per cent in 1987. Far more important, than the average vote share, was that the BJP's performance in two assembly constituencies in the Kasargode district in Northern Kerala; Manjeswaram and Kasrgode. In these two constituencies, along the state's borders with Karnataka, the BJP candidates notched up as much as 33.5 per cent and 31.58 per cent of the votes polled respectively and were placed second in successive elections. This indicates, that there was an erosion from both the fronts and a new social engineering was taking place in Kerala. The Dalits, by and large, are getting alienated from the Left and the BJP is more than willing to fill in the political vacuum. The CPI (M) too is aware of this arrival of right in the political space of Kerala. Its reaction to this is relevant here.

The growth of the caste influence in Kerala after the long years of activities of social reform movements and Left parties is a very serious matter. Failure to politically educate our masses and the weaknesses in conducting political propaganda among the masses that have gone behind the communal and casteist forces in order to win over them can be a reason for the emergence of the present situation.³⁰

Politically, the beginning of 1990s was not as good for the Left in Kerala as it lost the 1991 elections despite the high expectations it had, with good reason, after the

³⁰ Central Committee Resolution, CPI (M), August, 11-12, 2001.

groundswell of support it got in the District Council elections in Kerala just months before the general election.³¹ However, in the 1996 elections, the CPI (M)-led LDF could come back to power with ease. At the Centre it was the epoch of the third front. It is a fact that the idea of the third front was nurtured by the CPI (M); and when Jyoti Basu was offered the prestigious position of the Prime Minister, he was inclined to take it up. The CPI (M), however, decided against it, holding that the party shall not assume power where it was in no position to determine the policy of such a government. However, there was a section in the party who believed it was worth an attempt and concurred with Basu; the feeling was rejecting the opportunity was indeed a 'historical blunder' as Basu would insist even later. This was one of the major topics that came for discussion in the Thiruvananthapuram Special Congress to update the Programme.³² Theoretically it raised the question again as to where did the CPI (M) stand in a multi-party parliamentary set up.

When the Party came to power in Kerala in 1996, the major concern was how to present an alternative format of development to the people building upon the long legacy of the tradition of peoples' action and political democracy in the State. The economic crisis, the strong emergence of denominational politics, the incremental alienation of such classes as the Dalits and Adivasis from its fold, the bureaucratization and institutionalization of the Party organisation and the onslaught

³¹ It should be stressed here that the Left Front lost power in 1991 for a different reason. The polls, scheduled for May 1991, were postponed in the aftermath of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. And when they were held subsequently in June 1991, there was a tide of sympathy in favour of the Congress party and the UDF gained out of that.

³² "The most significant of the changes sought to be made in the Party Programme relates to the question whether the party can participate in Governments at the Centre. The CPI (M) Central Committee in 1996 and the 16th CPI (M) Congress in Calcutta in 1998 had firmly rejected the proposition which had been put forward by Mr. Surjeet and the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu. The party has now performed a pirouette and the formulation that the party can participate in Governments at the Centre, even when its voice is not decisive, is now part of the officially-approved amendments to the CPI (M) programme. This might well mean that from now on it is going to be people's democracy sans revolution for the party." C. Gouridasan Nair, 'CPI (M) all set to bury 'historic blunder' *The Hindu*, 20/10/2000.

of globalisation and liberalisation together made the Party search for an alternative and Kerala which had the first elected communist Ministry, had shown the way this time too.

It was in this context (and during the Ninth Plan period) that the People's Planning Campaign was born; an initiative that was well within the four corners of Constitutional democracy and at the same time raising expectations of a radical alternative to the larger consensus. Indeed it was in continuity with the radical left policies, such as land reforms, educational reforms, universal PDS, co-operatives for economic democracy, trade unionism and the rights consciousness, all of which were the contributions of the communist movement in Kerala, historically. The next section of this chapter will attempt to place the People's Planning Campaign in this perspective.

II

The People's Planning Campaign (PPC) in Kerala was formally launched in the State in August 1996, only a couple of months after the Left Democratic Front came to power in May 1996. The significance of this campaign was that it was conceived from an alternative development perspective and was rooted firmly in the idea of working the Constitutional scheme. This experiment was perceived as an alternative to tackle the stagnation in the economy, particularly in the agrarian and industrial sectors and in the larger context of the general crisis in the much celebrated Kerala model. The campaign relied on people's participation and their ability to decide their concerns on their own rather than being left to a bureaucratic set up located far away. The new initiative was derived from the understanding that to sustain the achievement of Kerala in the socio-economic sector as well as to revive the political and democratic culture of the State, which was unique in many ways; an alternative path of growth is

indispensable. The architect of the campaign, T.M. Thomas Isaac, the then Finance Minister of Kerala stated:

The question whether the organised strength of the mass movements and the democratic consciousness they have generated can be utilised to accelerate economic growth, therefore, is assuming critical importance in the present juncture. The People's Campaign for Ninth Plan represents such an initiative to make use the legacy of collective social intervention and the strength of mass movement to meet the contemporary crisis of development.³³

The fundamental premise of the Peoples Planning (*Janakeeyasuthranam*) Campaign was a new understanding on 'people's political praxis'. Naturally, democratisation and thus participation for development are the two strong elements of this process. The crux of the programme can be explained in terms of planning from below, mobilisation of local resources, need based participatory planning, accountability - social, economic and political - and transparency and low wastage of time and resources and capacity building. This study argues that it was indeed a significant aspect of the political praxis of the Left in its search for alternatives. Its political premise was that in the changed context of the world, "the role of the revolutionary party is not to substitute itself for the people, not to depoliticise them as a counterpart of the establishment of its own dictatorship; it is on the contrary to politicize them, to ensure that their political praxis is not thwarted, by pointing at every stage the way forward."³⁴ Economically too, it presented a people oriented, people participated, accountable and transparent format. This campaign was not an isolated attempt and was part of the worldwide search for alternatives to neo-liberal onslaught; creating a space for 'unleashing democracy and a perennial engagement of the people with politics.'³⁵

³³ T M Thomas Isaac and K N Harilal, 'Planning for Empowerment: People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning for Kerala', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4-11 January 1977, p.54.

³⁴ Prabhat Patnaik, 'Re-envisioning socialism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3 November 2007, p.41.

³⁵ Ibid.

This unique initiative was introduced in the wake of the Ninth Five Year Plan –hence popularly known as Peoples’ Campaign for Ninth Plan. However, in a way it was also a continuation of the LDF government’s initiative during its previous term in power, between 1987-91, when the Kerala *Sastra Sahitya Parishad* (KSSP)³⁶ took up the task of local resource mapping in 25 villages.³⁷ This initiative in the Kalliasseri Panchayat in the Malabar region of Kerala led to it being turned into a model village in the process. Then there was the remarkable difference between 1987 and 1996. In 1996, the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments (which came into effect in April 1993) made the task easy; elected bodies at the rural and urban levels had become Constitutional entities and in this sense not mere civic bodies. It may be stressed here that the concept of elected District Councils were institutionalized in Kerala during the LDF rule between 1987-91 and this was built upon the long tradition of local self - government in Malabar.³⁸ Subsequently, the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act was enacted in 1994 in conformity with the Central Act. The new Act relied on the grass-roots democracy wherein the Grama Sabha became a mandatory body.

The first elections to the revamped Local Bodies were held in September 1995 and the LDF won in a majority of Panchayats with 585 seats of 966 grama panchayats against and 367 for the UDF. It created a conducive atmosphere for the State government to introduce the People’s Plan Campaign. The KSSP, after the success of the literacy campaign (*Kerala Saksharatha Samithi*) in 1991, and the pioneering experiments in the 25 Panchayats, was all set for the task. It had an adequate voluntary force for such a campaign. As an organisation, it had proved its mettle

³⁶KSSP was established in 1962 and since then this organisation has been active in the State with its motto “Science for social revolution”- reaching science and technology to people. For more details about the activities of KSSP, visit <http://www.kssp.in/>

³⁷ Rashmi Sharma, ‘Kerala’s Decentralisation Idea in Practice’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 6 September 2003, p. 3835.

³⁸ I have dealt with this elsewhere. See E. K. Santha, *Local Self-Government in Malabar (1800–1960)* (New Delhi: Institute for Social Sciences, 1986).

working with the people since 1962. It is relevant here to recall that the KSSP had successfully led the movement against the Silent Valley Hydroelectric Project in the late 1970s even when the CPI (M) was in favour of the project.³⁹ The fact is that the KSSP, though comprised of many Party insiders, had managed to preserve its autonomy and independence from the CPI (M). It took a strong stand against degradation of environment and stood up for a development model rooted in the principle of small-is-beautiful even where the organisation ended up opposing the CPI(M) as a party.

The most significant part of this decentralization process was that it ensured adequate resources - 35-40 percent of the state's Ninth Plan outlay - was earmarked for the local bodies for the preparation and realization of developmental plans.

It is pertinent here to look at the trajectory of the decentralisation attempts in Kerala. The communists' tryst with the democratic institutions began in early 1950s, even before the Kerala State was formed on linguistic basis in 1957, with the District Board in Malabar. The Communists won the Malabar District Board elections in 1954 and also won acclaims from the Prime Minister Nehru for their performance. Similarly, the idea of revamping the administrative system came from the first ever elected communist ministry under Namboodiripad which took this task seriously. He was the first one call it *Local self- government*. The communist government constituted an Administrative Reforms Committee. Incidentally, this happened around the same time as the Balwantrai Mehta Committee, constituted by the Centre with similar purpose, was at its job.

It is important to stress here that the agenda of engaging with the people in the area of governance was a concept that was an important measure undertaken by the

³⁹ Apart from forming a group called the "Protection of Silent Valley" in 1979, the KSSP is responsible for creating mass awareness on the environmental issues of the project.

first Communist Ministry. The Education Reforms Bill, for instance, contained a provision to constitute local committees to advise the school management and the establishment of a State Education Advisory Board in order to ensure people's participation in this basic services to ensure quality and accountability. It is also a well-known fact an extensive engagement with the potential beneficiaries was a feature that marked the drafting of the Agrarian restructuring bill during the Communist Ministry between 1957-59. On the legislation front, the government passed the Kerala Panchayat Bill in 1958; however it could not pass a similar law with regard to District Councils as the government was dismissed in 1959. The District Administration Bill was passed by the Congress-led government in 1979 and became an Act during the CPI (M)- led government (1980-1982); however, it remained on the paper until the Left returned to power in 1987 and gave effect to it in 1991.

In short, the Communists contributed largely for the decentralisation process of the State. However, in the new context of the 1990s, the purpose was not only to expand and deepen the concept of decentralisation of power to the people but was by way of presenting an alternative to the Washington consensus and to pull the economy out of the stagnation. It was also necessary to locate this alternative outside the frame-work of conventional welfare-ism - reaching relief to the people - format which was broadly restricted to services in the economic domain apart from social welfare schemes. Self- reliance became the major thrust. As Namboodiripad put it:

. . . the consciousness of the people [in Kerala] is such that they do not understand the significance of production activities, their attention being focused only on the social services sector. For the common man in Kerala, development means only more and more schools, more and more hospitals, more and more transport facilities and so on. They do not understand that although these are undoubtedly important, they cannot develop the State unless the productive sector-industries and agriculture in particular- is put on a healthy basis.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ E. M.S. Namboodiripad, *The Frontline Years: Selected Articles*, (New Delhi: LeftWord, 2010), p.186.

There have been debates on the want of a theory behind the People's Plan Campaign within the CPI (M) and in academic circles. Rajan Gurukkal argued on the necessity for a theoretical understanding on the nature, degree and level of decentralisation in order to devise the required institutional channels. His arguments were on the basis that this was required not only for organising the campaign but also conducting a realistic analysis of existing institutions and channels and the capacity of these to implement such a programme which involve planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation.⁴¹ Among those who agreed with the perception of Gurukkal were activist scholars such as Jose Chathukulam and M.S.John and they were critical of the manner in which the programme was initiated and set out without a concrete theory on hand: "The process" in their view "had its problems that arose essentially from the absence of a clear perspective about decentralisation."⁴² Theoretical premises of the campaign were attributed to an amalgam of perspective ranging from an interpretation of the Marxist framework to reliance upon Gandhi's conception of *swaraj* by some.⁴³

⁴¹ Gurukkal said: "It is essential for anyone to have a determinate theoretical standpoint to decide the nature, degree and level of decentralisation and devise the required institutional channels, for decentralisation can be advocated as a means to achieve a variety of conflicting objectives. So how significant it is for the decentralisation activists to be unequivocal and clear about their theoretical presupposition can hardly be exaggerated. They should know theory for not only running the campaign but also for doing a realistic analysis of the performance of local government bodies/institutions in terms of their planning ability, implementation skill, administrative capability, financial capacity and so on in the specific context of Kerala's decentralisation experience.. . However, the handbooks (circulated by the Planning Board) do not adequately recognise the theoretical unfeasibility of the objectives in the given social formation and hence fail to emphasise the praxis of people's struggles for making them politically feasible." Rajan Gurukkal, 'When a Coalition of Conflicting Interests Decentralises: A Theoretical Critique of Decentralisation Politics in Kerala', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 29, No. 9/10, September - October 2001, pp. 63-64.

⁴² Jos Chathakulam and M S John, 'Five Years of Participatory Planning in Kerala Rhetoric and Reality', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 7 December 2002, p.4917.

⁴³ The then Chief Minister of the State E K Nayanar, pinpointed the class struggle aspect of the Campaign. According to E K Nayanar, "decentralisation of power is part of class struggle and conflict of class interests, precisely for that reason a polarisation is taking place between those supporting and opposing it. This polarisation is actually a manifestation of class struggle. Making people's plan campaign a success is thus part of the effort at strengthening class struggle," *The Hindu*, January 5, 1999 cited in Jos Chathakulam and M S John, Five Years of Participatory Planning in Kerala Rhetoric and Reality in *Economic and Political Weekly* December 7, 2002, p.4918. However. People like Sreedharan, Planning Board Member could identify with Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj. CPI (M)

It is pertinent to look at the experience of the implementation of the Campaign to understand the nature and intensity of the tasks and its implications in the State of Kerala. As mentioned earlier, the KSSP took charge of the Campaign not without reasons; for the KSSP, with a 40000 strong voluntary force in 2000 units all over Kerala- the task was huge.

So far the elected representatives of the local bodies did not have the planning experience as the officials were doing it for them. Such a shift, then, warranted maximum participation of the people and these 'inexperienced' people had to be trained in the whole process from scratch. Another factor which was not in favour of such an exercise was the time restriction as the entire process from training of the representatives, the communication of this message to the people in the villages and managing their aspirations with the available funds and the drafting of the demands had to be completed in a short span of time before the Ninth Plan allocation to the States. The massive task was carried out in stages; first being the State level training for key resource persons. The Key Resource persons carried out the training to the district Resource persons and they in turn to the Panchayats and then to the grama sabhas. The unwieldy numbers of the each of the Grama Sabhas was addressed by the formation of Neighbourhood Groups and ward meetings. Though in the last stage, much needed technical assistance, this was managed by tapping the skills from retired government servants who were technically qualified people from the localities.

In terms of Peoples' participation, this was a successful programme. The grama sabhas turned out to be the festival of masses; lakhs of people were involved in the whole process along with an equally assorted group of experts in the various

state committee member E M Sreedharan, who was a member of the then Planning Board, described people's planning as the concretisation of the Gandhian idea of Gram Swaraj (*Madhyamom Daily*, 20 March 2000, cited in *Ibid*).

aspects of planning including a high level advisory committee, committed volunteers, a voluntary technical corps (VTCs). In the 6th phase of this process, more than 35,000 VTC members were registered⁴⁴ and harnessed into VTC/PAT (plan appraisal teams). It also had considerable material gain to its kitty in the plan execution period.⁴⁵

Moreover, the campaign had the potential to deepen democracy and ensure a fairly high level of participation in tune with the slogan the world over. This been a pioneering attempt to hand over power to the people, the campaign infused a substantial dose of direct democracy and ensured the shift of decision making process from seminar halls and conference rooms of the government departments to the streets. The people's planning programme was, indeed, a step towards "narrowing the separation between the representatives and the represented".⁴⁶ The importance of this experiment from the concerns of this study is that alternatives such as deepening of democracy as an inevitable element of the Marxist political praxis. Like in the case of the 1957 communist-led government, this was also a huge learning process not only to the Left but to anyone concerned with the quest for an alternative in the neo-liberal context. On the practical side, the campaign demystified the whole concept of planning. Whether it was a success or failure, when measured in the normal scale is

⁴⁴ Rashmi Sharma, 'Kerala's Decentralisation' p. 3839.

⁴⁵ The achievements were briefed as, "in the two years 1997 to 1999, 98,494 houses have been built, 240,307 sanitary latrines constructed, 50,162 wells dug, 17,489 public taps provided and 16,563 ponds cleaned. A total of 2,800,179 individual beneficiaries received support from the plan for seedlings and fertilisers. The length of roads constructed under the Campaign adds up to 7,947 kms." Apart from these physical achievements, the PPC has involved a series of institutional innovations. These include the local-level institutions like Gram Sabhas, beneficiary committees and neighbourhood groups, and the state-level institutions like the Ombudsman and the Information Kerala Mission. Gram Sabha, in the context of Kerala village panchayats being demographically too big, is organised at the ward-level. The dynamics of the PPC itself made it imperative to have a unit even below the Gram Sabha. Hence, ayalkoottams, collections of families in a neighbourhood, were organised to conduct various activities of PPC." P. K. Michael Tharakan and Vikas Rawal, 'Decentralisation and the Peoples Campaign in Kerala', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 29, No. 9/10, September - October, 2001, pp. 2-3, Also see Richard W. Franke & Barbara H. Chasin, 'The Kerala Decentralisation Experiment: Achievements, Origins, and Implications', Presented at the *International Conference on Democratic Decentralisation May 23-28, 2000*, Kerala University, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala Sponsored by the Kerala State Planning Board pp.4 -5.

⁴⁶ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.251.

not the matter here. What mattered is that it proved the potential for such radical thinking and locating the idea of change in a Marxian sense to a context that was far too different from that which Marx and Engels confronted in Western Europe when they sought to evolve a theory for change.

However, despite these new initiatives, the LDF could not retain power in the general elections to the State assembly in May 2001. The important point here is that after coming to power, the Congress-led UDF persisted with the process of direct democracy insofar as fund allocation to the Panchayats were concerned even while making changes in the programme. However, the political will, which was the most important element that brought strength to the programme was missing and the campaign, thus, lost its core strength. The enthusiastic KSSP volunteers too withdrew from the scene slowly.

The CPI (M), meanwhile, made a somewhat shoddy assessment of its record in utilitarian terms post-2001 reversals. The party's central committee came to the conclusion that 'the successful implementation of the land reform measures from within the constraints of the Constitution, social welfare measures, strong and wide spread public distribution system, improvements in the education and public health, self-sufficiency in power production, *decentralisation of powers to panchayati raj institutions, people's participation in planning and execution of the development activities*' (emphasis added) and expressed its serious concern as to why 'despite all these achievements, and the innumerable struggles conducted by the Party and the mass organisations and the electoral tactics of united front, the fact that the Party has not been able to make any advance.' The document then cautioned that 'if the Party in Kerala fails to address this serious problem and appropriate remedial measures are not

taken, it would not be possible even to sustain the present strength.’⁴⁷ Referring to the People’s Plan Campaign in particular, the Central Committee had this to say:

The crisis of productive forces was, however, deepened further by the time PPC came into being as a result of the neo-liberal reforms underway at the national-level. The economic reforms not only forced a decline in the existing productive capacity of the state but also threatened the systems of public provisioning of food, education and health care that Kerala was well known for.⁴⁸

In the final analysis, it may be held, that the Peoples’ Campaign had the potential for effecting a structural transformation and for developing into an alternative model; it did unsettle the power relations. And yet the idea did not gather moss. It was possibly because a large section of the leadership, within the Communist parties and outside of it in the political spectrum, was against this move as it threatened to undermine the role of the state legislature. Probably the effect of this was the slowing down of this programme after the initial couple of years since it began in 1996 and with the defeat of the LDF in the 2001 elections, detractors within the front succeeded in presenting the programme as such as a cause for their defeat. And when the UDF sought to dilute it in many ways, there was hardly any resistance to such efforts between 2001 and 2006. And when the LDF returned to power in 2006, there was hardly any enthusiasm to revive the campaign; instead, another programme - Kudumbashree - was introduced and this is still going on.

Thomas Isaac, one of the architects of the Campaign gives an insider’s view:

The uncooperative and negative attitude of the officials, the inability of resource persons to deal with issues raised during training, and the fact that some of the southern districts had not yet completed the development seminars. The quality of the projects too left much to be desired. There was a general tendency to imitate model projects given in the handbook or adopt ongoing schemes of the departments. Financial analysis was especially weak, as was the technical analysis of production-related projects.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ ‘Review of the May 2001 Assembly Elections Adopted in the August 11-12, 2001 Meeting of the Central Committee’, *Communist Party of India (Marxist)*, p.4.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Rashmi Sharma, ‘Kerala’s Decentralisation’, p. 3837.

While these may have been issues at the level of implementation of the programme, the important factor is the lack of enthusiasm and motivation from a large section of the communists themselves - the question of renewal - for a programme that had the potential to challenge the *status quo* - the power relations. This was not realised by a large section of the communist party. Attempts at *Renewals* need a lot more conviction, commitment and above all the courage to shake away shibboleths. That certainly was found wanting within the various levels of leadership in the CPI(M). The major cause of this predicament then was the inability of the Marxists to locate themselves in the changing reality and formulate a theory – Marxist Praxis – and instead holding on to shibboleths. And hence, the political leadership did not show up whole heartedly to transform this campaign into an alternative.⁵⁰ This was evident when the party's resolution on the political situation at its 17th Congress (Hyderabad, March 19-24, 2002) restricted itself to a brief mention of the decentralisation campaign in general. Under the sub-heading (vii) - For Development- it held:

Promoting balanced development of all regions through planning. Decentralisation of development decisions up to the panchayat and local bodies level. Devolve financial and administrative powers to the panchayat system. Environmental policy integrated with needs for rapid and sustainable development. Promoting indigenous scientific and technological research for independent development.⁵¹

⁵⁰ A section of the top echelons in the LDF itself did not realise the relevance and potential of people's planning. As a result, during the initial years of the campaign against it, some of the partners in the LDF coalition had come out denigrating. Strangely, even some of the state-level leaders of the CPI (M) characterised in public people's planning as a strategy to infringe upon and transgress the powers and prerogatives of the members of the legislative assembly; The CPI (M) cadres at the local level, to a certain extent, viewed the plan fund devolved to local bodies as a potential source to attract people to the party, resulting in violating the norms of beneficiary selection and bypassing the beneficiary list approved by grama sabhas for individual beneficiary schemes such as house, wells, and cattle. Even though such instances of violation of beneficiary lists were not the norm, they added, to a great extent, the strength of the campaigners against people's planning; At the fag end of the tenure of the LDF government, there were murmurings at the ministerial level that the devolution of funds to LSGIs had thrown the financial management of the government out of gear. Besides, the disbursement of the last instalment of the fourth-year allotment of plan fund owed to the LSGIs was also withheld, which further turned people against people's planning, thus nullifying the achievements of four years of hard work."⁵⁰ S. Mohanakumar, *From People's Plan*, p, 1494.

⁵¹ 'Political Resolution Adopted At The 17th Congress', March 19-24, 2002, Hyderabad: March 19-24, 2002, *Communist Party of India (Marxist)*, p. 30.

The Political-Organisational Report was also silent on this. Moreover, there were even charges within the party that “the People's Plan Campaign, implemented by the 1996-2001 Left Democratic Front Government, had its origins on the drawing boards of the World Bank and that it did not have clear class or political perspective.”⁵² Although the Party rejected this charge outright, the fact that there was a conspicuous absence of a serious discussion on it should be taken as evidence that the Party’s position regarding the Campaign was not so favourable. It even went as far as to reject its significance in the new reality when it held that “the position that decentralisation of powers is not a panacea for globalisation (as anti-Marxist) and called upon party members to remain vigilant against the ‘anti-Marxist’ campaign for party-less participatory democracy at the grassroots.”⁵³

In short, the point was made in a study holding that:

Despite all those positive conditions being present, however, the outcome was rather frustrating. There was little spontaneous convergence of various groups and interests in favour of actual productive co-operation and democratisation. Special interests and diverging views of specific issues often persisted, which sustained the dominance of old political and at times communal loyalties. Moreover, several established (especially trade union-) sections of the Left Front parties were very sceptical of the new initiatives. In fact, much of the initiatives rested instead with support from some well-wishers within the state government. So when the Left lost the next election, the campaigns lost steam.⁵⁴

⁵² This issue was raised in the context of the expel of MP Parameswaran, who was also master brain behind the People’s Campaign and his thesis Fourth World had similarities derived from the Campaign.. The Hindu, CPI (M)expels M.P. Parameswaran, *The Hindu*, 16/2/ 2004.

⁵³ CPI (M)expels M.P. Parameswaran, *The Hindu* 16/2/ 2004. The State committee, however, took a stronger view of the manner in which the KSSP had availed itself of Dutch assistance through the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) for one of its projects related to democratic decentralisation. The communique pointed out that though it could technically be said that it had received the funds from the CDS-approved research project, the failure of Parishad members to draw the party's attention to receipt of the assistance had led to confusion.

⁵⁴ Olle Törnquist, ‘Movement, Politics and Development: The Case of Kerala’, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 29, No. 11/12, November - December 2001, pp.60-61. He added that in this respect, the major problems so far are the latter two - the institutionalization of the positive gains of the 'People's Plan' for decentralised development and to get the established politicians to follow suit. By now - and despite the very impressive and powerful efforts - it does not seem as if the Kerala reformists have been successful enough in these respects. The late-2000 local elections were close to a failure for the Left Front.

Similarly, unlike in the case of agrarian reforms, legislations which were preceded by movements mobilizing the people for many years, the People's Plan Campaign was essentially top-down; it certainly contributed to its weakness. As a consequence, "contrary to the dynamics of the region's historical trajectory, it has so far succeeded mainly in accentuating the dominant paradigm of development, and reinforcing the status quo rather than forging ahead in the path of mass empowerment and sustainable development."⁵⁵

And finally, the failure of the PPC was also attributed to the basic structure of the Party - the principle of democratic centralism - that does not provide space for this kind of localized planning and implementation. The argument goes that the PPC was an ultimate format for peoples' participation in a democratic manner. The basic postulates of PPC rely on transparency, openness, public scrutiny and other such democratic values. A Party with principle of democratic centralism as its basic structure is indeed antithetical and inimical to a concept like PPC.

The PPC was the last attempt by the CPI (M) to present an alternative to the neo-liberal challenge. Not only did the party desist any serious assessment of the People's Planning Campaign, it even encouraged views that expressed suspicion on the idea. The political and economic concerns of the Party too transformed considerably. In the 1950s and 60s Cooperatives were a major aspect of the Party's strategy. (This has been discussed in detail in Chapter II). The Industrial Cooperative of the Beedi workers- Kerala Dinesh Beedi Cooperative- which was established in 1969 runs as a successful business model while 'the industrial cooperatives have not generally not been very successful in Kerala'.⁵⁶ These were empowerment oriented,

⁵⁵ Gurukkal, 'When a Coalition of Conflicting Interests Decentralises', p. 61.

⁵⁶"The handloom, cashew processing and tile manufacturing cooperatives in Kerala suffer from a series of crisis that have hit their respective industries: raw material scarcity, market competition from modern products, and failure to introduce appropriate technological modernization. The few studies

right based programmes and meant to not only to save the poor from the debt trap but these were initiative aiming at reaching economic democracy going by the principles of distributive economy. This was the radical phase of the Party which had changed over a period of time.

A close look at the cooperative movement in Kerala today reveals a shift in the concerns of the Party; the CPI (M), in recent times, have chosen to set up cooperative societies in such sectors as tourism,⁵⁷ hospitality and building multi-specialty hospitals and so on. In other words, cooperatives, in the CPI (M)'s view are meant to be business ventures and investment options rather than means to strengthen the people and their rights. In the words of a perceptive journalist:

The CPI (M) is foraying into the thriving tourism and hospitality sector via cooperative societies controlled by it—and charging market rates with pleasure. The CPI (M)-controlled Kozhikode District Cooperative Travel & Tourism Development Society (KTDS) plans a five-star hotel as well as a hotel management institute, and has shelled out Rs 6 crore to buy a plot of land in the heart of the city. The cooperatives in the tourism sector are ready to offer shares in the companies to cash-rich Gulf Malayalees—who would be quick to notice that the ventures are not charities but out to make a profit.⁵⁸

The CPI (M) had grown through its distinctive path of agitational politics and good governance by taking radical steps to implement land reform and other courses slowly began to change its developmental concerns. In the process, the difference between the bourgeois parties and the Communist Parties narrowed down

that have been done on industrial cooperatives in Kerala indicate that worker participation rates are low and that some so-called cooperatives are actually exploitative private companies registered as cooperatives in order to benefit from low interest loans and other government services.” T.M. Thomas Isaac, Richard W. Frank and Pyaralal Raghavan, *Democracy at Work in an Indian Industrial Cooperative: The Story of Kerala Dinesh Beedi* (London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 16

⁵⁷ For instance the Vismaya" amusement park, a Rs. 39 crore venture of CPI (M)-controlled cooperative society, the Malabar Tourism Development Cooperatives Ltd (MTDCL). This was opened in Parassinikadavu in Kannur district. Kerala Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac, the leading voice among ministers backing the trend, defends the profit-making ventures. He says; “It is a wrong notion that cooperatives must confine themselves to sunset industries and are meant to take over sick units rejected by capitalists. Who said cooperatives can run only coffee houses?” ‘Capitalism, CPI (M) Style’. K.R. Balasubramanyam, *Business Today*, 2 November 2008, [http://www.businesstoday.in/magazine/in-this-issue/capitalism,-CPI-\(M\)-style/story/3189.html](http://www.businesstoday.in/magazine/in-this-issue/capitalism,-CPI-(M)-style/story/3189.html) accessed on 3/9/2016. This is no way to dismiss the fact that Kerala had a total of in its 1,628 primary cooperative agriculture credit societies with 1.11 crore members (*The Hindu* 30/10/2007). The issue is the cooperative societies in other productive sectors and the changes in the development concerns.

⁵⁸K.R. Balasubramanyam.

considerably. The CPI (M) do admit the ‘erosion of ideological conviction and consequent loss of impetus for politics distinct from bourgeois parties’ and ‘growing *parliamentarism* in the Party that undermined the focus on building a revolutionary party organisation and development of mass organisations.’ This led to this state of affairs today.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly in the midst of the chaotic economic relations, emergence of revivalism and resurgence of the identity politics, persistent factionalism within the Party in the State Kerala, the Party had gained considerable achievement in the electoral sense.

However, a new churning has taken place in the political discourse in Kerala with the arrival and rise of localized movements; though localized and often based on micro-demands, these movements have captured a good amount of space in the democratic discourse of the State. The next section will look into the nature of these movements and try to place the Left in the new paradigm.

III

Most of those who built the communist movement in India found it necessary to take up reforms in the social structure seriously. There were instances in the history that they were even willing to treat this as an autonomous area. And in the places where they adopted such a course, they were able to establish themselves as a force; they were also successful in forcing others in the political spectrum to internalise a more pro-active agenda on the question of challenging the feudal social order. The Communist movement in Kerala too was rooted in a social agenda by organising the oppressed classes - small peasants, agriculture workers and industrial workers - to fight against the social oppression as much as for their economic liberation. These

⁵⁹ Report on Organization (Adopted by the Plenum on Organization Kolkata, December 27-31, 2015, CPI (M) CC, pp.45.

leaders refused to go by the presumption that this was an agenda of the bourgeoisie and that the incipient capitalist classes would, anyway, carry out this task.

Eventually, through persistent struggles, the communists did succeed in addressing the social oppression to a large extent. Their labours for restructuring the agrarian relations and thus the social restructuring culminated in the Kerala Land Reform Act and the implementation of minimum wages for the agriculture workers when the first communist government was formed in Kerala in 1957. By late 1970s, a major chunk of the implementation of land reform measures were completed; the landlords as class had been made extinct and the tenant farmers were liberated from exploitation. However, the major drawback in the implementation of the land reforms legislations remained; the real tillers, the agricultural workers, by and large, were left out in the process. This has been a point of discussion among the academia since then.⁶⁰ Even while the *theological* Marxists claim that the land reform was complete in Kerala, the fact is that the landless agriculture workers, mostly Dalits and tribal people, continue to remain landless to this day. And, this was prominently pronounced in the 1990s as a churning was happening all over of the country in the

⁶⁰ About the fag end of the implementation of the land reform measures in Kerala in 1977, an EPW correspondent's study on the situation revealed that the surplus land distribution among the poor agricultural workers were not largely met with. The correspondent wrote: "The estimates about the surplus land in Kerala vary from the official 2 lakh acres to about 8 lakhs if all categories of surplus land, including private forests and land are taken into consideration. Only the latter surplus area would be able to satiate the land hunger of the peasantry to a certain extent, say of 4 lakh landless households with two acres each. This would have a revolutionary impact on the class relations in Kerala and liberate the forces of production. Such a programme, however, is not yet on the agenda. As on July 9, 1976, only 23,000 of the 38,000 ceiling returns filed had been disposed of, yielding a mere 63,000 acres of surplus area, of which 31,000 acres had been taken possession of. This means hardly one-half of one per cent of the total net sown area, which is incidentally also the all-India average. These official data explain properly that the slogan land to the tiller', despite some radical legislation, has remained ineffective, even in this reference state of one shade of communists." Land Reform; Failure Even in Kerala, *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 5, 1977, p. 417. Also see T K Oommen, Agrarian Legislations and Movements as Sources of Change: The Case of Kerala, *Economic and Political weekly*, 4 October 1975, and a micro study of Suma Sacria, 'Changes in Land Relations: The Political Economy of Land Reforms in a Kerala Village, *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vo. 45, Issue No. 26-27, June 26, 2010.

post–Mandal-Masjid era. This also happened to be the period when Dalit consolidation had become a feature across the country.

The Adivasi and Dalits movements for land for livelihood in Kerala, which began in the 1990s, will be discussed here in order to present the changing social correlations in Kerala in perspective. This is also placed in the larger context of the new genre of social movements world over such as the ANTEAG- National Association of Worker Managed Enterprises in Argentina, the CONAIE- Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, The *Movimento Serra Tem* (MST) – movement of landless for land in Brazil, Neighbourhood Associations in Bolivia as well as other environmental and gender movements all over the world. The common characteristics of these movements were; participatory and democratic approach and a shared value. They were issuing new empowerment praxis to the world that went beyond the texts. Some of these praxis are recognised as a continuous process of theoretical reconstruction around the core of Marxism for providing the basis for praxis in a changing world.⁶¹ While some others considered them as a search for renewals in the changed context of the world or searching for new products of socialism as the old socialism was the product of another time and hence not enough a tool to explain the new epoch.

In Kerala, the erosion of Dalit votes (though it was not described as dalit votes then as caste was not factored in the Marxist discourses) was a major concern CPI (M) in the late 1970s itself.⁶² However, the consolidation of Dalits signified by their caste identity as such began to happen only in the 1990s in Kerala. This phenomenon in Kerala as well as elsewhere can be best understood in the larger backdrop of the

⁶¹ Patnaik, “The Future of Marxism”, p.181.

⁶² Party expressed its concern about the ‘erosion of popular votes in certain important pockets such as Palakkad and Alapuzha districts, a strong bases of the Party in the 1977 elections. In Palakkad, the agriculture workers, mostly belong to the dalit community, were the backbone of the Party and Alapuzha it was the workers in the traditional industries like coir. *Salkia Plenum*, p. 16.

unfinished agrarian reforms in Kerala. Though the radical record of land reforms had received acclaim from different quarters, in the whole land restructuring process, the Dalits and Adivasis - the actual tillers of the land - were the losers as the surplus land distribution (which was the only available track to provide land for the Dalits for cultivation), by and large, did not accomplish the task. Partly it was due to the delay in the implementation of the Land Reform Act which provided the landed class the much needed time and space for manipulation and hence the land ceilings could not bring the desired effects. The landless agricultural workers had to satisfy with the homestead while the ultimate prerequisite of land for livelihood remained a dream.

The invectives of the liberalisation and globalisation - withdrawal of the state from the social and welfare sectors and the consequent deterioration of the quality of public service sectors like health, education and PDS – alongside the problems that arose out of the Kerala Model of Development - stagnation in the agriculture sector and the sluggish /or negative growth of traditional industries - affected the poor in general and the dalit and tribal people severely. Farming was the only skill they had acquired over centuries as educational and other opportunities were denied to them for long. In this context, the land question strongly bounced back to the political discourse. The difference was that during the period between the 1950s and 1970s, the movement was led by the Karshaka Sangams supported by the Communist Party which had also come to power twice during this period. But the present movements were led by identity based groups of the Dalits and the tribal people, claiming to be outside the mainstream political domain and hence faced an antagonistic response from the political parties across the spectrum including the communist parties. It is pertinent here to look at the attitude of the Left, especially the CPI (M), towards the Dalit and Adivasi in general and their movements in particular.

As early as in the 1980s, the CPI (M) had taken note of the danger of the emergence of identity based consolidation of the agriculture workers, the most trusted ally of the Party, and it asked its mass organisations to ‘represent the mass and its mood, and link the vanguard with the masses.’⁶³ The Party also asked its mass organisations to be sensitive towards the problems of the Dalits and Adivasis and warned that otherwise they will be alienated from the common movement.⁶⁴ A perceptive change was conceived since the 1990s in the context of a new social realignment all over the country. The political resolution of the Fourteenth Congress expressed its ‘concerns for the protection of the identity and cultural rights,’⁶⁵ of the tribal people, alienation of their land and so livelihood, brutal disruption of their traditional way of life and so on. Further, in 1993, we find in a Central Committee document, by way of self-criticism, that the Party in general of not taking up the Dalits and adivasi issues for it had led to the growth of caste based organisations.

The CPI (M)’s concerns were triggered by the fact that such consolidation on the basis of caste identity, as was happening, strengthened the bourgeois-landlord political parties as it helped their divisive agenda.⁶⁶ It called for intensive action to rectify this and the party was confident of reversing this trend given the CPI (M)’s record of having been taken up the struggle for social justice and that this was bound to make the scheduled castes more receptive to Left policies.⁶⁷ This sense of confidence was not misplaced. The communist legacy was one where the caste/class

⁶³ The Political Resolution of the Eleventh Congress stated: “The Mass organisations led by our Party must overcome the weaknesses nailed down by the Salkia plenum and ensure that they represented the mass and its mood, and link the vanguard with the masses. ‘Documents of the Eleventh Congress of the CPI (M)’, p. 63.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 52.

⁶⁵ Documents of the Fourteenth Congress of the Communist Party of India, Madras January, 1992, A CPI (M) Publication, June 1992, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁶ Cited in the Review of the Work on Kisan and Agricultural Workers Fronts and Future Tasks, (Adopted at the Central Committee meeting held on June 07-09, 2003 at Kolkata, p. 7.

⁶⁷ Documents of the Fourteenth Congress of the Communist Party of India, Madras January, 1992, A CPI (M) Publication, June 1992, p. 28.

overlap was internalized and led to a combination of social and economic justice. This, notwithstanding, the political landscape in Kerala witnessed the rise of tribal and Dalit consolidation on identity basis organised by non-mainstream Left outfits for land for livelihood. The CPI (M) realised this a bit too late and only a decade after such consolidation emerged. The provocation for such realization too came after the LDF lost the assembly elections in 2001. The election review warned against the erosion of the basic classes from the Party. It said:

The Party should take adequate steps for bringing back the sections of kisans, agricultural workers, workers in traditional industries such as coir, handloom, cashew nut, toddy tapping, middle class employees etc who went away from us. The state committee also should make efforts to expand our influence among these sections . . . It cannot be obsessed only with the issue of electoral tactics alone in effecting a change in the alignment of political parties in favour of the Left Democratic Front. The sole issue cannot be the by winning over of more parties so that the LDF can again come to power. . . It was also a serious lapse that the interests of the poorer sections such as the agricultural workers, workers in the traditional industries such as coir, handloom, cashew, toddy tapping, fishing and handicapped and widows were forgotten.⁶⁸

The Kerala State committee was also concerned about the intensive efforts to organise the Dalits behind identity based organisations and thus alienate them from the Party. It was imperative for the Party to chart out a course to prevent this alienation. It reminded those historical struggles carried out by the Party and the agricultural workers' union to reach what they achieved today. Rather than charting a concerted course of action the Party simply sought to rest itself with a propaganda of the glorious role it played in the past insofar as the concerns of the Dalits and the adivasis were concerned and seek their return.⁶⁹ It, by and large remained a 'call'.

The political Resolutions in the various party congresses since 2000 and other documents such as *Review of the Work on Kisan Front and on Agricultural*

⁶⁸ Review of the May 2001 Assembly Elections Adopted in the August 11-12, 2001 Meeting of the Central Committee, p.5-6.

⁶⁹ Document Adopted by the Kerala State Committee of the CPI (M) at its meeting on 27-28 March 2003, p. 9. The situation warranted immediate attention of the Party. It also expressed its concern over the 'attempts to draw away the basic classes – 'ordinary and poor sections of people engaged in traditional industries and agricultural sector who are the foundation of the Party by using casteism.'"⁶⁹

Workers' Front and Future Tasks reiterated the fact the fighting caste oppression is integral to the fight against economic oppression.⁷⁰ The party has also been emphasizing on the need to identify with the aspirations and assertions of all socially and economically oppressed sections” and “making their demand for social justice a part of the common democratic platform.”⁷¹ The Party also came up with two documents - On Tribal Policy in 2001⁷² and adopted a resolution at the All India Convention on Problems of Dalits (February 22, 2006)⁷³ emphasizing the Marxist perspective on caste oppression.⁷⁴

However, unfortunately, these ideological exercises and concerns, hardly translated into political action.⁷⁵ Dalits and Adivasis consolidation did take place in

⁷⁰ For instance the political resolution of the 17th Congress too stressed that the fight against caste oppression is an integral to the fight against the economic oppression of Dalits. It stated: The struggle for the emancipation of the dalits will succeed only when the fight against the oppressive caste system is harnessed to the struggle to end the economic exploitation of the dalit working masses, when the class issues of land, wages and employment are taken up along with the heinous and inhuman caste practices. Dalit Christians should be provided reservation as other scheduled castes since conversion to any religion does not free the dalits from social oppression.”(Political Resolution Adopted At The 17th Congress, Hyderabad: March 19-24, 2002, P.22. In the document Review of the Work on Kisan and Agricultural Workers Fronts and Future Tasks also Party called for taking up the social issues to be taken up such as social discrimination, caste oppression, atrocities against scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes. And the weakness regarding this should be examined and concrete form of action should be chalked out. ‘Review of the Work on Kisan and Agricultural Workers Fronts and Future Tasks’, Adopted at the Central Committee meeting held on June 07-09, 2003 at Kolkata, pp.20.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² The Tribal policy rightly identified the main problems affecting the tribal people are: Land and their alienation from it, Forests and their access to it, large scale displacement due to development projects, status of women, social Oppression, lack of educational facilities, language and culture, autonomy and constitutional safeguards. ‘CPI (M) Policy Document on Tribal Question’, Adopted by the Central Committee in its meeting held on March 2-3, 2002, pp. 1-2. Accordingly it charted out a 13 point programme to address these issues. However, these were largely remained in the paper.

⁷³ The Party observed November 18, 2005, as All India Tribal Demands Day.

⁷⁴ The Party Centre organised an all-India convention on Dalits in New Delhi on February 12, 2006. This was the first time that the Party had organised a convention on dalit issues at the national level. 600 delegates representing 21 states attended the convention. The convention adopted a 14-point charter of demands which include implementation of land reforms, strict implementation of reservations in appointment and promotions, passing a legislation to provide reservation in the private sector, infrastructure development, rooting out untouchability, protection from atrocities, providing more employment opportunities, providing educational facilities, passing a comprehensive legislation providing minimum wages and other social security measures, expansion of credit facilities, strengthening of the PDS, abolition of bonded labour and rehabilitation of bonded labourers, etc. Resolution Adopted at the all India Convention on Problems of Dalits, CPI (M), February 22, 2006 New Delhi

⁷⁵ Sitram Yechury, the general secretary of the CPI (M) writes that fighting the dalit oppression is important to advance the class advance in the country. This is a “big challenge before the Party and the movement which we are not really conscious of, we are trying to overcome but this is the one obstacle

Kerala despite the repeated appeals of the Party, despite the growing membership of the Party and its frontal and mass organisations in Kerala and despite the CPI (M) led governments being in power for full terms between 1996-2001, and 2006-2011. In fact Dalit and Adivasi alienation was taking a new shape in Kerala.

It is relevant here to look at the some of the Dalit and Adivasi movements for land for livelihood in Kerala. These originated outside realm of the mainstream Left and it may be argued that these movements had only tried to fill the vacuum caused by the Left vacating this socio-economic and political space it had occupied for long. These social groups, after all, were historically with the Communists; and the communists, indeed, had represented their cause in the epochal struggles since the days of national liberation movement.

It has already been mentioned that the major lacuna of the land reforms movement in Kerala, as elsewhere, was that the landless agricultural worker ended up remaining landless. By the late 1970s the scope for addressing this issue through further restructuring of agrarian land ownership patterns and redistribution of land was lost given the stagnation in agricultural production and also the small tracts that could be considered surplus land. Nevertheless, it must be stressed here that abolition of zamindari (in its various names in Kerala society) and the redistribution of land to the tenant farmer was no mean achievement in Kerala and this was a contribution of the communists, while being in power and out of it since 1957. The *rule and struggle* strategy adopted by the CPI (M), facilitated the masses to carry on with their struggle even when the Party was in power. However, since the late 1980s, the spirit of the struggles waned down considerably to token protests; so the question of further land

to be overcome in order to advance the class struggle in our country.” He added that ‘combining the social oppression and class as a part of one class struggle’ in India, Sitaram Yechuri, in Muraleedharan *et al.*, (ed.), Left Alternative, pp. 34-39

restructuring remained an academic question that was discussed once in a while and more so in the context of the *Kerala Model of development*.

Similarly, it is an undisputable fact that the Adivasis were alienated from their forest lands by fraudulent means in such parts of Attapadi (Palakkad district) and in Wayanad, the two major parts of Kerala with a predominant Adivasi population. It is also a fact these large scale illegal transfer of tribal land to the settlers and the resistance building against such land grab, when the Naxalites began organising the adivasi people in the Wayanad region pushed the then government to enact the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act, 1975 (Act 31 of 1975). This law, passed when the CPI headed Achutha Menon government was in power, was indeed, a radical one.⁷⁶ It firmly mandated the restoration of the alienated land of the Adivasis. The preamble of the Act unambiguously stated that 'it is expedient to provide for restricting the transfer of lands by members of Scheduled Tribes in the State of Kerala and for the restoration of possession of lands alienated by such members and for matters connected therewith'.

However, the original sin was that the CPI headed government did not show the political will to implement the Act; the attitude was diametrically opposite to the Agrarian Reform Act. Incidentally, none of the governments since then have shown

⁷⁶ The rules made all transfer of property "possessed, enjoyed or owned" by Adivasis to non-tribal people between January 1, 1960 and January 1, 1982 "invalid" and directed that the "possession or enjoyment" of property so transferred be restored to the Adivasis concerned. However, the Act required that the Adivasi return the amount, if any, they had received during the original transaction and pay compensation for any improvements made on the land by the non-tribal occupants. The government was to advance this amount to the tribal people as loans and recover it from them in 20 years. R. Krishnakumar, 'The Adivasi Struggle', *Frontline*, Vol.18 - Issue 21, 13 – 26 October, 2001. A sub-committee constituted by Kerala state assembly in 1976 visited Wayanad district which has the largest adivasi population in the state. They constructed a rapid survey on land alienation. Of the 298 cases presented to them, it was found that 71 (24 percent) were grabbed by force, 57 were grabbed for measly sums while the rest for a small amount. There were 14 cases signatures were obtained on blank papers without any money being paid, five did not receive the stipulated amount and two had their money taken away. An official ITDP survey in February 15, 1977 reveals that in Attapady of Palakkad district, another major adivasi belt, 10,106.19 acres of adivasi lands were alienated."⁷⁶ C. R. Bijoy, 'Adivasis Betrayed: Land Rights in Kerala', *Economic and Political weekly*, 29 May 1999, p. 1329.

the urge to implement the Act including the CPI (M), a Party which staunchly stood for the restoration of the alienated land to the tribal people. The pressure of the settlers, who constitute a predominant vote base in such districts as Kottayam and Kollam, indeed, led the parties, across the spectrum, to trade off the rights of the adivasi people in Wayanad, whose population even otherwise remains sparse. Numerically and economically powerful settlers outstripped the poor landless Adivasis. It took more than a decade to do the dusting of the Act, as it happened only at the insistence of the Kerala High Court which asked the Government implement the long overdue Act; the Kerala High Court ordered this on a petition filed by a social activist, Nalla Thampi, in 1988. However, nothing happened on that front and the Act was amended in 1996; a much diluted version of the 1975 Act is now in place. The new Act included crucial provisions in favour of the settlers. This is the background of the Adivasis resistance in Kerala. At the outset, it should be acknowledged that the political space for agitational politics was readily available in Kerala, thanks to the long tradition of public action adopted by the communists over a period of time.

C.K. Janu, previously an activist with the Kerala Agriculture Workers Union (a front organisation of CPI-M), disillusioned with the Party's attitude towards the issues of Tribal people in Wayanad, started the Adivasi Vikasana Pravarthaka Samiti in 1992.⁷⁷ That was the beginning of the land for livelihood movement by the Adivasis in the region. This was just ahead of the proposed amendment to the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act, 1975. Subsequently, the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (AGMS) was formed in 1994 with a demand for the implementation of the Act. A similar movement was launched in Kannur by Adivasi Vimochana Munnani (AVM) in 1999.

⁷⁷ CPI (M) was accused for floating an Adivasi Kshema Samiti (AKS) for breaking the unity among the tribal people.

The plight of the Adivasis made news when they organised a 48 day *dharna* in front of the State secretariat under the banner of Adivasi Dalit Samara Samiti (ADSS) demanding an immediate end to starvation deaths among the adivasis and resettlement for all the landless adivasis across the state in 2001.⁷⁸ A temporary truce was arrived at on the promise by the government to provide land to the 60,000 adivasi families among other demands.⁷⁹ However, the movement expanded when the government retracted from its promise. This led to the forceful occupation of land by the adivasi people at the Muthanga Wild Life sanctuary that was met with massive repression including indiscriminate firing by the armed police force. When this happened on February 19, 2003, the Congress-led UDF was in power in Kerala and A K Antony was Chief Minister.

Another major movement for land was the Chengara land occupation in the line of the squatters' movement in Mexico. A massive group of 3000 families⁸⁰ that were landless, organised under the banner of Sadhujana Vimochana Samyukata Vedi, occupied the Harrison Malayalam Estate⁸¹ in Chengara in Pathanamthitta district in August 2007. These lands were under the possession of the estate even after the lease period was over. Prior to that, there were small scale occupation movement in the State-owned Chandanappally Estate in the same region in July 2006. However, upon the assurance of the government that it will provide land to them by August 1, 2007,

⁷⁸ 'Occupy Muthanga' struggles began in 2003, M S Sreerexha, 'Challenges before Kerala's Landless: The Story of Aralam Farm', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 May 2010, p. 57. In Kerala, between 1999 and 2001, 147 starvation deaths were reported from the adivasi community. Bijoy and Raman (2003)

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 57.

⁸⁰ Vedi alleges attack on Dalits over land acquisition , August 06, 2007, <http://news.oneindia.mobi/2007/08/06/408118.html> accessed on 12 July 2016.

⁸¹ The land was handed over to the company in 1918 from the Vanchipuzha Madhom family, which had been given the land by a Travancore king (Landless encroach on Harrisons Malayalam estate, put up tents Ajayan, www.Livemint.com, the wall street journal, Monday November 12, 2007, accessed on 12 July 2016, <http://www.livemint.com/2007/08/11010238/Landless-encroach-onHarrisons.htm>, accessed on 12 July 2016. Harrison had a lease agreement with the Travancore Kingdom which expired and the land was supposed to go back to the government.

the squatters called off the movement. The government did not honour the agreement and then the squatters occupied the estate in August 2007. This happened when the CPI (M)-led LDF was in power and V.S.Achutanandan was Chief Minister.

What had happened or the nature of such movements, though important, may not be the prime concern of this study; however, it is of importance here to note that such developments where the communists had established their strong presence and even laid the grounds for such campaigns but reneged on those when they came to power. Herein lies the importance of the political conviction to realise the political praxis envisaged in the theory. In this context it is relevant to recall Hugo Chavez, the former president of Venezuela who brought out radical changes in the country challenging the neo-liberal policies with what he described as ; “21st Century Socialism.” Chavez held: “Praxis is what transforms a person. Theory is theory, but theory cannot touch the heart, the bones, the nerves, the spirit of the human being and in reality nothing will change.”⁸²

In other words, the correct analysis of the Dalit and Adivasi situation in the State or in the country (the CPI -M, without doubt, has done this systematically in the larger Marxian framework and theorized it too), alone will not transform the situation but empowerment praxis does. One of the major aspects is that this dialectical unity between the theory and practice is what is missing in the present discourse.

Incidentally, the Party need not search for such praxis elsewhere. The CPI (M) had a long history of agitation demanding the redistribution of surplus land (*the micha bhumi samram*) under A. K. Gopalan in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Party was not in power; and this agitation and occupation of surplus land created a

⁸² Hugo Chavez in his first ‘*Theoretical Alo Presidente*’ on June 11, 2009, cited in Marta Harnecker, ‘New Path Require a New Culture on the Left’, Prof. M Muraleedharan, et al (ed.) Left Alternatives, pp. 93-94.

strong base for the Party since then. The communists are also the inheritors of the historic and heroic tradition of peasant struggle in Telengana in the erstwhile Hyderabad State. What is needed is not the replication of that but the updating or reinventing of new praxis which will enable the Left to place them in the new context. Supporting or being a part of such localized, issue based struggles is one of the possible strategies. And “unless the entire lot of struggles on the local issues are intensified the subjective factor cannot be strengthened.”⁸³

However, in the Chengara struggle, the Party did not express or extend its solidarity for the struggle. On the contrary, all the trade unions, including the CITU, in the estate, run by a private corporation and occupying the land even after the lease had expired (and encroachers in the true sense of the term), strongly condemned the movement. There were physical attacks on the agitating people by them.⁸⁴ The Party raised allegations of foreign funding, involvement of NGOs, and prompting by the naxalites behind the movement. A news report during the movement said it all:

It is not without party sanction that the powerful estate trade unions in the Chengara have laid siege to the dalit settlement... The estate trade unions have issued a stern warning to the agitating dalit families that they would be driven out if they do not vacate.⁸⁵

There was no evidence in this of any attempt to realise the unity of the working class with other oppressed sections – the people’s democratic front – in this context. Even if the argument of the Party leadership in Kerala that there was no

⁸³ Sitaram Yechuri, Philosophy of Praxis, in Left Alternative, p. 36

⁸⁴ ‘Agitation by plantation workers turns violent’, *The Hindu*, 4/8/ 2008. “The all trade union protest was inaugurated by the CPI (M), MLA K.C. Rajagopalan. The march turned violent when a van carrying special invitees for the SJVSV meet reached Athumbamkulam on its way to the HML estate. The agitators blocked the van and prevented human rights activists Swapan Ganguly, who is also Paschim Bengal Khet Mazdoor Sangh general secretary, C.R. Neelakantan, Fr. Abraham Joseph and Fr. Augustine Vattoli from proceeding further. They deflated the tyres of the vehicle and smashed the windscreen. The police sent Mr. Ganguly, who was here to inaugurate the anniversary, and other invitees back to Pathanamthitta in an effort to defuse the tension.” See also <http://www.gbdigest.com/2011/08/breaking-news.html> accessed on 15 July 2016

⁸⁵ See also Radhakrishnan Kuttoor, Fever takes its toll on encroachers, *The Hindu*, 23/8/ 2007, The Hindu <http://www.hindu.com/2007/08/23/stories/2007082353100300.htm>, accessed on 15 July 2016

more surplus land available to be redistributed is accepted,⁸⁶ the Party should be looking for alternative avenues for addressing the question rather than making it as a workers vs. agriculture workers scenario. And all the trade unions, despite the ideological differences, joined hands in this instance to force eviction of the squatters. In other words, the Chengara struggle was appropriately put in context: “The move has definitive support from the management of Harrisons Malayalam too. Struggles throw up strange oppositions and alliances: here, a curious situation where the proletariat and capitalists have joined to fight the landless dalits.”⁸⁷ It was indeed ironical that the BJP took this opportunity to occupy the space by supporting the movement. The irony is over the fact that the BJP had shown no such concerns elsewhere in Chattisgarh where adivasis have borne the brunt of the state and its armed might at the same time.

It may be true that these movements were spontaneous and in that sense lacked a definite direction (that the mainstream left would describe as movements without any definite ideology). The ease with which the BJP could reach out to the Chengara protestors and their accepting support from anywhere and everywhere it came from is certainly an evidence of this. Another fact in this context was that C.K. Janu, the tribal leader, ended up joining the BJP-led NDA to fight elections in 2016. The Political Resolution of the CPI (M)’s 18th Congress recorded this in so many words:

There are some dalit organisations and NGOs who seek to foster anti-Communist feelings among the dalit masses and to detach them from the Left movement. Such sectarian and, in

⁸⁶ Reportedly, “the state secretary (of the CPI -M) condemns any talk of a second round of land reforms as “gibberish radicalism”. He is not exactly honest when he misrepresents the demand of the landless as a threat to the small holders. The chief minister is said to be more favourably disposed, but there has been very little evidence to this so far. . . Despite the reported differences over the land question within the party, and between the party and the government, all are united in implementing a different kind of reform that aggravates inequities in land distribution.”K.T.Rammohan, ‘Black Spots in Kerala’s Socio-Economic Scene’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 September 2008, p. 15.

⁸⁷bid

certain cases, foreign-funded activities must be countered and exposed by positively putting forth the Party's stand on caste oppression and making special efforts to draw the dalit masses into common struggles.⁸⁸

The point is that the emergence of more and more identity based movements in Kerala and elsewhere that suggests that the Left is yet to come up with an alternative Marxist strategy that is “more nuanced to be sensitive to the various types of popular protests and rebellions... and select, incorporate or reject them according to the ideological principles.”⁸⁹ In other words, in the changed context of the world and the country, mere resting on the long legacy of the Party alone will be inadequate to keep the communal forces away from appropriating these movements and more importantly bring them back where they belonged to. More importantly, any act of social transformation largely depends upon the participation of those classes. The premise ought to be, as proposed by Marta Harnekar, the “people cannot develop by magic, they would develop because they struggle and they transform (in transforming circumstances, people transform themselves).”⁹⁰ In their struggles, the communist parties, if not leading, should be on the side of those who struggle for the transformation. In this context the movement of the Adivasis and the Dalits, even if these are mobilised on the basis of identity politics in Kerala, cannot be treated in isolation. Whether they are spontaneous or a planned one, localized or broad-based, ideologically oriented or not, politically motivated or not, the fact is that the stakeholders here are the poor and the marginalized and their fight is for asserting their rights.

⁸⁸ Political Resolution adopted at the 18th Congress, Communist Party of India (Marxist), New Delhi - April 6 to 11, 2005, p. 20.

⁸⁹ Sumanta Banerjee, ‘The Revolutionary in a Post Marxian Era’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 5 May 2012. He was discussing it in a larger context of the search for global Marxist Strategy.

⁹⁰ Marta Harnekar, ‘New Path Require a New Culture on the Left’, p.93.

Here the Left, by and large, seems to be missing the link. “A generation of communists who built the party and its organization against a repressive regime came to be replaced by a managerial class of leftists. These time servers, who came to fill the party’s ranks and its structures, contributed immensely to its alienation from its support base of small farmers and landless proletariat.”⁹¹

Apart from the dalit and tribal movements for land for livelihood, the post-liberalisation period also witnessed an array of localized movements in Kerala to regain the commons, and for preserving and protecting the ecological balance and environment which has come under consistent attack and degradation in Kerala. Among the environmentalists and among the concerned and affected people this is a serious concern today. The deterioration is too profound that “the hydrological cycle is seriously damaged, probably irreversibly. Natural systems like forests and the river systems are irreparably destroyed. Kerala’s abundant wetlands sometimes referred to as the ‘kidney of the economic system’ are fast disappearing. . . Rhetoric apart, no worthwhile effort has been made to conserve the forests. Powerful forest mafia with political patronage has acquired, destroyed and plundered one of the rare forest resources of the world.”⁹²

It is true that there was a perceptual change in the CPI (M) on environmental issues in the face of new environmental challenges. It had graduated from the days of people’s struggle to protect the Silent Valley.⁹³ The mainstream Left parties as well as

⁹¹V Krishna Ananth, *The Decline of the Left: A Casualty of Ideological Contradictions, in Making Sense of Modi’s India* (Noida: Harper Collins, 2016), p.168.

⁹² M A Oommen, ‘Reforms and the Kerala Model’, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 12 January 2008, p. 25.

⁹³ In the 1980, when the CPI (M) led LDF was in power, it vehemently opposed the Protection of Silent Valley movement. The then Chief Minister E K Nayanar “made attempts to mobilize mass support in favour of the Silent Valley Project by all possible means and organised several meetings, seminars, etc., to this end. He deliberately avoided delegations in such meetings from environmentalists who were opposed to the Silent Valley project. . . The Left forces used to project this protest as a game-plan of the CIA which was interfering through the environmentalists to prevent the growth of Kerala.” Somen Chakraborty, ‘The Silent Valley Movement’, in Sebastia L Raj, SJP, Arundhuti Roy Choudhury

other Lefts had, in the past, condemned such campaigns by environmentalists and activists for civil rights, environmental protection, etc., even in the recent past. The Left displayed contempt for the NGOs too and it is a fact that some of its leading lights even accused them of being puppets of global capitalism.⁹⁴

However, the Party began to express concerns over environmental degradation in the recent past, especially since early 2000; this, notwithstanding, the CPI (M) is yet to come up with a concrete policy on environmental questions. This perceptible change was evident when a section of the party's leaders in Kerala ungrudgingly shared a platform with the leader of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, Medha Patkar or Vandana Shiva, whom the CPI (M)'s organ went on to describe as a "renowned anti-WTO activist."⁹⁵ This change is reflective of a thinking that the liberalisation regime has accentuated the problems of environmental degradation and consequently connected integrally with the denial of the livelihood of the people; such campaigns in Kerala have been marked by the leaders apportioning the blame for not enforcing environmental protection measures upon the Central Government.⁹⁶ The Party repeatedly talked about taking up environmental issues which affect the people, particularly to the poor and the vulnerable sections whose livelihoods are affected."⁹⁷

However, when it comes to practice, at least in the context of Kerala, the CPI (M) has not shown any evidence of such a commitment to be part of such movements for the preservation and protection of the environment. On the contrary, there are instances of such cooperatives, floated and controlled by the party like Malabar Tourism Development Cooperatives Ltd (MTDCL) and Kozhikode District

(ed.), *Contemporary Social Movements in India: Achievements and Hurdles*, (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1998), p. 192.

⁹⁴ V Krishna Ananth, 'The Left and the WTO Regime', *The Hindu*, 24/11/2001.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Political Resolution, 17th Congress of CPI (M), p. 18.

⁹⁷ Political Resolution, Adopted at the 20th Congress of CPI (M) Kozhikode, Kerala, April 4-9, 2012, p. 42.

Cooperative Travel & Tourism Development Society (KTDS) engaged with Environment unfriendly tourism projects like Vismaya, that allegedly deplete ground water considerably. Though water harvesting is carried out in the project site (as claimed by those at its helm), the water requirement for such a project is much higher than whatever is harvested. And Party's future investment expansion Plans in the tourism and hospitality industry does not seem to confirm with its professed commitment to protect the environment.⁹⁸ This is also evident from another factor that it does not lead or provide support to the ongoing localized environment movements in Kerala.

This is where the relevance of the large number of localized people's movement for protecting the commons and environment and the question of a Marxist praxis comes to the fore. Prominent among them being the tribal people's fight against the multi-national company Coca-Cola, in Plachimada, a village in the Palakkad district. The Plachimada struggle in the early years of the twenty first century, Gandhian in its form became synonymous with the peoples' struggle against the neoliberal challenge.⁹⁹ Such movements and agitations for protection of environment or the protection of the commons as against the Athirampilly Hydel-power Project, Kathikudam agitation by Nitta Gelatin Action Council (NGILAC) against dumping of chemical waste by a private corporation in the Chalakudy river, the People's movement against Edosulafan in Cheemeni, the Vilappilsala Janakeeya Samiti workers' movement against dumping wastes, Vilappilsala (in Thiruvananthapuram) and similar agitations in Brahmapuram (Kochi), Chelora

⁹⁸ See also, Inside the Theme Park, Shaju Philip. Sep 07 2008, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/inside-the-cpm-s-theme-park/358107/4>, accessed on 17 July 2016, M K Das, CPI (M)'s economic activism - Moulding a growth model in Kerala, The Hindu Businessline- May 8, 2001, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2001/05/08/stories/040860ke.htm>, accessed on 17 July 2016, and K.R. Balasubramanyam, Capitalism, CPI (M) style,

⁹⁹ See also, C R Bijoy, 'Kerala's Plachimada Struggle', *Economic and Political Weekly* October 14, 2006

(Kannur), Laloor (Thrissur) and Njeliyamparamba (Kozhikode), the movement for rehabilitation for displaced people like Moolampilly Coordination Committee for rehabilitation of evicted people from the island for the Vallarpadom Container Transshipment Terminal. The list is exhaustive.

However, in most of the cases, the CPI (M) did not identify itself with these local movements or even declare its support from a distance. And in some cases like that of the Coca-Cola plant in Plachimada, the Party declared its support to the struggle only after the campaign began to draw attention across the world. This happened post-World Social Forum 2004 in Mumbai.

The point here is that there is nothing un-Marxist about taking into the agenda for struggle the concerns about environmental degradation. On the contrary, while deliberating on modern agriculture and progress in the capitalist agriculture, Marx himself confronted the question as to how the so called progress destroys the “original sources of wealth- the soil and the labourer.”¹⁰⁰ In Marx’s own time, the impact of the industrial revolution - emergence of mass proletariat and the exploitation of this class by the capitalist - was the main dialectics, the core issue to be dealt with; environmental issues were peripheral. In the present epoch ‘new conditions of oppressions’ are emerging which are complex and non-linear in nature and these call for “new forms of struggles in the place of old ones.”¹⁰¹ Today one of the core

¹⁰⁰ Marx said: “Moreover, all progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country starts its development on the foundation of modern industry, like the United States, for example, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the labourer.” Karl Marx. Capital Volume One, Chapter Fifteen: Machinery and Modern Industry, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch15.htm> accessed on 17 July 2016.

¹⁰¹ Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 41. This was discussed in the context of the emergence of modern bourgeois society from the ruins of feudal society. With the establishment of new classes, new conditions of oppression arises and to oppose this new forms of struggle is needed in the place of old.

contradictions is between the neo-liberal model of development and environment; and the conflict here is between the core and the peripheries. Therefore, it is important for the Left to have a vision on environment and a new set of praxis to realise it. A new strategy to adopt appropriate technology is part of it. In the new context, old formulations are, if not obsolete, but definitely inadequate.

IV

Since the 1990s, the CPI (M) was going through a huge identity crisis. It had to operate in the new context of the neo-liberalisation which required to look for new Marxist tools for resistance. However, the CPI (M) seems to lack clarity on this front and this is evident from the updating exercise of the Programme. Ideologically, the fall of the Soviet Bloc necessitated loads of credible explanations and clarifications to the cadres and the masses. The document *Certain Ideological Issues* brought out in 1992 have done a situational analysis; however how to go ahead element was amiss or lacked clarity altogether. All these is not to say that the CPI (M) has refused to see the change or internalize all that has happened. It is true that the CPI (M) had seen the writing on the wall. However, the point is that it has not found a way to react and respond to the new challenges.

This section will look into those updates (it is very significant to point out in this context that the Party called it *updating the programme* rather than changing the programme). The Party Programme was in operation almost for three and half decades without any marked changes. In the new context of the world and in the context of the rapid socio-economic and political changes in the country, concrete changes were expected in the Programme. Though, the 14th Congress of the CPI (M) 1992 decided to update the Programme, it took another eight years to accomplish the

task. The Programme was updated at a Special Conference of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) convened at Thiruvananthapuram, between October 20-23, 2000.

Contrary to the expectations, the Conference decided to retain the core of the Programme which was adopted at the Seventh Congress in 1964 after the CPI –CPI (M) split. This was explained in terms of “the direction given by the 14th Congress of the Party that the stage of the revolution, the strategy, class character of the Indian State and the government and the class alliance to achieve the people’s democratic revolution contained in the Programme adopted in 1964 is valid and should be retained.”¹⁰² The updated Programme also decided to adhere to the strategy formulated in 1964 concerning these basic programmatic concepts and it is appropriate to stress here that its roots lay in the 1951 Programme.

The Party, by and large, reconciled itself to the fact that in the present situation, attaining the aim of people’s democratic government will be a protracted process than it was envisaged in the earlier phases. The Salkia Plenum had given the direction for building a Mass Revolutionary Party with a strong Party Centre for the expansion of the Party, especially in the Hindi speaking States. However, at the beginning of the new millennium, the CPI (M) found that their expansion plans had come a cropper; it could not penetrate much into the Hindi speaking areas. And the Party also understood the fact that it discussed about bringing changes in the ‘correlations forces in the country’ in the various party congresses and yet there was no basic change, ‘despite the many political changes and formation of successive governments at the Centre’. It conceded as much that “the independent strength of the

¹⁰² Prakash Karat, ‘CPI (M) Programme: Basic Strategy Reiterated’, *The Marxist* Vol. 16, No. 03 July-December 2000, p.1.

Left and its working class and its allies have not grown to such an extent at the all India level to bring about any such change.”¹⁰³

In this sense, the basic understanding in the updated programme - that the transformation is going to be protracted business – is indeed an honest statement. But then, the question is as to whether the structure and the strategy of the Party is good enough for such a transition.

As far as the concept of extending democracy is concerned, one of the major changes was in the functioning of democratic institutions under the people’s democratic republic; plurality is emphasized in the new programme. *Paragraph 88(9)* of the old programme stated that “the people’s democratic state shall strive to infuse the spirit of democracy into all our social and political institutions. Trade unions peasant and agricultural workers organisations will play decisive role in this;” but was silent on providing space for any other parties other than the Communist Party and frontal organisations of workers and peasants. But in the new framework of thinking, plurality is emphasized in as many words: “the people’s democratic state shall strive to infuse in all our social and political institutions the spirit of democracy. It extends democratic forms of initiative and control over every aspect of national life. A key role in this will be played by the political parties, trade union, peasant and agricultural workers associations, and other class and mass organisations of the working people.”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps a learning or two from the lack of democracy in the Soviet Union which was mentioned as a basic structural defect.

In the agrarian field a new paragraph was added in the context of the paradigm shift in the economy that apart from ‘ensuring long term and cheap credit for the peasants, artisans and agricultural workers and fair prices for agricultural produce’

¹⁰³ Report on Organisation and Tasks, 14th Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), p. 127.

¹⁰⁴ Updated Programme, 2000, 6.3 (vii).

(*Paragraph 89 of the old programme*) the updated programme added that the State should also develop a State-led marketing system to protect the peasantry from big traders and MNCs and from sharp fluctuation in prices.”(*Paragraph 6.4*) Another significant change was with regard to the party’s attitude to foreign capital; the earlier position that “all foreign capital in plantation, mines, oil refineries, shipping and trade will be taken over”¹⁰⁵ while the updated programme committed the party to “take steps to eliminate Indian and foreign monopolies in different sectors of industry, finance, trade and services through suitable measures including state takeover of their assets”.

The party also seemed to concede the fact that the FDI is here to stay and the updated programme qualifies that the fight against FDI will be restricted to certain areas; in other words, the party even clarified that FDI was welcome in areas where it infused advanced technology and upgraded productive capacities. The CPI (M) was now reconciled to the fact that the unprecedented dimensions of the finance capital cannot be wished away and only expressed caution that the State should take steps to “regulate finance capital flows in the interests of the overall economy.”(*Paragraph 6.4*.) A new paragraph (3-27) was added under section III Independence and after, about the Constitution and the adequacy of the directive principles. However, it blames the bourgeois rulers for not implementing it.¹⁰⁶

A substantive attempt with regard to re-envisioning socialism was *the Fourth World* thesis was presented before the CPI (M) post-2000 by one of the party’s long-

¹⁰⁵*Paragraph 90(1)* of the old programme stated that “all foreign capital in plantation, mines, oil refineries, shipping and trade will be taken over. All banks, financial institutions and other monopoly concerns will be nationalised. Foreign trade will be nationalised. .

¹⁰⁶The constitution of the Republic of India which was developed in 1950 has laid down a set of directive principles to be followed by the state. These include adequate means of livelihood for every citizen and the right to work, an economic system which does not result in the concentration of wealth, right to education and provisions of free and compulsory education for children, living wage for workers and equal pay to equal work for men and women. None of these principles have been realised in practice. The glaring gap between the constitutional precepts and the practice of the bourgeois rulers is a scathing indictment of the bourgeois landlord system instituted after independence.

time associate, M.P. Parameswaran, as an alternative model of development and resistance in the changed context of the world and the nation. This vision for a new world was presented in the context of the search for renewals all over the World. As the name indicate, four worlds were mentioned in his thesis - the first world made up of the capitalist countries, the second world being the socialist countries, the third world made up of the developing countries and the fourth world - a new world distinct from all these three worlds - was based on a perception that was a synthesis of Marxian and Gandhian framework as the alternative.

The basic precepts of the fourth world thesis are participatory democracy, an alternative view of progress and an alternative approach towards the development of productive forces, sciences and technology.¹⁰⁷ The Party, however, perceived this as his “sinister plan to subvert revolutionary movements in the country.”¹⁰⁸ Consequently, Parameswaran was expelled from the Party in 2003 holding him guilty of ‘open rejection of Marxism-Leninism and the fundamental tenets of the party’. He was also accused of ‘committing serious breach of discipline by adopting a stand that was at variance with the accepted principles of the CPI (M) and thus forfeited his right to continue as a member of the party’.¹⁰⁹

It is relevant at this point to present the re-envisioning of Marxism, a new narrative put forwarded by Prabhat Patnaik, as the right approach to Marxism; this approach sought to liberate Marxism even from Leninism and other canonical approaches and search a right path which does not arbitrarily separate the theory from its applications and which does not recognise that application too is theory. Patnaik holds:

¹⁰⁷ M. P. Parameswaran, *Fourth World: Thoughts About Socialism for Twenty First Century*, (Delhi: Daanish Books, 2014), p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. VII.

¹⁰⁹ ‘CPI (M) expels M.P. Parameswaran’, *The Hindu*, 16/2/ 2004

The old socialist view canonised Marxism, saw it as a closed and complete system, which only had to be grasped, like a religious text, through perseverance, and “applied” to specific contexts. According to old socialism there was a “thing” called Marxism (or rather Marxism-Leninism, since Lenin too was canonised in hyphenated splendour), and Mao “applied” it to china, and we have to apply it to India. This fundamentally erroneous attitude has been a predominant characteristic of a good deal of left thinking to this day. It is erroneous because it arbitrarily separates “theory” from its “applications” and does not recognise that “application” too is theory. It is erroneous because via this separation it implicitly presents a religious attitude to Marxism, as a closed complete theory. It is erroneous because it refuses to recognise the progress of knowledge which mankind acquires and which should be a source of enrichment of Marxism; instead it arbitrarily and unjustifiably selects only those strands of the advance of knowledge which in its view support canonical Marxism, and treats the rest as inconsequential if not reactionary. And it is erroneous because in the process it devalues theoretical endeavour on the left, and discourages creativity.¹¹⁰

An important component of such a re-envisioning is the idea of pluralism, which is missing insofar as the CPI (M)’s attempts to reinvent itself is concerned. The updated programme promised the expansion of democracy and extension of ‘democratic forms of initiative and control over every aspect of national life’. It also unequivocally made it clear that ‘the people’s democratic state shall strive to infuse in all the social and political institutions the spirit of democracy’. In other words it envisaged plurality as a core principle in the People’s Democratic Republic at a later date. However, it forgets the simple factor that it had to apply the democratic principle today to create a base for the proposed culture of plurality in future. This element is completely missing. As Samir Amin pointed out “dogmatic Marxism- Leninism taught that there was only one correct line, which the Party (or to be more precisely its leadership) had to discover. The Idea of pluralism was gradually becoming stranger or even alien to us. . . . The rejection of pluralism reflecting a mechanistic and deterministic reduction of Marxism.”¹¹¹

Unfortunately, Parameswaran as an individual and his thesis - though not exceptional in its content but novel - was pronounced guilty without a fair trial. It is not to deny that it was not discussed at all; such a discussion, in fact, was organised

¹¹⁰ Patnaik, ‘Re-Envisioning Socialism’, pp.45-46.

¹¹¹ Samir Amin, *A Life Looking Forward: Memoirs of an Independent Marxist* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2006), p-42.

among the intellectuals aligned with the CPI (M) and aptly called it “A proposed Path to Social Change” in March 2002.¹¹² That was before Parameswaran was expelled from the Party. But then, Parameswaran was isolated even among those who viewed his ideas as having the potential for change, owing to the structure of democratic centralism and the ‘*Idea of discipline*’ in the Party.¹¹³

However, despite such periodic purges and notwithstanding the faction feuds, the CPI (M) and its mass organisations did expand in Kerala specifically in the two decades since liberalisation. The LDF led by the Party formed every alternative government since 1987. The Party’s assets increased considerably; this includes Party run newspapers expanding into business models and the CPI (M) setting up a Malayalam Television channel. The CPI (M) attributed the disintegration of Soviet Union to the “failure to deepen socialist democracy in the party, State and society; the growth of bureaucratism, deviations from revolutionary theory and practice and the erosion of ideological consciousness and so on.”¹¹⁴ Ironically, the CPI (M) is as much infested with all these problems for a long time. Two rectification campaigns - the first one in 1996 and the second one in 2008 - that identified these problems clearly meant nothing. They persisted. The rectification campaign initiated in 2008 vouched that the earlier one initiated in 1996 did not yield.

The 1996 Rectification Campaign, for instance, highlighted the major issues pertaining to the slow down or uneven growth of the Party. These were the

¹¹² Chandradutt, the Director of Achutha Menon Centre organised a discussion on the thesis on March 14, 2002 where the author presented the thesis and around fifty intellectuals and practioners from the Left participated in it.

¹¹³ It is interesting to note here that the Idea of Discipline and its application are not uniform. While many were thrown out and ostracized by the party for minor acts of indiscipline, there have been instances such as Jyoti Basu staying on where he was even after accusing the party of having committed a historical blunder by rejecting the opportunity to head the union government in May 1996; or V.S.Achutanandan staying on even after the spectacle he caused by walking out of the party’s conference in Allepey. See V.Krishna Ananth, ‘Achutanandan’s Splendid Isolation’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol L- No 13, 28 March, 2015, pp.17-19.

¹¹⁴ 2.3, Updated Party Programme, 2000.

penetration of the bourgeois style of functioning within the Party, low level of political consciousness, lack of basic understanding of the Party and its programmatic objectives, penetration and spread of the values of market economy, consumerism and individualism (a contribution of globalisation and liberalisation) to the Party, the impact of the setback of socialism and related disillusionment and so on. After twelve years since the first rectification campaign, Party admitted, that these issues remained relevant at the time of the 2009 campaign too; in fact “some of the factors cited above have got further consolidated and their impact has deepened.”¹¹⁵

As far as Kerala is concerned the factionalism prevailed over the Party many years now. And the Central Committee identified the root cause of this problem as parliamentarism.¹¹⁶ There were fierce struggles and manipulations organised to capture District and State Committees. Like any other bourgeois party, the CPI (M) too was plagued by aspirants pulling all the stops for obtaining nominations to parliamentary positions.

In Kerala, the root cause of factionalism was identified by the Central Committee as parliamentarism and the struggle to capture Party committees and key positions in the Party through whom candidates and elected positions are decided. Mobilising support behind groups and individuals in the Party to get positions in the Party is totally violative of the norms of democratic centralism. When factionalism prevails, all sorts of wrong trends are allowed to flourish. The prolonged factionalism in Kerala took its toll.¹¹⁷

The 2009 document also highlighted the possibilities of increased cases of mal practices like corruption and amassing wealth, leading luxurious life style and indulging in ‘petty bourgeois values’ and accepting ‘hospitality and gifts from businessmen, companies and big traders and contractors, big expenses on conferences of Party and mass organisations, use of big posters and cut outs of leaders and

¹¹⁵ ‘On Rectification Campaign’, edited version of the Resolution adopted by the Central Committee, October 23-25, 2009, Central Committee, CPI (M), *The Marxist*, XXVI 1, January–March 2010, p. 63. See details on the rectification campaigns in the Chapter Culture and Ideology.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.65.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 67,

receptions involving a lot of wasteful expenditure and so on.’¹¹⁸ It also stated that being in power encouraged such practices. Increasingly, these are being acquiesced in and no questions are being asked within the Party. The Kerala unit of the Party was no exception to this.

In this given context of the changes in the CPI (M), the next chapter Culture and Ideology will look into the evolution of a new political culture from the concept of “talking back” as it evolved in the cultural and ideological frame as fore-grounded by the Communist movement as a catalytic agent to challenging the status-quo of fragmented and unequal social order in the formative period of the movement. It will also look into how that culture, subsequently gave way to a ‘talking down’ approach over a period of time. An attempt has been made to trace the subordination of a culture, closer to a Gandhian framework that the Marxists had internalised into their praxis, to consumerism and its impact on the larger socio-political domain.

¹¹⁸Ibid, pp. 68-69.

CHAPTER VI

CULTURE, IDEOLOGY AND THE COMMUNISTS

Indeed, it is a difficult task to trace the processes and changes in the cultural domain, especially in a complex historical milieu, and pinpoint the hegemonic and counter hegemonic cultural elements accurately. A teleological unfolding may, definitely, be impossible. The difficulty arises when we have to locate the cultural process that involved a “relatively mixed, confused, incomplete, or inarticulate consciousness of actual men in that period and society. . .”¹ Agreeing with the prescription that “a structural phase can be concretely studied and analysed only after it has gone through its whole process of development, and not during the process itself, except hypothetically and with the explicit proviso that one is dealing with a hypotheses,”² this study offers a concrete analysis of the situation of an ongoing process and find out where it stands at this particular historical juncture. It is no way conclusive.

This chapter intends to look at two distinct, but organically related aspects of the cultural process in Kerala during the national liberation movement and beyond. To begin with the study will analyse the factors that were instrumental to the social and cultural changes in the society and the role of Left radicals in it. The second part will try to analyse few selected variants, well within the control of the Left (read CPI (M) here), which could/would have been used as tools for cultural transformation to sustain or defend the achievement of the Left in the past in the cultural domain and would have open up new avenues for augmentation. The variants, to be stressed, are

¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 109.

² Gramsci presented this claim “as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism, and combated in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx, the author of concrete political and historical works”. The Antonio Gramsci Reader, *Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs, (Delhi, Aakar Books, 2014), p.191.

perceptive. The exercise is carried out through narratives that traverse through the specific activities of the Congress Socialist Party and later on the Communist movement (as a larger part of their political praxis) that contributed to the social and cultural changes, in backdrop of the national liberation movement. Finally, and more importantly, the whole exercise of looking back at the past is to interpret the present. In the process, some ideological concerns are raised to explain the dominant (hegemonic) culture of present day Kerala and explore the role of the Communist Parties, especially the CPI (M), as it is indeed the major Left force in Kerala today.

A brief narration of the historical settings of the Left is imperative in order to place the argument in order. As historical milieu, the social reform movement that began with the arrival of Sri Narayana Guru³ and Ayyankali,⁴ was a culmination of various historical events and practices; the interaction with the outside world (West), activities of the Christian missionaries and the eventual spread of education among the *Avarnas*, changes in the agrarian relations due to the various agricultural reforms and other such affirmative actions carried out by the Rajas under the influence of the British and the missionaries in Travancore and Cochin, the two princely states.⁵ The

³ To restore the lost dignity and self-respect of the *Avarnas* including the untouchables, Guru did not depend upon the western ideals and education. On the other hand he made use of the religious symbols and idioms to shake the existing unequal social relations. Sri Narayana Guru's philosophy had a larger impact in the transition of the caste ridden society of Kerala and it influenced the thought process of people and set the stage for a social revolution in Kerala. Also see, K N Shaji (ed.), *Narayana Guru: Jeevitham, Krithikal, Darsanam*, (Malayalam), (Thrissur: Current Books, 2002), Dr. Mohandas (ed.), *Viswa Guru: A Book on Sree Narayana Guru*, (Trivandrum: S. N. Club, 1988).

⁴ For the first time in the history of Travancore, Ayyankali organised agricultural workers' strike for six days works a week and also for the right to education for the Pulaya children in government schools in 1906. His bullock cart ride through a main road that was unapproachable to the Dalits was historical. He told the agricultural labourers that nothing sacrosanct in their relationship with landlords. He also asked the Pulaya women not to wear the mandatory stone beads as this was a symbol of enslavement.

⁵ Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bai's Proclamation of on the abolition of slavery in Travancore under the influence of Col. Monroe, the British Resident and Diwan of Travancore in 1812, a similar proclamation was issued by the rulers of the State of Cochin in the year 1821. The slave trade was banned in Malabar as early as 1792, immediately after the annexation of Malabar Coast in 1792 by East India Company and in 1862 the IPC imposed penalties for slave trading. The 1818 proclamation of the king of Travancore allowing Nair and Ezhava women to wear gold and silver ornaments, and the 1859 proclamation of the king (under pressure from the Madras Governor) announcing the right of *Nadar* women to wear upper clothes as a result of Shannar revolt in which the *Nadar* converted Christians revolted for the right to cover the upper bodies of women with the support of the

arrival of Sri Narayana Guru⁶, and Ayyankali kindled the reformation in Kerala society. This was followed by the emergence of caste based reform organisations such as the *Yogakshema Sabha* (1908) and Nair Service Society (NSS-1914) among the Namboothiri and Nair communities respectively (this has been dealt in Chapter II). An educated new middle class, aware of and even detesting the rotten practices in their own communities, went about campaigning for positive and structural changes within the community and did achieve a measure of success. A large number of them emerged as leaders of the freedom struggle and later on became leaders of the communist movement too. Some indeed stayed back with the respective communal organisations. Though caste based, these organisations were not retrogressive, as they had a progressive role to play in that historical juncture.

It should be noted here that the *Yogakshema Sabha*, first of such kind of organisations in Kerala, to use the drama/theatre as an effective tool to spread the message of reform to the community. The progressive youth among the Namboothiris staged plays like *Adukkalayilninum Arangathekku* written by V T Bhattathiripad, M R. Bhattathiripad's "*Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam*", and M.P Bhattathiripad (Premji)'s *Ritumathi* which were 'blasphemy' and strong enough to shook the old fetters.⁷ More importantly, they lived their lives by setting examples.⁸

missionaries. The revolt ended in the royal proclamation. However, it was made on a condition that the Nadar women should not imitate the style of clothing upper class women. Still the Dalits women were not allowed to wear upper clothes were others. Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, p.270.

⁶ Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928) was the contemporary of Jothirba Phule (1827-1890) in Maharashtra. However, less known outside Kerala. Like Sri Narayana Guru, Phule also emphasised that "the lower castes people should organise their ritualistic and religious activity themselves, so that the role of Brahmin priest became redundant . . . Phule attempted to supplant the belief structure of brahmanism with an alternative understanding and praxis. His central concern here is to dethrone the brahman from his preeminent position of being the go-getter between God and the man. G. P Despande, *Of Hopes and Melancholy, Reading Jotirao Phule in Our Times- Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2002), pp.5-12.

⁷These plays directly nailed down the hellish life of the Namboothiri women (They are denied access to education and was not allowed to remarriage. Widowhood at a young age was normal then as very young girls were married to old people. A girl had to remain as an 'inmate' inside her house after puberty) and questioned the clandestine practices in the Namboothiri community. These attempts helped to form the new moral helm that women are also human beings with flesh and emotions

It will be appropriate here to present a scene from M.P Bhattathiripad's (Premji)'s *Ritumathi*, to illustrate the revolutionary content of the play. The dialogue between two characters in the play - Vasudevan and Devaki – can be roughly translated like this. Vasudevan reminds her, while he appreciates her fight against fate, that it was imperative for the parrot (he uses a slimy to indicate the state of the woman) itself to break out of its cage; encouraging her to come out the shackles by breaking it. However, the initial reaction to the play was not very different from Ibsen's play, *A Doll House*, though set in a different social context. And Gramsci wrote, while explaining why the society failed to appreciate the courage of the heroine breaking her cage:

. . . another standard, whereby women and men are no longer just muscles, nerves and skin, but are essentially spirit; whereby the family is no longer just an economic institution but is above all a moral world in process, completed by the intimate fusion of two souls which find in each other what each individually lacks; whereby the woman is no longer just the female who nurses her new born and feels for them a love made up of spasms of the flesh and palpitations of the heart, but is human creature in herself, with her own awareness, her own inner needs, a human personality entirely her own and the dignity of an independent being.⁹

Interestingly, these words do express the soul of the plays penned by the insurgent youths from among the Namboothiri community, who also lived in the same timeline of history but in different time zones and social contexts.

In the context of larger national liberation movement Gandhi's political philosophy had deep impressions on the Kerala society. The Temple entry movement and 'inter-caste dining' to break the shackles of the castes became metaphors of the social reform movements at that historical epoch. Gandhi's mode of struggle had been replicated in a prominent way in the Kerala. His implement, *Satyagraha*, was

⁸Incidentally, M. Raman Bhattathiripad (one of the active members of the *Yogakshema Sabha*) married a widow, for the first time in the Namboothiri community in a simple ceremony, in September 1934 and the orthodox sections in the community ostracised the couple. But then, the fight continued.

⁹ Gramsci stated this while discussing about Ibsen's fantasy *A Doll's House* and why the people fail to understand the plight of the heroine and fail to appreciate when she breaks the cage with a better understanding of her *self*. Antonio Gramsci, *Sections from Cultural Writings*, ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 71.

also used extensively in the State. The Temple Entry movement that began in 1919 and the subsequent famous Vaikom Satyagraha,¹⁰ even got Gandhi to the heels. The Guruvayoor¹¹ Satyagraha followed and these nonviolent actions led to the subsequent Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 and the Madras Hindu Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Act, 1939.¹² These were impetus for social change. The most important factor here is the active role played by the then Congress leaders (the radical strand) who became the Socialist Party leaders, later on became the leaders of the Communist party in these events of history. And they carried the legacy even when they became the communists. In the backdrop of these historical events the chapter will analyse the cultural process in Kerala.

This chapter have six sections. Section I is the entry of the Left and the changes in the cultural domain; section II will look into the organic relationship between the intellectuals and communist Parties, especially the CPI (M); section III is about the revival of communal and caste based organisations in Kerala; section IV will look into the assigned role of women in the Communist Party; section V is on

¹⁰ Not only the entry to the temple but the main roads leading to the temples are banned for the polluted and untouchable castes as these roads were used by the Brahmins and the entry of other castes will pollute them. The roads leading to Vaikom Siva temple also was banned the entry of lower castes and a Gandhian mode of protest was organised against this epoch making incident is known as Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924. Interestingly in the Vaikom Satyagraha, well known social reformers like Periyar from Tamil Nadu and the State Congress leaders actively participated. The Satyagraha went on despite the regular verbal and physical attacks from the upper caste people which made even Gandhi to pay a visit to place in 1924. Finally the solution found was to construct parallel roads so the Brahmins are safe from pollution. Also see Prof P C Menon and Adv. P K Harikumar (compiled) *Vaikom Satyagraha Rekhalakal* [Malayalam], (Kottayam: M G University, 2009).

¹¹ It was a movement for temple entry to lower caste people to Guruvayur temple. The Satyagraha began in 1931 under the leadership of Sri. K. Kelappan, a Gandhian and Congress leader. It is interesting to make note of the leadership of this Satyagraha. Mannath Padmanabhan (Nair service Society leader), A.K. Gopalan (then INC member and later on CSP leader and then the most famous Communist organiser who led historical peasant struggles in Kerala) and N.P. Damodaran were the other leaders. The Satyagraha had run over a period of a year. This led to a referendum which was held among the Hindus to find out their views on the question of temple entry. More than 77 percent of the Hindus expressed themselves in favour of temple entry. See also A. Sreedhara Menon, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, (Madras: 1996) and Chandra *et al.*, *India's Struggle for Independence*.

¹² The Guruvayur Satyagraha did not immediately result in the opening of the Guruvayur temple to all Hindus. The temple was thrown open to Dalits only in 1946.

the mass organisations as a tool for Social and cultural change; and section V discusses about certain other ideological questions.

I

The social reform movements, as the name indicates, mainly effected the superstructure while the base remained untouched. However, we have already seen that it created space for a radical movement and the Left in Kerala arrived at that historical juncture and appropriated the space without the prejudices of canonical texts and theological formulations. The relevance of the CSP and then the communists in that historical epoch was that it fought against the existing social oppression and economic exploitation concomitantly, engaging both at the same vigour. Consequently, that brought about marked changes in the domain of culture too.

This section will analyse as to how the radicals brought out changes in the cultural front and the prominent role of the fellow travellers of the Left in it. Before being with this, it should be emphasised here that the Russian revolution of 1917 had a huge impression on the Left in Kerala, though they were not familiar with the theoretical works then. The radicals in the Indian National Congress often used the Soviet experience to inspire the workers and peasants join their hands together in united front. For the poor, their emancipation was twofold – liberation from the exploitative landlords and liberation from the British (the anti-feudal and imperialist struggle was born out of this internalisation).

The Russian Revolution of 1917¹³ had made a huge impact on the new emerging group of intellectuals in Kerala society. The Soviet Union was the ultimate

¹³ Articles regularly appeared on Soviet Union in the Newspaper regularly highlighting the achievement of the Soviet Union and explaining the socialist system rustically- “There is no classes, no exploitation, no inequality and no unemployment under the Soviet system. To deracinate the

dream, an oasis and the Socialist model was projected as a panacea for every existing malady. A readymade model was available for ready reference and emulation. Even though the ongoing Chinese protracted war in the countryside too attracted the masses, but the Soviet influence was unparalleled. It went to the extent that some even named their children after Lenin and Stalin. This blind adulation has been continued and not surprisingly, the disillusionment and the vacuum that was created by the disintegration of the Soviet Union were too deep and incomparable in Kerala. That's when the revolution became an illusionary agenda for many.

Interestingly, Karl Marx's life history was published in Malayalam (the first in any of the Indian languages) even before the October Revolution; as early as in 1912 by Ramakrishna Pillai who is also known as *Swadeshaimani* (Patriot).¹⁴ He became a legend for his bold writings against the misrule of the diwan and his coterie in Travancore. As a result of the contact with Soviet literature, the concept of socialist realism entered into the world of Malayalam literature too. New words and expressions appeared in the common man's vocabulary. *Chenkodi* (Red flag), *Sakavu* (comrade) and *Inquilab Zindabad* became common nouns; even before they understood these words rightly. An interesting conversation between the workers, in Kesavadev's *Kannadi*, is illustrative of this. This conversation takes place in the office of the newly formed workers' union.

Padmanabhan (a worker leader says): if we all grunt together, the world will tremble.

Joseph (another leader): Capitalists will tremble; police will tremble; everybody will tremble.

imperialism, to establish peace all over the world Soviet model is the only way out", the article reminded the readers. Mullan, 'Anniversary of the Russian Revolution' *Prabhatam*, 1938, November 7, 1938, Issue 30.

¹⁴ M. N. Vijayan (ed.), *Nammute Sahityam Nammute Samooham 1901-2000*, Vol. II, [Malayalam], (Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Akademy, 2000), p. 123. The 1917 published "*Ezhavodbodhanam* by Sahodharan Ayyappan is the first write up on Russian Revolution in Malayalam.

Pappan: Then why aren't we grunting? Let us do it.

Achuthan: Those who grunted are in jail now.

Wind (a leader who works from underground, hence name is not known, and workers began to call him wind for his omnipresence): their sacrifice unified us: that's why we are unionised and sitting in this office: workers will come together, they will grunt together; the world will tremble; workers will rule one day. The workers came together in a country; they grunted together; the capitalists and the state trembled there and shattered. It had happened in Russia.

Nobody in the group except 'the wind' knows about the October revolution; he explains about the revolution to the workers and also briefs them about the need for an armed revolution and the annihilation of the exploiting capitalists and the repressive state apparatus.¹⁵ In yet another context, in a procession, the leader shouts *Inquilab Zindabad* and the workers repeat it. One asks the other what does that mean; the other says, I don't know but 'something really big'.¹⁶ There is no dearth of similar situations in the literature of that time. A large part of the agit –props, highlighted the achievement of the Soviet Union. Even those writers who were not the supporters of socialism like Vallathol Narayana Menon –(1878-1958) (ideologically he was closer to Gandhism like many other writers of his time and one of the "talking back"¹⁷ writers in Malayalam) and G Shankara Kurup too eulogised the Russian achievement in their poems like *NovemberEzhu* (November Seven) and *Naale* (Tomorrow) respectively.¹⁸ Interestingly, socialism was not antithetical to Gandhism then; they blended very well.

¹⁵ Kesavadev, *Kannadi* [Malayalam], (Kottayam: D C Books, 2009), p. 80-81.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 95.

¹⁷ 'Talking Back' is in simple terms was the representation of Indian Civilization in a new way in the writings and contesting the representation of India by the West. See Sabyasachi Battacharya, *Talking Back: The Idea of Civilisation in the Indian Nationalist Discourse* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ Vijayan (ed.), *Nammute Sahityam*, p. 125.

With the emergence of the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala, in the mid-1930s, a perceptible paradigm shift was evident in the functioning of the Indian National Congress in the region. It has been already discussed how the radicals engaged in organising the peasants, the workers and petty bourgeois sections like the school teachers, students on a class basis into an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal United Front. Needless to state, the inspiration came from the fiery speeches¹⁹ of Jawaharlal Nehru (sounded more Left than the Left) and also from such leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose and Jayprakash Narayan who inspired the early communists in Kerala.

For a group of young leaders, mostly belonging to the upper castes, penetrating into the realm of the peasantry and the agricultural labourers was a huge task and the major hurdle being discriminative caste structure. Though the primary task was intervention in the economic area, to tackle the dominant ideas and values that subjugated the lower caste people who happened to be the working class (including agricultural labourers) and poor peasantry, was equally important. This remained inimical to any change. Hence, the major ambit of the fight was centred around two fronts - while advocating radical agrarian reforms, such as “abolition of land revenue, exempting small cultivators from income tax and vesting property rights over the land in the actual cultivators,”²⁰ they simultaneously organised the peasants

¹⁹ Nehru in his speech at the Faizpur Congress Session stated; “the Backward Russia, with one mighty jump, has established a Soviet Socialist State and an economic order which has resulted in tremendous progress in all directions. The world has gone on changing and hovers on the brink of yet another vast change. But not so the Indian States; they remain static in this ever-changing panorama, staring at us with the eyes of the early nineteenth century. The old treaties are sacrosanct, treaties made not with the people or their representatives but with their autocratic rulers. This is a state of affairs which no nation, no people can tolerate. . . The real object before us is to build up a powerful joint front of all the anti-imperialist forces in the country. The Congress has indeed been in the past and is to-day, such a united popular front, and inevitably the Congress must be the basis and pivot of united action. The active participation of the organised workers and peasants in such a front would add to its strength and must be welcomed. Presidential Address at the Indian National Congress at Faizpur, December 26, 1936, Marxist Internet Archives, www.Marxists.org accessed on 10/8/2015.

²⁰ Menon, Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India, Malabar, p. 133.

to fight the oppressive practices of the *Janmis* at the social and cultural domains. As a result, the peasants staunchly opposed the collection of numerous illegal feudal exactions on the one hand and also began to defy the system of cultivated customs and beliefs and stopped paying obeisance on the other.

It is not to claim here that the “relatively mixed, confused, incomplete, or inarticulate consciousness of actual men in that period and society”²¹ reacted in a singular and perfect fashion to the call of the radicals. Whatever the limitation of this exercise, this, indeed, reinstated self-dignity of the servile peasants and the agriculture workers at a large extent. In the due course this enabled them to defy the practices of social deference - discarding the use of honorific suffixes while addressing the landlords, stopping the usage of customary language (demeaning usages) of the untouchables, defying the rules of *un-approachability* and *untouchability* and so on. In other words it led to “a transformation of the rural structures of deference and authority.”²² These agitations were inbuilt in the agitations for economic justice.

This endeavour, though ensured in a short span of three decades, was an intense process carried out with the support of the teachers (who were better in social terms but brutally exploited and suffered economically) and an organised cadre and constituted a large chunk of agit-prop activists. It was not an easy task to break the age old shackles – tradition and practices which haunt the human mind’. The tradition²³ overrides the peripheral or the subordinates’ articulations over a period of

²¹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 109.

²² Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, p. 131. Consequently, a number of officious words connected to agrarian relations lost their meaning and relevance and eventually disappeared from the common man’s vocabulary.

²³ Here we use the notion of tradition as the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits as in the words of Raymond Williams: “. . . it is always more than an inert historicized segment; indeed it is the most powerful practical means of incorporation. What we have to see is not just a ‘tradition’ but a selective *tradition*; an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification . . . From a whole possible area of past and present, in a particular culture, certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and other meanings and practices are

time and is presented as part of the culture. The deeper the 'selective tradition' is, the harder the task to break it. And a conscious and consistent effort had to be carried out. But the radical left in Kerala were able to break the barriers. They engaged in this war persistently and in the process they did not even hesitate to evoke the symbols of resistance from the past.

This was carried out through trial and error, the practical knowledge they gained out of being with the masses; definitely not from a theoretical prescription as they were yet to be '*ideologised*'. As already mentioned, the leadership that came from the upper strata²⁴ (socially and economically), themselves had to transcend the barriers of the caste and develop a strategy in order to break the tradition and practices that enmeshed poor peasants and agricultural labourers in a subordinate position over centuries. The initial efforts were to develop a trust between them and the lower peasantry which was a herculean task; in the mid-1930s, their constituency looked at them with suspicion. Their convoluted language was alien to the poor farmers and agricultural workers. For the subalterns, whatever was presented before them as reality by the dominant classes was accepted by them as their own reality and became the part of common 'sense'.²⁵ As Gramsci theorises, they were a social group "for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it

neglected or excluded". Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 115. This selection is presented and as usually successfully passed off as 'the tradition', 'the significant past.'

²⁴ For instance Subramuniam Thirumumbu (1906-1984), a CSP leader and a great organiser of the peasants in Malabar, was a *Janmi* himself. Participated in the Guruvayoor Satyagraha along with AK and Kellappan. He wrote the *Jatha* (marching) songs for Guruvayoor Satyagraha. As a real activist and a poet, his actions and writings inspired the peasants to come forefront in the fight. In the fight against the *Janmis*, and against the imperialist forces, he called the peasants to come forward to liberate the country and the world from these forces. However, when he died in 1984, he died as a believer. M Achuthan, *Swathanthrya Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum* [Freedom Struggle and Malayalam Literature-[Malayalam], (Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Akademy, 2003), p .280. EMS Namboodiripad, AKG Gopalan and many such leaders were from landlord families.

²⁵ The concept is borrowed from Gramsci.

follows in 'normal times'- that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate."²⁶ They perceived the world as submissive for generations.

To break the mode, the Gandhian strategy of inter-caste dining, which was carried out occasionally, was soon replaced with an intense mode - a way of life - and the major ambit of difference was that the venue of such interactions shifted to the homesteads of the poor from the public spaces. Eventually things were moving for better and a change became apparent in the general attitude, belief and behaviour of the people.

This transition from treating the employer as a provider to become a conscious worker (who understands the exploitation of the employer and consciously resist it) was beautifully presented in the novel *Kannadi* (Mirror) by Kesavadev (1905-1983) in 1938. This depicts the reality of the time. Dev was a well-known writer and was a fellow traveller of the Communist Party while writing this novel. The story unfolds in an era of emergence of active labour unions among the coir workers in Alapuzha. Set in the background of the historical three weeks struggle of the coir workers in 1938 in Alapuzha, the story draws the transformation of the workers from a generation of subjugated workers who considered the *Muthalali* (capitalist/employer) as the provider and hence equated him with the God to become right conscious workers who question their exploitation by the capitalists who divide them on communal lines too. While the old generation easily succumbed to their fate, the new one asks why is it that they are the one always getting killed; why can't they kill the exploiters?²⁷

The leaders used multipronged tactics in nature to achieve the task. The library movement was a novel experiment, wherein, they went about establishing

²⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison note Books*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1987), p.327.

²⁷ Dev, *Kannadi*.

reading rooms²⁸ attached to the offices of *Karshaka Sangams* and labour union offices. The literacy campaigns using literate workers and school teachers was a common feature. The *chief organisers* of the CSP, who were the link between the Party centre and villages, monitored the situation closely. Out of this new reading room culture that emerged, it was common in those days that the *beedi* workers ‘engaged’ a literate member in their workplace to read the newspaper for others and while others continue with their work; and the rest did extra labour to compensate the one who was ‘engaged’ as their reader. Workers carrying a newspaper to their work place were making a strong statement. By mid 1930s, *Prabhatam*, the mouth piece of the CSP was revived and this played an important role in propagating the ideals of socialism in Kerala.

Interestingly, ‘socialist’ aphorisms became a common rhetoric since the inception of the CSP even when the Party hardly had any socialist ideologues; and as a matter of fact, various strands of socialism were discussed and accepted at this point of time. However, at the end of the 1930s, the leaders were attaining more clarity on ideological issues with the arrival of socialist literature, especially on the Soviet socialism. The same period also witnessed increased interaction between communists in Kerala and those from outside Kerala. A qualitative change appeared in the organisation of the peasants, workers, teachers, etc, in that period. Study classes were organised on a regular basis at night schools. This trend had continued without break when the CSP *enmasse* became the CPI in Kerala in 1940.²⁹

²⁸ A large number of small reading rooms and libraries came out as an outcome of this movement. Some of the reading room/Libraries were *Pallazhi*, Kozhikode, *Gramaposhini Vayanashala* Ellerinji Swaraj Vayanashala. Talasseri Beedi Workers Union Vayanashala- *Thozhilali* (Worker) Vayanashala. They conducted reading examination too. *Prabhatam*, 5 December 1938, Issue 33.

²⁹ See *Prabhatam* 1937-39

Yet another strong weapon was agit-props - instrumentalist³⁰ by nature –that were used as strong medium and a vehicle for social and cultural change. It has already discussed that how the *Yogakshema* Sabha used theatre as a weapon in their fight obscurantist practices. The CSP too used literature and theatre to communicate and engage the masses with progressive ideas. A new array of writers who belonged to the leadership of Communist Party as well as fellow travellers of the communist ideology arrived in the scene. The form of the literature was certainly not a major concern then as far as the content is *revolutionary*. It is appropriate here to recall E.M.S. Namboodiripad, a Marxist ideologue said about the situation;

In the beginning, Kerala's progressive cultural movement was by and large confined to those who are active in radical political movement. We have no credentials as men and women of letters. We engaged ourselves in the problems of art and literature only as part of the radical political movement. We wrote poems, songs, short stories and so on and we staged plays and sang songs, in furtherance of political movement of which we were active participants. Art in general, literature in particular, was for us one of the effective weapons of political struggle.³¹

It is pertinent to present the content of one or two of such plays which had made a huge impact in Kerala at that time and later too: the play *Paattabaakky* (Rent arrears) deserves special mention; this was written by K Damodaran (a communist ideologue and a founding member of the Communist Party who also doubled up as a play writer and occasionally acted when the situation demanded). *Paattabaakky*³²,

³⁰ Instrumentalist approach is “primarily influenced by immediate political needs, particularly its mobilisational strategies. In this perspective culture is a vehicle to communicate political message.” K.N. Panikkar, *Left cultural Intervention: Perspectives and Practice*’, *Economic and Political weekly*, 12 April 1997.

³¹ Namboodiripad, ‘Art and Politics: Social Roots of Art and the Role of the talented Artist’, *Frontline*, 1 June 1996, in *The Frontline Years*, p.169.

³² The story revolves around Kittunni who was a peasant as well as a worker in a company. The alienation of the peasants of their land was a common phenomenon then; the agriculture debts and the inability to pay the rent and the fear of eviction, together forced the peasant to seek other means of livelihood. Kittuni, Aphan Namboothiri's tenant, is threatened with eviction due to rent arrears. Kittuni was caught while stealing some rice for a meal and was jailed. The *Karystans* (farm supervisor), now, is after the young Kunhimalu, Kittuni's sister and when her brother was in jail, he tries to cajole her but she resists. The *Karystan* retaliates and evicts the family by influencing the *Janmi*. Her Mother dies in the street and the responsibility of taking care of the younger brother forces Kunhimalu into prostitution. On coming out of the jail initially Kittunni is angry to find his sister as a prostitute; however, he soon realises it was not her fault but the cruel and exploitative system brutalises the poor

was specifically written to stage on the occasion of the Ponnani's Karshaka Sangam Conference in 1938. The Karshaka Sangams were emerging a major force then. The play became so popular and in demand that it was staged almost in every conference of Karshaka Sangams since then. They play movingly highlight the plight of the peasants in the epoch and the peasants could identified themselves with the hero effortlessly. The play also highlights the achievement of socialism³³ and there were also occasional expressions about the apprehensions of the capitalists over the arrival of labour unions in the factories³⁴ and so on. It also projects the Congress leader in the locality in a poor light - as a character who conspires with the factory owner against the workers. This was when the CSP was still working within the INC but the impending crisis – the ideological rift between the CSP members and the Right wing inside the Congress – were beginning to surface. The nexus between the Right wing in the Congress, the capitalists and the police (agent of the repressive state) was not uncommon in the literature then. The Congress Government was in power in Madras province and the anti-labour policies of the C Rajagopalachari ministry in the Madras Presidency were indeed unravelling around this time.

Content wise, as mentioned earlier, these plays created ripples among the audience as they depicted the reality of their lives, for the amount of truth contained in it - the exploitation (including the sexual ones), rent arrears due to crop failure and many such other reasons, eviction, exploitation of capitalists, the alienated peasants,

and make them thieves and prostitutes. Hence these are not sins. K Damodaran *Paattabaakky*, [Malayalam Play], (Trivandrum: *Prabhatam* Printing and Publishing Co Pvt Ltd, 1979).

³³In the play Muhammad, a poor worker, says: "what a cruel world. In this wicked world man is an animal. Only under the socialist world a human being can live as a human being." Ibid, p. 14.

³⁴The factory owner talks to his Congress friend who sympathises with his problems: "Some rascals are there telling the workers to strike; they are not even scared of the police. These unionists are useless; labour unions are nonsense. We are not able to cut wages, they will not allow to increase the work time; we cannot admonish the workers, cannot talk; cannot do anything. If we attempt to do so, they threaten us with strike; it is very difficult. . . Inspector though represents the oppressor, he is aware of the changing times and says: these days it is difficult to arrest the workers- they (socialist elements) organises protest meetings, passing resolutions, meetings at town hall- shouting *inquilab zindabad*... Ibid, p. 25-26.

the squalor and the poverty that pushed the people to extremes; as for instance, the girl was pushed to prostitution, etc.

The point is that these plays were not meant for those who were “fed well and has three hours to kill between dinner and bedtime, a play is something in between a digestive and an aphrodisiac”³⁵. Those were conscious efforts at informing the masses and raising the consciousness among the peasants and the workers at that historical context. And their plays were of “human relations, of human behaviour and human capacities” and they played that “consciously, suggestively and descriptively.”³⁶ In the process, they won the immediate task to liberate the people from many dubious customs and attempted to instil consciousness among the working class and peasants. Whether they succeeded in instilling revolutionary consciousness among them or not, the radicals could bring these classes together in the fight against the imperialism and feudalism was a historical fact.

The radical phase of the literature continued and a vista of characters appeared in the literature challenging the dominant values and ideas. Changes in the realm of thought and practice, shaping new perceptions, a new avenue was available. In the novels, short stories and plays, dark skinned women and men belonging to the lower castes and from the untouchable communities, who live in the morass of misery and poverty, became the protagonists. A lot of writings on workers, peasants, and teachers, people who were living in the peripheries and on ‘undesirable’ and real life characters like beggars, thieves and prostitutes appeared on the literary scene.³⁷ Even

³⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Sections from Cultural Writings*, op cit., 1985, p. 75. Gramsci made this remark about the taste of bourgeois while discussing about the play *Anfisa* by Andreyev which hit the bourgeois like a blow on their stomach.

³⁶ John Willet (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of An Aesthetic*, (London: Methuen Drama, 1964), p.26.

³⁷ Vialopillys poem *Padayalikal* (Fighters-(about a couple belongs to lower caste watering the paddy field at night, where the poet says that their sweat is nothing but their own blood, Mathrubhumi, 24 January 1938), S K Nambath’s *Aa Koithukari* (That Lady Reaper, Mathrubhumi, 24 January 1938), T K Raman Menon’s *Daridryam* (impoverished) K Govindapoduval’s *Samathvavadi*” (The Socialist,

though a large chunk of these were poor imitations and mechanical accumulation of words and applications of the messages from the Soviet Union and thus contained rhetoric in many ways and were driven by an over enthusiasm to theorise everything, there was a certain sense of radicalism in all these.³⁸

There were myriad examples for such literature. Blood was dripping literally, in many titles. And it could not have been anything different when oppression became a norm like Pablo Neruda wrote in the background of Spanish War. The poetry cannot speak a different language than the context. And he cannot write about the beauty

Mathrubhumi, 4 February 1938), K A Keraleeyan “*Viplovam*” (Revolution *Prabhatam*, July 11, 1938), Theruvathu Raman’s, *Paattabaakky* (Rent arrears) and Premji’s *Unararai* (Time has come to Wake up, *Prabhatam*, May 30 1938), S K Pottekat’s *Alapuzhayille Thozhilalikalodu* (Odd to the Alapuzha Workers - written inspired by the historical three weeks strike of Alapuzha workers and asking them not to succumb to the brutal torture and killings of the repressive state. *Prabhatam*, November 7, 1938), Kesavdev’s *Unarvu* (Awakening- Story of a worker, *Prabhatam*, May 17, 1937), S K Pottekat’s *Samudayadrohi*, (Anti-social, *Prabhatam*, October 17, 1938), by Theruvathu Raman, *Pannimudakam* (the Strike *Prabhatam*, October 31, 1938)) and so on. *Inquilab Zindabad*, long live revolution, down with capitalism were repeatedly heard and these were mostly a kind of loud and pronounced sloganeering., Rickshaw Walla (Rickshaw puller), short story by Mancherath Govindan (*Prabhatam*, June 27, 1938), Odaylninum From the ditch (Novel) by P Kesavadev, again story of a Rickshaw puller, Vesyalayathil-, Vyapicharam (prostitution) short story by S K Pottekat (*Prabhatam*, July 18, 1938. These are few examples). There were stories that shocked the existing sensibilities such as Apart from the above *Anchu Cheetha Kathakal* (five awful stories), shocked the existing sensitivity *Kalla Pashu* (Wayward Cow) by S K Pottekat’s, *Bharyayude Kamukan* (Wife’s Lover) by Vikom Muhaammad Bashir, Pathivratha (chaste woman) by Thakazhi, *Vithukkala* by Ponkunam Varkey and suffering of the poor reflected in a lot of literature such as poor l Pavangal (Poor), Coolie (Wage), *Paattabaakky* (rent arrears), *Thozilali*, (worker). And there were rousing literature like Kesavadev’s *Kannadi* (Mirror) or, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai’s *Thotitilla* (have not lost) portraying the indomitable spirit of the workers, K Ramakrishna Pillai’s *Nizhalukkal* (Shades), *Prathima* (Statue), Idaserry’s- *Kootukrishy* (Collective Farming) and Cherukad’s *Maninte Maril* (In the Chest of the Land) and so on.

³⁸ In the name of socialist realism, a large chunk of them stooped down to the form of sloganeering. As for instance in *KK Pattinipalayam*, (Barracks of Poverty) the hero is a worker who reads newspapers. He enters into an argument with his employer in defence of this ‘habit’ of his and eventually loses his job. A sequence of the conversation between him (Thomas) and his illiterate wife (Maria) illustrates the form best:

Thomas: When one feels the pangs of hunger; everybody becomes a socialist and pro-worker.

Maria: Oh, capitalism, how cruel are you? Due to this economic system my son has died.

Thomas: Darling, Why do you worry? This world is a capitalist world; not workers. It creates inequality and poverty, discontent and unrest. When the workers became conscious and began to fight against this inequality, this selfish lot will be shattered. Oh capitalism you will dig your own grave.

when death rains on the street.³⁹ *Raktha Daham* (Blood Thirsty) by KPG, *Raktha Pushpam* (Blood Flower) By Changampuzha and *Raktha Pathaka Ganam* (The Blood Banner Song) by T S Thirumumbu⁴⁰ are a few examples of the titles to mention few. The intention here is not to state all these were prosaic literature and superficial; the Banner song of T S Thirumumbu which was sung on many occasions and it became a legendary marching song in the process.⁴¹ That kindled the spirit of the peasants and workers. These songs symbolised the unity of the workers and peasants. That is the relevance. A transitional society needed such forms of literature were natural. It is true that when the ‘sufferings are greater and the number of those suffering has

³⁹ “And you'll ask: why doesn't his poetry speak of dreams and leaves/and the great volcanoes of his native land?/Come and see the blood in the streets/Come and see/The blood in the streets/Come and see the blood In the streets, Pablo Neruda from the Poem, “I am Explaining A Few Things”. Similarly the famous lines of Bertolt Brecht “In the dark times/Will there also be singing?/Yes, there will also be singing/About the dark times” is also relevant to reproduce here

⁴⁰ *Raktha Daham* goes like this- “If a red flag is shown against the brutal system which exploits thousands, they scream blood... Workers, please come and join under the red flag today; you will rule the world tomorrow”, *Raktha Pushpam* (Blood Flower) By Changapuzha

For you to rest on your silk bed
We had to stand in the scorching sun with no food
In the revolutionary storm of the hunger,
The haughty capitalism will be shattered once for all”

(M Achuthan , *Swathanthrya Samaravum*, p. 285)

Raktha Pathaka Ganam by T S Thirumumbu (*Prabhatam*, 27 June 1938)

We are the one created all these resources and wealth
Without us these landlords, capitalists and such others will not survive
To pulverise the earth, to pay the rent
And to run all these machines, they need us
Nothing is impossible before us, if we
Come together consciously
Raise the flag and fight the atrocities
Many sacrificed their life holding this flag high
Let us march on march
Let us never retreat
Let us shout slogans so that
Let the universe wobble
Let the capitalism tremble
Let us blow off feudalism

⁴¹The 1930s also saw the arrival of a group of progressive writers – Thakazhi Sivasankaran Pillai, Kesavdev, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, Ponkunnam Varkey, S K Pottekat, Nagavalli R.S. Kuruppu, Karoor Neelakanda Pillai⁴¹ and so on, who were influenced by a certain vision of socialism and all of them became the fellow travellers of the socialist and then the communist movement in Kerala. Interestingly, most of them were well aware of the trend in world literature. In the 1930s itself, the art world in Kerala was aware of Henrik Johan Ibsen, John Galsworthy, Anton Chekov, Henrique Mann, Hauptmann, and Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol thanks to the write ups of Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, a well-known writer and critic in Kerala.

grown'⁴² new expressions are born out of it. It is 'more necessary than ever to speak their language.'⁴³ As held by Bertolt Brecht:

It is in the interest of the people, the broad working masses, that literature should give them truthful representation of life; and the truthful representation of life are in fact only of use to the broad working masses, the people; so that they have to be suggestive and intelligible to them, i.e. popular. . . Popular means intelligible to the broad masses, taking over their own forms of expressions and enriching them/adopting and consolidating their stand point/representing the most progressive section of the people in such a way that it can take over the leadership: thus intelligible to other sections too/ linking with the tradition and carrying it further/handing on the achievements of the section now leading to the section of the people that is struggle for the lead.⁴⁴

K Satchidanandan, a well-known poet and critic in Kerala gives a good analysis of the nature of the literature then:

Entire sections of people sentenced to a culture of silence found a voice in these writers, many of whom were liberal socialists inspired alike by Gandhi and Lenin. Landless peasants, fishermen, the rural poor, impoverished craftsmen, urban workers, helpless men and women forced into begging and sex work: all these subaltern layers of society found a place in literature for the first time after the age of folklore. This also brought about a stylistic transformation. In poetry, it appears chiefly as a replacement of Sanskrit meters by folk and Dravidian meters and rhythms, and a considerable reduction of Sanskrit words in the diction. In fiction, it meant the introduction of diverse community dialects and the disavowal of the laboured linguistic sublimity of earlier fictional modes. In short, it privileged realism against mysticism in both content and style.⁴⁵

The establishment of the Kerala People's Arts Club, an offshoot of the alternative theatre movement in Northern India –Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) - in 1950 provided a new meaning for the theatre movement in Kerala; a new sensibility was evident and thus witnessed emergence of large number of political and social plays that questioned the unequal social relations and also kindled the revolutionary spirit in an unprecedented way. Similarly, the establishment of the Sahithya Pravartha Cooperative Society, Kottayam, in 1955 provided the progressive writers a new platform to publish their works. And this new trend was also reflected

⁴² John Willet (ed.), *Brecht to Theatre*, p. 107 (Brecht was speaking about "the popular and the realistic).

⁴³ Ibid. p. 107.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 107.

⁴⁵ K. Satchidanandan, Society and Literature, http://www.india-seminar.com/2012/637/637_k_satchidanandan.htm, accessed on 6/10/2015.

in the realm of popular cinema too⁴⁶. Yet another genre of literature was the film songs. Revolution and social change, from within a larger humanist framework, had brought poets and lyricists like Vayalar Rama Varma, O.N.V. Kurup and P. Bhaskaran into prominence and the era was vibrant with revolutionary songs which were equally attractive in its form and content. The beautiful lines of Vayalar-*Snehickayilla njan novum atmavine/ Snehichidathoru thatvasastratheyum* (I will not love any philosophy that loves not the aching soul') reverberated the whole ideology of the era and Marxism was indeed defined as the highest form of humanism.⁴⁷

However, the point here is that how far the Communist could sustain what they achieved in the cultural and ideological realms through their continuous interaction with the masses. As this section largely discussed about the changes in the cultural realm and the contribution of literature in the form of agit-props and others to the cultural process of the times. The coming sections (section II to IV) will analyse some variants where the communists could have and would have made their mark as a strong cadre base Party. The next one is about the relationship between the communists and writers and intellectuals who were also fellow travellers of the idea of communism. Did the communists take them along with them?

II

The previous section illustrated the organic relationship that developed between the writers and the radicals in Kerala and their immense contribution in radicalising the working class and peasantry. This relationship was formalised through establishment

⁴⁶ Films like *Neela Kuyil* (The Blue Cuckoo- 1954) are best examples for such initiative, Most of the famous novels and plays from the progressive writers like Uroob, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, and Thoppil Basi appeared in the silver screen.

⁴⁷ Songs such as *Workers of the World, we have nothing to lose but our chains* (Thulabharam-1968), *Sakhakkale Munnottu*, (Comrades, march on in Punnapra Vayalar 1968), *MooladhanamOro thulli chorayil ninum orayiram per uyrannunu* (From every drop of blood that was shed, raise a thousand more-1969), *Sarva Rajya thozhilikalikaleSangatikuvin* (Workers of the world oragnise and be strong through your unity -Anubhavangal Paalichakal-1971) and *Marikkan njangalkku manassilla*(We refuse to die and refuse to be cowed down and bow down before the capitalism! *Neelakkannukal*-1974) these were few rousing songs that directly linked the workers with the idea of socialism.

of the literary platform called *Jeeval Sahitya Sangham* in 1937⁴⁸ in line with the All India Progressive Writers Association, the first-ever national gathering of writers in Lucknow in 1936. The initiative came from the Leftists leaders (who were also writers) like E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran, M.S. Devadas, K.K. Warriar, and so on. Soon, many fellow travellers of the socialist ideology and established young writers in their own right, such as Kesavdev, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, too had joined the bandwagon. Though it began with great hopes and aspirations, it did not last too long, largely due to the dogmatism of the communists. They began to set the rules of the game, derived mainly from the imported ideas of Lenin and Stalin on literature. To be precisely, they mechanically applied the ‘aestheticisms’ that was promoted by the Soviet Writers’ Congress in 1934, under the leadership of Maxim Gorky, Karl Radek, and Andrei Zhdanov, etc.⁴⁹ Their prescriptions, reportedly, had the blessings of Stalin. Since then, Socialist realism was forced upon the progressive writers who began contesting it. The maxim that art is not for art’s sake but art is a social responsibility and the argument that as long as the content was strong, the form does not matter was put forward by the Party ideologues. The mechanical application

⁴⁸It should be mentioned here in the context that “realism”, a separate genre of literature, had set in motion in the late 1910s and 1920s itself and this was marked by the presence of such writers as Swadeshbhimani Ramakrishna Pillai, Kumaranasan, Shoadharan Ayyappan.

⁴⁹It meant that: “The proletarian state must educate thousands of first class “craftsmen of culture,” “engineers of the soul.” This is necessary in order to restore to the whole mass of the working people the right to develop their intelligence, talents and faculties – a right of which they have been deprived everywhere else in the world. This aim, which is a fully practicable one, imposes on us writers the need of strict responsibility for our work and our social behaviour. This places us not only in the position, traditional to realist literature, of “judges of the world and men,” “critics of life,” but gives us the right to participate directly in the construction of a new life, in the process of “changing the world.” The possession of this right should impress every writer with a sense of his duty and responsibility for all literature, for all the aspects in it which should, not be there. . . Why has the Congress of Writers been organized, and what aims will the future union pursue? If it is only for the professional welfare of literary workers, it was hardly worth making such a great fuss about. It seems to me that the union should make its aim not only the professional interests of writers, but the interests of literature in general. The union should in some degree assume guidance over the army of beginners, should organize it, distribute its forces to different tasks and teach these forces to work on material derived both from the past and from the present” Gorky, Radek, Bukharin, Zhdanov and others “Soviet Writers’ Congress 1934,” p. 25-69, Lawrence & Wishart, 1977. First published in 1935; Online Version: Marxists Internet Archive (www.marxists.org) 2004, accessed on 16/5/2015.

of Stalin's concepts on literature- writers as 'engineers human and souls' - in the name of Marxist Framework was one that was thrust on the domain of literature. And people like Zhadnov had converted these ideas into socialist realism.⁵⁰

It must be stressed here that these perceptions, for sure, were not created from a deep understanding of the concept of realism envisaged by Marx and Engels, from whatever minimum their contribution to this field was. Engels made it amply clear what do they mean by realism; that it is not just the reproduction of the reality as it was. He said: "Realism in my mind implies, besides truth in detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances." Engels hastened to add, "however, the more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art. The realism, I allude to may crop out even in spite of the author's opinions."⁵¹ Critiquing the work of Minna Kautsky , *The Old ones and the New*, Engels made this strong observation that author need not repeatedly take a public stand to testify his/her convictions in all the writings. Partisan art is not a bad thing; writing with a purpose is also good. However, "the purpose must become manifest from the situation and the action themselves *withoutbeing expressly pointed out* and the author does not have to serve the reader on a platter the future historical resolution of the social conflicts which he describes (emphasis added)."⁵²

⁵⁰ Andrei Zhdanov said "To be an engineer of human souls means standing with both feet firmly planted on the basis of real life. And this in its turn denotes a rupture with romanticism of the old type, which depicted a non-existent life and non-existent heroes, leading the reader away from the antagonisms and oppression of real life into a world of the impossible, into a world of utopian dreams. Our literature, which stands with both feet firmly planted on a materialist basis, cannot be hostile to romanticism, but it must be a romanticism of a new type, revolutionary romanticism. One cannot be an engineer of human souls without knowing the technique of literary work, and it must be noted that the technique of the writer's work possesses a large number of specific peculiarities. To be engineers of human souls means to fight actively for the culture of language, for quality of production. Our literature does not as yet come up to the requirements of our era. Ibid, p. 25-69.

⁵¹ Engels to Margaret Harkness in London, 1888 about her book 'City Girl' General Problems of Art, in *Marx and Engels on Literature and Arts*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984), pp. 90-91.

⁵² Engels to Minna Kautsky, 1885, Ibid, p. 88.

Interestingly Marx's and Engels's views on literature were not the point of discussion among the members of the communist movement in Kerala then. Marx, a voracious reader of literature had read up the classics as well as modern literature of his own times - Aeschylus, Dante, Cervantes, Johann Wolfgang, Goethe, Henry Fielding Shakespeare, Christian Johann Heinrich Heine, Charles Dickens, Honore de Balzac, and others. His critique on Balzac was often referred and Engels considered Balzac as far greater master of realism as he gave a most wonderfully realistic history of French 'Society'.⁵³ Marx had placed on record, his appreciation of myths; reading myths gave him immense aesthetic pleasure and were in certain respects regarded as a standard and unattainable ideal. He enjoyed reading from "the historical childhood of the humanity in its most beautiful form."⁵⁴ Had the Kerala Communists read at least Marx's and Engels's critique on Balzac, their understanding and perspective on progressive writing would have been different and that would have influenced their approach to the progressive writers' movement too? But then, those were times when circulation of Marxist literature was limited and the ones available were mostly Soviet Union oriented; Marxism was that what Lenin or Stalin interpreted. Soviet Union was the Mecca for the early communists in Kerala and they cannot be blamed for this. However, the fact remained that this tendency had continued over a period of time even after there was no dearth of such literature available for reference.

⁵³ Engels to Margaret Harkins, 1888, Ibid, pp. 91-92.

⁵⁴ On reading the Greek works, Marx observed: "The difficulty we are confronted with is not, however, that of understanding how Greek art and epic poetry are associated with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still give us aesthetic pleasure and are in certain respects regarded as a standard and unattainable ideal. An adult cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does the naivete of the child not give him pleasure, and does not he himself endeavour to reproduce the child's veracity on a higher level? Does not the child in every epoch represent the character of the period in its natural veracity? Why should not the historical childhood of humanity, where it attained its most beautiful form, exert an eternal charm because it is a stage that will never recur? There are rude children and precocious children. Many of the ancient peoples belong to this category. The Greeks were normal children. The charm their art has for us does not conflict with the immature stage of the society in which it originated. On the contrary its charm is a consequence of this and is inseparably linked with the fact that the immature social conditions which gave rise, and which alone could give rise, to this art cannot recur". Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), p. 233.

It may also be relevant in this context to add the views of Gramsci specifically that on *Communism and Art* to drive away the misconception that communists are the enemies of *beauty and art*. He says:

Our anger is all the greater when we think among the so called intellectuals run the widely held prejudice that the workers' movement and communism are enemies of beauty and art, and that the friend to art in favour of creation and the disinterested contemplation of beauty . . . No, communism will not obscure beauty and grace: one must understand the impetus by which workers feel drawn to the contemplation of art, how deeply they feel offended in their humanity because of the slavery of wages and work cut them off from a world that integrates man's life, that makes it worth living.⁵⁵

The fact was that in the beginning the writers were very enthusiastic to join the Progressive Writers Forum. The coming together was expected to further strengthen the process of new literature. Writers like Thakzhi Sivasankara Pillai had even fought inside the Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishad (All Kerala Literary Forum established in 1925) for the cause of new literature at the risk of irking the old and established writers of his time.⁵⁶

The narrow and mechanical application of Stalinist approach in the field of literature had catastrophic effects on the forum and consequently on the relationship between the Party and the intellectuals and this has not been rectified even today.

Though the Progressive Writers' Forum was revived in 1944, it was soon caught in similar disputes as in the earlier phase. The interference of the party and its control over the organisation irked many. The fact is that ever since its formation in 1937 and its revival in 1944, the Communists tried to keep it on their leash. In the

⁵⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Sections from Cultural Writings*, pp. 37-38.

⁵⁶ In the Samastha Kerala Sahitya parishad [All Kerala Literary Association] (which was established in 1925) had its 11th Annual Conference on 30 December 1936 under the president ship of Nilambur Valiya Raja. This three days conference had seven meetings which was inaugurated by C P Rama Swami Iyer. This gathering had representatives of orthodox writers like Ullur and the radical writers like Thakazhi. The report on the meeting appeared in the Mathrubhumi Weekly clearly shows that the difference between the two sections wide opened and Thakazhi representing the new generation of writers said that the time has come that the writers to give up taking characters and story from puranas and epics like Harichandra and so on. This statement was disapproved by the old school and his return speech Ullur said that the young writers should learn to respect the older ones. *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, 11 January 1937, p.14.

Progressive Writers Association meeting in Shoranur in 1944, an array of Progressive writers like Thakazhi, Kesavdev, Joseph Mundaseeri, Ponkunnam Vareky, and G Shankara Kurup participated. In the 1945 meeting, more non-communist writers like N V Krishna Warriar, S Guptan Nair, and Nagavalli R S Kurup had participated.⁵⁷ However, issues concerning the domination of the communist party leaders over the forum remained unresolved.

The theoreticians of the Progressive Literary Movement, who were hardly familiar with the contemporary debates in Marxist criticism, failed to recognize the relative autonomy of literature at the level of cultural formation with its own history and rules of evolution. They equated literature with ideology and considered it a direct expression of the author's personal beliefs while even Lenin had condemned this approach. They underrated the importance of the context, intent and ideology of reading that can make the same work mean different things. In short, the early open approach soon gave way to rigid dogmatism.⁵⁸

And in the 1947 meeting of the forum, the split became wide open. Apart from the issue of the domination of the communists, the primacy-of-content-over-form debate reached its peak and Joseph Mundassery argued that the literary works should have form along with progressive content.⁵⁹

A new manifesto for the Progressive Writers Forum was presented for discussion in 1948. There were accusations that (not without reasons), it sounded like a Communist Party Manifesto in its wordings and content⁶⁰ and this was opposed by many writers. The Party soon launched a strong tirade against the opposition. The Calcutta Thesis was the inspiration behind such a Manifesto and thus path of struggle

⁵⁷ Vijayan (ed.), *Nammute Sahityam*, p. 121.

⁵⁸ "By the time the first conference of the Progressive Writers' Association was held after seven years (in 1944) almost every major writer in Kerala had been won over by the movement. They included poets like Vallathol Narayana Menon, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai and G. Shankara Kurup, fiction writers like Vaikom Mohammed Basheer, Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai, Karoor Neelakanta Pillai, S.K. Pottekkatt, Keshava Dev and Ponkunnam Varky, playwrights like Thoppil Bhasi, S.L. Puram Sadanandan and K.T. Muhammed, and critics like Joseph Mundassery and M.P. Paul, besides communist activists and fellow travellers like K. Damodaran, Cherukad, D.M. Pottekkatt, M.S. Devadas, Kedamangalam Pappukutty, M.P. Bhattathirippad (Premji) and others. These writers used different idioms even while sharing similar concerns." K. Satchidanandan, *Society and Literature*.

⁵⁹ Vijayan (ed.), *Nammute Sahityam*, pp. 121-22.

⁶⁰ The words like establishing new democracy by ending feudalism, nationalization of big industries, struggle against the autocracy of the princely states, struggle against untouchability, women inequality, protection of minority etc, were seen in the Manifesto. *Ibid*, p. 875.

was proposed in every front. When borrowed ideas from Lenin and Stalin, on literature and art, were reproduced, many writers, who did not fall in line, were attacked as being ‘reactionaries.’ This was not merely a development involving the communist movement in Kerala. At the national level, such creative men as Satyajit Ray, Kishan Chand and Balraj Sahni suffered in the hands of the Party; and Sahni, in fact, was thrown out of the Party when he was in jail⁶¹ for criticising the Calcutta Thesis. The fact is that the Calcutta Thesis and the revolutionary war path had rectified its ‘sectarian line’ in 1951, but the CPI lost some of the leading progressive writers by this time. It was strange that the party failed to keep its fellow travellers and that too such great writers like Kesavdev, Thakazhi, S K Pottekat, Muhammad Bashir, Uroob, etc., even though their writings had cumulatively contributed immensely to the Communist movement in Kerala in the formative years. In the words of P. Govinda Pillai, a prominent ideologue of the party in later years:

The political line of the CPI adopted at the 2nd Congress at Calcutta which was later to be given up as sectarian, rendered a self-righteous tone to the Communists repartees. All these led to a split in the PWA in 1949 and some of the highly respected supporters and leaders of the movement such as critics M.P. Paul and Joseph Mundassery, creative writers like Thakazhi Siva Sankara Pillai and P. Kesavadev crossed over the fence to the other side and Communists and their close associates were isolated.⁶²

The revelation, subsequently and since the 1950s, of excesses during the Stalin era in the Soviet Union, the Hungarian Spring and such incidents had forced the writers like George Orwell, Arthur Koestler,⁶³ to write about the other side of

⁶¹ Thoppil Bhasi, *Thirenjedutha Krithikkal*, p.346.

⁶² Govinda Pillai, EMS As Literary Critic and Cultural Activist, *The Marxist*, Vol. 14, No. 01-02 Jan-June 1998 pp. 6-7.

⁶³ George Orwell’s satiric *Animal Farm* and Arthur Koestler’s *The God That Failed*. Koestler writes about the excesses of Stalin, “every single one of us knows of at least one friend who perished in the Arctic subcontinent of forced labour camps, was shot as spy or vanished without trace. How our voices boomed with righteous indignation, denouncing flaws in the procedure of justice in our comfortable democracies; and how silent we were when our comrades, without trial or conviction, were liquidated in the Socialist sixth of the earth. Each of us carried a skeleton in the cupboard of his conscience; added together they would form galleries of bones more labyrinthine than the Paris catacombs.” Arthur Koestler *et al.*, *The God That Failed*, Bentam Matrix Editions, p.63. Koestler lost his brother in Law and some close friends to the Stalinist regime.

socialism. Camu too become an *outsider*. These incidents had its impact on the intellectuals in Kerala too. Talented writers like O.V. Vijayan, M. Mukundan, Kakkanadan, M.P. Narayana Pillai, and Kakkad and others who were known for their Left affiliation distanced themselves from the CPI (M). These writers were attracted to socialism not from the ‘materialist conception of history’ but rather treating Marxism as the ultimate humanist theory which foresees an egalitarian society with no exploitation and suffering. They were rather attracted to the ultimate freedom of the individual who can, if he wants to “ hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.”⁶⁴

The dreams on communism was shattered when the weakness of socialism as an ideal model was exposed in Prague and in Hungary and the inability of the Communists in Kerala to address the question caused further alienation of the writers and intellectuals. The disappointment about the invasion of alien (bourgeois) culture to the domain of Communist parties too took off some writers away from the fold.

Many Marxist writers had turned to existentialism in the meanwhile. The CPI (M) from its side established a new forum in the place of the old ones. The *Desabhimani* Study Circle was established in 1970 and this became a platform to launch attack on more and more established writers. In the words of Govinda Pillai, “Again he (EMS Namboodiripad) took up a firm stand against the modernist novelists - O.V. Vijayan, Kakkanadan and M. Mukundan - and poets M. Govindan, K.

⁶⁴He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic, Karl Marx, The German Ideology, Part I: Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook, 1845, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm> accessed on 15/5/2015

Ayyappa Panicker and N.N. Kakkad, among others.”⁶⁵ Not surprisingly, when the Circle was formed EMS himself wrote a book-length manifesto for it.⁶⁶ And this was precisely the problem. The CPI (M) wanted to have a complete control over such organisations as did they want over the other mass organisations related to the party (this will be looked into the following sections). Needless to say, this approach neither helped the forum nor the Party in the long run.

During the 1970s, especially in the mid-1970s, during the emergency period, hardly any records are available on the activities of the Study Circle. Some available literature and cartoons of the dark years indicate that the literary activities - was mostly brought out by the Naxalites, to protect the “bourgeois democracy.” Their short lived cultural forum *Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi* (People’s Cultural Forum 1980-81) that issued some protest literature which is perhaps in the genre to date.

Subsequently, the *Purogamana Kala Sahithya Sangham* was established in August 1981 under the auspicious of the CPI (M). Like other mass organisations, the Party’s attitude to keep the literary organisations under its control, drove away many talented writers who believed in creative freedom.

It is true that the communist ideologues did retreat from their earlier positions and K Damodaran of the Communist Party and a writer himself was the first one to recant from his earlier position stressing the autonomy of the writer (was a complete shift). E.M.S. Namboodiripad, who was a strong proponent of the content over form argument, also conceded later on that their policy was narrow and rigid. Namboodiripad admitted that he and his comrades misread Marx regarding literature and said: “It would be a grievous error - and this was precisely the error committed by us in our polemics against our non-Communist colleagues - to think that aesthetic

⁶⁵ Pillai, ‘Marxism and Literature’.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

production is more or less an exact copy of class struggle in its economic or political forms.”⁶⁷

By this time, E.M.S Namboodiripad and other ideologues of the CPI (M) was proficient about Marx’s and Engels contribution to the discourse of literature. EMS wrote on the “Evolution of Society, Language and Literature in India” (in 1980) quoting Engels, Marx:

“Artists, writers, singers, playwrights, etc., being artists lovers of what is beautiful in human society, sometimes break out of their class limitations. This is very important lesson drawn by Marx, Engels and Lenin in their reference to some literary work or other- Marx his reference to Balzac and Lenin to Tolstoy. In their artistic creation, they reflected reality, real changes taking place in the society.”⁶⁸

However, this outlook was not reflected as much in the realm of practice. The dogmatism has continued; so the alienation of writers.

When the Party loses its fellow travellers at some point of time, especially when the alienation became larger, then it calls for some attention. It is not deceit. A careful examination is needed and it has to go beyond such rhetoric as bourgeois culture; a proselytising attitude certainly will not do. Those writers and intellectuals wrote particular types of literature in a historical context because that gave an impetus for such writings. It was not independent from their existence. The historical context

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 14. Pillai quoted this from Namboodiripad’s work *Marxism and Literature*(1975). There was a perceptible change in the views of Namboodiripad regarding literature in the 1970s.

⁶⁸E M S Namboodiripad, ‘On People’s Culture’, *Selected Works*, Vol.I, (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1982), p.405. While reverting from his old position, E.M.S. Namboodiripad said in 1996. When we formed the first organisation of Progressive writers in the 1930s we did not have a correct perception of the principles of Marxian aesthetics. That is why, in our debates, we tended to be sectarian towards non –Communist writers and other cultural activists. Many respected literary and cultural figures, who were not communists but who played a positive role in the development of the radical socio-political movement in the State, were denounced by us - a mistake that was subsequently corrected “The Roopa Bhadrata argument which arose out of our conflict was wrong, in another sense it was correct too. Evaluating the worth of literature we should never confine ourselves to content alone. Mundassery was correct in insisting that form too is to be evaluated. In his own words it is not enough to have perfect content, it must also have perfect form. That is Roopa Bhadrata. Is that not correct? Yes, it is. We accept that we were wrong on that count. Those of us who founded the Jeevat Sahitya Sanghom were political workers. We looked at literature too through political eyes. So we did not pay sufficient attention to the artistic structure of literature. That was our mistake”. Namboodiripad, *The Frontline Years*, p. 170

of the national liberation movement and the hegemonic role of the Left influenced the overall cultural scene.

The attitude, that if one is not with us, then he/she is our enemy, is indeed destructive. In today's context it is not important to count on who is with us; rather what is more important is to count on those who are not on the other side - the side of the fascists, the side of the global finance capital - in other words, the bigger enemies in today's context. Those who are not on the other side is potentially 'with us' may be the right approach. Then it is very important to keep the progressive writers and intellectuals with the Left to resist the challenges. Unfortunately, the process has not begun yet; still dogmatism reigns. The CPI (M) had break out of the Stalinist structure and frame of mind to bring amends.

Next section will look onto the growth of communalism and related revivalism in Kerala and where the Left stands.

III

It has been already discussed that how the communal based reform movement played a progressive role in that historical context. Beyond that brief, its existence became retrogressive; it lost its historical significance for its continued existence. A logical culmination of the activities of the communist movement, the strong class based organisations, over a period of time, would have challenged the existence of communal organisations and caused its annihilation. On the contrary, these organisations have been gaining strength and prominence and even to the point of manoeuvring election process in Kerala for sometimes. More importantly, new caste and identity based organisations have arrived on the scene.⁶⁹ Currently, it is a norm

⁶⁹ Apart from Nair Service Society (NSS) and Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), there are a number of organisations of the backward castes like Dheevara Sabha, Viswakarma Mahasabha, Nadar Mahajana Sabha, Latin Catholic Association and Dalit organisations like Kerala Pulaya Mahasabha, Sambava Sabha, the Adhakrita Varga League, etc. The list is not exhaustive but illustrative. Alongside are such political formations as the Kerala Congress (in many factions claiming to represent the Christian community) and the Indian Union Muslim League that too contributed to communal politics in the State.

that the communal political parties, with their share of votes, engineer the elections and determine the election results by shifting alliances between the two political fronts - LDF led by the CPI (M) and the UDF by the Congress (I). Needless to say, these communal parties do contribute to revivalism witnessed by the Kerala society today.

The NSS, for instance, was a progressive organisation so long as they fought against the loathsome practices in a transitional period to lead the Nair community to modernity. But certainly, its existence became regressive the moment it began to act on communal lines in a modern democratic set up. Incidentally the NSS was in the forefront in the so called 'Liberation struggle' against the Communist Government along with the Catholic Church and its followers in Kerala. The SNDP today play a most regressive role even went the extent of joining the hands of right wing communalists and contested elections. Interestingly, the Ezhava community is still a strong vote base of the communist parties in Kerala.

The communal aspirations and actions took monstrous shape over a period of time though this polarisation was evident since the first ever general elections to the Legislative Assembly, on the basis of adult franchise, held in Travancore-Cochin in 1948. The period from 1948 to 1957 had witnessed many changes in the government due to the communal polemics and the leaders of the communal organisations had a heyday.⁷⁰ Even the Communist victory of the 1957, certain extent owes to the

⁷⁰The fact remains that caste based polarisation was a dominant feature in Travancore and Cochin throughout the struggle for responsible government, except in an interim period between the late 1930s and the early 1940s when the Quit India movement gained the momentum. Caste based polarisation was obvious and it caused instability of governments since the first election to Travancore-Cochin in 1948 and it resulted ten governments in nine years. It is also a fact that the caste based polarisation immensely helped the first communist government to come to power in 1957 though communists were in no way responsible for that. Secondly, the caste based outfits had a larger role in pulling down the government in 1959. In every election since then, the communal-casteist organisations remained a force manoeuvring the electoral politics. When they came together in 1960, the CPI lost badly in the legislative Assembly elections. It is important to stress here that it was the other way round too in some other time.

communal polarization in the State.⁷¹ . The gravity of situation increased since then. Apart from the pressure groups like the NSS and the SNDP, Political parties like the Indian Union Muslim League, the Kerala Congress and so on contributed to the communalisation of politics further. The most unfortunate part is that sometimes Left parties in Kerala too did succumb to the pressure of these groups. Conceding its historic mistake for not creating political consciousness among its cadres on this issue, the review of the 2001 elections by the Central Committee of the CPI (M) stated:

The growth of the caste influence in Kerala after the long years of activities of social reform movements and Left parties is a very serious matter. Failure to politically educate our masses and the weaknesses in conducting political propaganda among the masses behind the communal and casteist forces in order to win over them can be a reason for the emergence of the present situation.⁷²

A tendency, instead of challenging the communal factors, from a Marxist framework, the Party often appropriates the symbols into its fold, has been observed in the recent years. The participation of a CPI (M) MLA in the *Janmashtami* rally that was organised by the children's wing of the Party⁷³ illustrates this. These aberrations should be treated seriously especially in the context of the emergence of the right wing communal parties in electoral politics in Kerala.⁷⁴

Yet another weakness of the Communist Parties is the reluctance to take up social issues especially the ones that related to dalit and tribal people which was one of the main concerns of the Party in the earlier period. The vacuum is filled by the identity based groups who carry on with the struggle for land and livelihood. The adivasi leader C K Janu led movement under the banner of *Adivasi Gothra Maha*

⁷¹ . Namboodiripad, 'The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony', pp. 41-42

⁷² Review of the May 2001 Assembly Elections Adopted in the August 11-12, 2001 Meeting of the Central Committee, <http://cpim.org> accessed on 17/9/2015.

⁷³ The Party explanation was that it was just a distraction otherwise distract (Kanur) party cadres who might otherwise join the Janmashtami processions organized by the RSS. *The Times of India*, 8 September 2015.

⁷⁴ Emergence of the right wing is dealt in E.K. Santha, 'Saffron Headway in Kerala'.

Sabha (AGMS) in Wayanad since 2001 or the Chengara agitation for land for the landless led by Laha Gopalan of *Sadhu Jana Vimochana Samyukta Vedi* (SJVSV) in 2007⁷⁵ are examples where the traditional agenda of the Communist party have been handed over to localised outfits (this has been discussed in detail in Chapter V). The historical struggle for the implementation of land reforms legislations and their implementation in the 1960s and the early 1970s by the Communist party, especially under the leadership of A.K. Gopalan attributes a contrast picture. Then it is not surprising that the Rectification campaign, pronounced by the CPI (M), in 1996 and later on in 2009 took note of this fact and stated:

The last two Party Congresses have stressed the importance of the Party directly taking up social issues. While most Party members do not practice untouchability or caste discrimination, they are reluctant to take up these issues and launch a campaign/movements against them. Party committees are reluctant to take up the fight against regressive social practices. It is not enough to condemn individual atrocity against dalits, instead we should take up a sustained campaign against untouchability and caste oppression. In many cases Party committees do not actively discourage or intervene to stop the observance of rituals and religious customs by Party cadres.⁷⁶

Yet there is no pointer towards its implementation.

To explain caste in a Marxian framework was perhaps a difficult task in the early years of the party's history in India; this, however, is no longer the case. Marxism has grown beyond those dogmas to perceive that class alone is a factor and caste is a mere false consciousness and even detracts the revolutionary task. From an understanding that caste discrimination is not the fossils of the medieval era but a living organism in the society and that it is closely connected to the economic factors, a new praxis can be arrived at. The early activities and interventions of the communists and the urbanisation process did address this issue to a certain extent as a

⁷⁵ Interestingly the trade unions including the CITU opposed the squatting and in a press conference the trade union leaders V.R. Shaji (CITU), S.Biji (KPEU-CITU), Suresh Babu (BMS), S.Bijumon (ESUSI), C.K. Divakaran (AITUC), Koshy (INTUC) and Unnikrishnan (PLC), said the plantation workers would forcibly occupy the houses of encroachers in different parts of the State if they failed to vacate the estate before March 20. *The Hindu*, 7/3/ 2008.

⁷⁶ On Rectification Campaign, p.70.

class organisation could achieve. However the increase in the number of caste based organisations in Kerala, since independence, needs further explanation. There is a fundamental problem with the CPI (M)'s analysis of the caste based consolidations in Kerala. The CPI (M) analysed (in 2003) the role of casteist organisations in Kerala and connected it with the erosion of its cadre strength. While admitting that this is an old phenomenon, it said; "the caste-based organisations and their alliances had its influence in political field in the Travancore-Cochin area. But during the post-independence period, it was generally felt that the influence and the capacity for intervention of such organisations was decreasing."⁷⁷ However, the CPI (M) was apprehensive about "the growth of the caste influence in Kerala after the long years of activities of social reform movements and Left parties."⁷⁸

Therefore, the conclusion here would be that caste and communal forces existed in pre and post independent Kerala and in the present context their appearance and presence is stronger than ever. The CPI (M) blames it on its inability "to politically educate (our) masses and the weaknesses in conducting political propaganda among the masses behind the communal and casteist forces in order to win them over can be a reason for the emergence of the present situation."⁷⁹ The Communists, whether the CPI (M) or the CPI, have a lot to explain as to how did the working class and the poor peasantry (lowest in the caste hierarchy), who were the stronghold of the communist party, had got fragmented and a chunk of them had migrated to the communal and caste organisations. Communists who still consider the "fight to do away with the caste system is an important part of the democratic revolution and the communists who are supposed to be fighting to establish a

⁷⁷ "Casteist Organisations and the Party", document Adopted by the Kerala State Committee of the CPI (M) at its meeting on 27-28 March 2003, *The Marxist*, Oct-December 2003, cpim.org/sites/default/files/documents/2003-castist-orgns-party.pdf accessed on 15/9/2015

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

casteless society”⁸⁰ have to look within for an explanation. It should be beyond a just a deep concern, as expressed in their resolutions periodically. There are evidences that their own cadre are not free from the archaic practices and the Party is worried about the factor. It is indeed admitted by the party in so many words:

The Party has to evolve effective tactics in reaching the masses rallied around caste leaders by taking up economic and social issues and also by exposing the vested interest of the leadership. . . In order to do away with all disabilities and to achieve relentless progress and growth, the present socio-economic system has to be smashed and a classless society has to be established. Such a society can be created only when all weaker sections of people came together and carry out social revolution. Without increased unity and united moves of people, it is not possible to achieve progress. If continuous ideological campaign on these matters is not carried out among the people their consciousness will be stuck on temporary and narrow objectives. The importance of the ideological struggle to be carried out by the Communist party should never be forgotten. The party must be ready to clarify as to how temporary, partial and fundamental issues are inter-related.⁸¹

It further advocated a set of commandments for the Party members to be followed.⁸²

This extract from the CPI (M)’s document reflects the concrete situation of the 21st century Kerala and yet there is nothing to indicate that the call for fighting the casteist tendencies were made with utmost sincerity. Six years since this the CPI (M) had to launch a strong rectification campaign in 2009 that had to deal with similar issues and in a worse situation. The rhetoric in the party Congresses and the appeal to its cadre to come forward and fight all evil customs and obscurantist practices and to uphold the cause of social reform and scientific approach failed to translate into action. The pockets of counter hegemonic culture postulated by the Communist movement during the national liberation movement and thereafter had shrunk considerably and the deterioration was worse with the drastic changes in the economy since the early 1990s. The penetration of ‘alien ideologies’ into the Communist movement had a reverse effect on the domain of culture and ideology, to the say the least.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “. . . Party members and sympathisers must be prepared to organise social functions in a model manner. They should adopt the style of functioning which motivate people to improve their scientific consciousness and which explains the need for social reforms to suit the times” and son Ibid.

Next section will look into another important variant – the women’s question and the CPI (M), an area the Party could have brought some positive changes.

IV

The focus of this section is about the political praxis of the CPI (M) pertaining to women’s representation and participation in the party, which has largely remained rhetorical. This has direct repercussions on the cultural and ideological field. The communists yet to treat the women’s question as an integral part of its ideological orientation. To borrow the words of Lenin who had dealt this question extensively in the early years of the Russian revolution, the Party has yet to internalise and translate it into the political praxis that:

“Unless women are brought to take an independent part, not only in political life generally, but also in daily and universal public service, it is no use talking about full and stable democracy, let alone socialism. And such "police" functions as care of the sick and of homeless children, food inspection, etc., will never be satisfactorily discharged until women are on an equal footing with men, not merely nominally but in reality.⁸³

There is a general apathy on women’s issues in Kerala, and the CPI (M) is no exception, although the political resolutions of the Party Congresses dedicated a small section of it as a reminder of the issue.⁸⁴ Since 1996, when the Women's Reservation Bill was placed before the Lok Sabha for the first time, one more aspect is added to the list. It is not to deny here that the Left, in general (CPI (M), CPI, RSP and the Forward Bloc), has been unequivocally supporting the Bill since 1996.⁸⁵ However, the

⁸³ V I Lenin, ‘*The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*’, 1917 pamphlet, Source / www.marxists.org, accessed on 17/4/2015

⁸⁴ The women question was in the agenda of the Political Resolution of Palghat Congress in 1956. It reads: “Ensure equal rights to women- inheritance including the right to own land, for equal pay for equal work, maternity leave and maternity benefits...and substantial provision in the social welfare schemes of the government for welfare of children and social, educational, cultural and economic advancement of women.” Sen (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party*, p. 571.

⁸⁵ The 1996 Election Manifesto exasperated about the Bill on the one third reservations for women in legislatures and demanded that the new Parliament will have to adopt this measure. This has been regular demand since the Bill came in for discussion in the Parliament for the first time in 1996 and was passed in the Rajya Sabha in March 9, 2010. Apart from this, the CPI (M) actively supported a list of other matters- equal legal rights for women of all communities, compulsory registration of marriage, dowry eradication, equal property and inheritance rights for women and joint matrimonial property rights, special schemes for female-headed households in rural areas and increasing employment

question here is that how far these activities and support of the CPI (M) translated into the empowerment of women within the very structure of the Party. This has been presented as a serious concern by the central leadership of the Party. However, it is evident from the various documents circulated by the CPI (M) from time to time and from the political praxis of the Party that this concern was not equally shared by all or percolated down to the entire Party structure, and most importantly to a substantial section of the Party leadership itself.

The Eleventh Congress of CPI (M) in 1982 placed the women's question beyond a mere question of social reform and presented gender equity as a larger question pertaining to democracy and socialism. The Congress was critical of the abysmal membership of women in the Party and in the Communist-led trade union fronts which hardly had any women in the leadership. It stated that "even in the industries and concerns where women form the majority of workers they are hardly any women to be found among the active leaders and functionaries of the organisations. The trade unions by and large neglect the problems of women in their concern. They do not fight against unequal treatment, discrimination in promotion, etc."⁸⁶ The Congress spoke volumes about the situation of women organisation and their participation in the Party leadership. The Political Organisational Report expressed the concern in strong words:

Considering the mass membership and large participation of women in struggles, their strength in the Party, in its higher committees and the leadership level is meagre. In Kerala for instance, lakhs of women workers are participating in struggles and their militancy and heroism are an accepted fact and their literacy level is also high, but they constitute only 2700 of the 104000 Party membership. In Kerala, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, the women movement had been developing since the 1940s and women participation in all political activities and the organisation have lakhs of members. But what is the increase in Party membership? It is a fact that we have failed to develop women cadres not only in the Party and its higher committees but also in the higher committees of the trade unions and Kisan

opportunities for women, legislation against domestic violence and sexual abuse of children and a comprehensive media policy to check the growing trend of commodification of women. 1996 Election Manifesto of the CPI (M) <http://cpim.org> accessed on 17/9/2015.

⁸⁶ Eleventh Congress of the CPI (M), p.274-75

Sabhas, even where women had participated in all struggles . . . A great barrier and drawback is the backward and feudal attitudes prevailing within our own Party towards in general and lack of awareness and interest in the special problems of women.⁸⁷

The issue was taken up seriously in the context of the proposed one-third reservations for women in the legislatures. The CPI (M) had given call to address the matter seriously and to recruit women to the Party from the mass organisations and give them “sufficient scope for education and training so that there can be many women candidates of the Party in the coming days.”⁸⁸

Participation of women in the democratic institutions is an important benchmark to analyse women’s position in the society. It is surprising that the Left parties being the “firmest champions of the women's rights and for ending gender discrimination,”⁸⁹ and the staunch supporters of the women reservation Bill in the Parliament and outside, have done precious little to ensure adequate representation of women in the Parliament and State Legislature Assemblies. On the contrary, when it comes to providing seats for women in the Legislatures and the Parliament, the CPI (M)’s performance was sometimes far worse than the bourgeois parties. Gender representation of CPI (M) in Lok Sabha from 1967 to 2014 shows that except in 2004 and 2014, the women representation is well below 10 per cent or just 10 per cent. The CPI (M) In Kerala, the highest representation of was two in the 2004 elections when CPI (M) had twelve MPs altogether.⁹⁰

This holds good for the Legislative Assembly elections too where the number of seats are more. The representation of women in the Legislative Assembly in Kerala shows how desperately the CPI (M) which is supposed to hold a different ideology,

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.69.

⁸⁸ Review Report On 1996 General Elections; Adopted By The Central Committee, July 27-29, 1996, <http://cpim.org> accessed on 17/9/2015.

⁸⁹ Manifesto of the Left Parties for the Lok Sabha elections, <http://cpim.org> accessed on 17/9/2015.

⁹⁰ Election Commission of India.

culture and political agenda, have to set their home right before they blame the bourgeois parties for the lack of interest in women's issues including their representation in various elected bodies. Since 1965 -2011, Kerala had twelve Assembly elections and out of that except for 1996, the women's representation was on or below 10 per cent. In 1996 it was 14 per cent. In 1970 and 1977 recorded zero representation of women.⁹¹ Other Left Parties are no way different. The CPI (M) could have offered a model for other Parties by providing extensive reservation for women in their own Party. Nothing was done on this front; it remained as emaciated rhetoric.

The establishment of All-India Democratic Women's Association in 1981 raised high hopes on this front. Since its inception in 1981, AIDWA has been campaigning for women's rights on regular basis and has been very active in fighting atrocities against women and children. The phenomenal growth of the membership of AIDWA since its inception in 1981 and the corresponding figures of the women membership in the Party is paradoxical. In 2005, the total membership of AIDWA was 9 million⁹² and Kerala, West Bengal, Tripura and Delhi constitute 90 per cent of this. This has increased to 1, 07, 91, 299 in 2015. It has already seen that these figures no way reflected in the gender representation in the legislatures. Time and again, the Party's weakness is exposed in developing women as leaders and recruiting them to the Party from the mass organisations.

The Political-Organisational Report Adopted at the XIX Congress of the CPI (M) in 2008 stressed the need for promoting women in the mass organizations and said that the inclusion of adequate numbers of women in all the committees of mass organizations such as peasants, agricultural workers, trade unions, students, youth and

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹² from 1990 to 2001 the membership increased from 31,19,234 to 63,27,361
<http://aidwaonline.org/faq/what-aidwa> accessed on 19/11/2015

so on is essential. However, this has yet to bring to the realm of praxis and there will be huge opposition from the existing male leadership to vacate their position for women.

As far as Kerala is concerned, the number of women party members in Kerala was 3810 - (constitutes just 3% of the total membership of the Party) in 1985,⁹³ indeed a disappointing figure. This was less than the previous years. The fact that between the year 1981 and 1985 the membership of the AIDWA in Kerala increased considerably- from 2,88,836 to 3,69,914⁹⁴ - shows the offensive apathy of the Party to welcome more women members into the Party and its leadership. The picture is not radically different in other communist mainstays except for Tripura which has 23.16 per cent of women membership and this has increased 25.8 per cent in 2015.⁹⁵

A look at the women membership over a period of ten years (1998- 2008) in Kerala, substantiate this argument further. Only 7.5 per cent of the total members of the CPI (M) were women in Kerala in 1998, and in 2001 it was 7.77 per cent. According to the Political-Organisational Report, 2008, the women constituted just about 12 per cent of the Party and in Kerala it was 11.28, little below the average and slightly better than its 2004 position of 10.11 per cent.⁹⁶ The Political-Organisational Report of 2015 indicates a marginal improvement (15 per cent). The poverty of the political praxis of the Party on gender issues is graphically indicated in the composition of the Polit Bureau and Kerala State Secretariat. Even by the 2015 statistics, the Central Committee of the Party has only 14 women out of 91 members,

⁹³ *Party Rekhakal* -1985-1988, p. 249.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 245.

⁹⁵ Political-Organisational Report of CPI (M), 2015.

⁹⁶ In Tripura 17.6 in 2001, 20.11 in 2004 and 23.16 in 2008, West Bengal, 7.71 in 2001, 9.37 in 2004 and 10.47 in 2008, Political-Organisational Report Adopted at the XIX Congress of the CPI (M) March 29 to April 3, 2008, Coimbatore, p. 60.

in the Polit Bureau out of 16 members only two are women and as far as the Kerala is concerned only one woman is there among 15 male members in the Party secretariat.

In the trade union front, the statistics are better than the Party domain and there has been some marked improvement in the women membership in the trade unions from the 18th Congress to the 19th Congress which had enhanced from 18.2 per cent to 22.6 per cent; however, involving women in trade union work and promoting them in the committees is still seriously lagging behind.⁹⁷

The general trend in the Party is that the women's issues are better to be left with women's organisation to be dealt with. The 18th Congress challenged this view and had stressed the importance of the Party directly taking up social issues, which include issues directly concerning women - the falling sex ratio, dowry and discriminatory practices against women issues and so on. It felt that "still the prevalent view in the Party is that these are to be taken up by the women's organisation. The Party should incorporate such issues in its general platform and Party leaders should address these issues in their speeches."⁹⁸

The Communist Party led two rectification campaigns in 1996 and 2006 respectively and one of the important agenda was to rectify the low level of women's representation and participation in the Party. Significantly, the paltry representation and participation was attributed to the general chauvinistic attitude of the Party members. Though the Rectification Campaign of 2009 was appreciative of the increased awareness of women's issues in the Party, it was critical of *certain tendencies* among its members. It stated that inside the Party the "male chauvinist outlook remains. There are some cases of sexual harassment within the Party. In many places, Party leaders and cadres are not encouraging the participation of their women

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 96.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 114-15.

family members in political activities. There is reluctance to assign women cadres with responsibilities on the part of Party.

As the Rectification Document of the Party has noted, “some Party members succumb to social and religious practices alien to Communist standards with the family and the community on questions -such as dowry taking, inter-caste marriages, child marriage, equal status to girl child etc. The tendency is to go along with family or community pressures rather than have a firm and principled stand behaving a Communist.”⁹⁹ It highlighted the need for conscious efforts for the communists to set ‘to set standards of communist morality and ethics in relations within families Party members’. Encouraging women family members to be ‘politically active’ and uphold democratic practices at home and asked to make more visible space for women to act in the public domain.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, there is no dearth of reference to solve the problem. Realisation of the praxis is *the issue*.

In short, it is a matter for worry that communists are stooping to the trap of patriarchal culture and “within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat.”¹⁰¹ Even when the struggle against revisionism and bourgeois culture

⁹⁹On Party’s Perspective on Women’s Issues and Tasks (Adopted by the Central Committee at its December 14 -16, 2005 Meeting. www.cpim.org , accessed on 18/7/2015.

¹⁰⁰“The document stated: “There should be a conscious effort to set standards of communist morality and ethics in relations within families Party members and especially leaders should encourage women family members to be politically active in whatever way is best suited to them. It should not be the case, as sometimes happens that Party members discourage their wives from joining political work on the plea that “at least one of us should stay at home. Communists have to uphold democratic practices like registration of marriage within their own families, equal treatment to daughters and sons within the family, eschewing of rituals and religious ceremonies many of which have an anti-woman and casteist bias. There have been many examples of two active comrades in the Party deciding to get married of their own choice. In some cases the marriage then becomes a barrier for the woman’s advance because once married she is expected to play the role of a housewife giving up her political life. By not intervening, the Party actually loses a talented and committed cadre apart from the negative impact on the woman herself. The Party has to make conscious efforts to root out alien patriarchal notions about women and women’s role within the family and in public life. Setting examples in personal life also will be of immense help in fulfilling the political task of mobilizing larger sections of women.” Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Engels said: “In the great majority of cases today, at least in the possessing classes, the husband is obliged to earn a living and support his family, and that in itself gives him a position of supremacy, without any need for special legal titles and privileges. Within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat”, Frederick Engels Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the

had been carried out in the communist parties, the women's question has been treated in a lighter vein. This will have larger implications in the ideological and cultural domain. An utmost serious struggle has to be waged to overcome this impediment. Placing Lenin's reply to Clara Zetkin, the German Marxist and a champion of women's liberation may be contextual here.

Every such struggle brings us in opposition to respectable bourgeois relationships, and to their not less respectable reformist admirers whom it compels, either to fight together with us under our leadership – which they don't want to do – or to be shown up in their true colours. That is, the struggle clearly brings out the differences between us and other Parties, brings out our communism. It wins us the confidence of the masses of women who feel themselves exploited, enslaved, suppressed, by the domination of the man, by the power of the employer, by the whole of bourgeois society. Betrayed and deserted by all, the working women will recognise that they must fight together with us.¹⁰²

V

Progressive mass organisations are the torch bearers of social and cultural changes. The definition of the mass organisation, from a classical Marxist framework, is that it should act as a platform to circulate wider ideas (let the hundred flowers bloom) and provide a forum for expressing eclectic views and open discussion. It should constitute an example for democratic functioning; in the structure as well as in the leadership. The point here is that the Party need not control the mass organisations and make them auxiliary units of the Party by mechanically applying the Party structure there too. The mass organisations should function with certain amount of autonomy, even when some of the Communist Party members are the members of these organisations.

However, in reality, the mass organisations – whether it is the Student Federation, or Youth Federation or Women's Associations or other frontal

State". Here only difference is that irrespective of the fact that women is earning or not, women is a communist or not within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat.

¹⁰²Clara Zetkin, Lenin on the *Women's Question*, From *My Memorandum Book*, 1920.
www.marxist.org accessed on 15/5/2015

organisations - do not function as autonomous bodies but mostly are reduced to play the second fiddle for the Party and thus is not able accomplish their historical role. In the process, it fails to attract a larger section of the progressive people who do not want to work under the rigid edifice of the Party as cadres. If only they are allowed to function independently, the mass organisations will have the capacity to act as a bridge between the masses and the Communist Parties. It can reach the people's pulse to the Party too. This certainly was the case in the early days of the communist movement in Kerala (not to mention about elsewhere) during the 1930s and 1940s. Perhaps these organisations – the *Karshaka Sangams*, Teachers Association, workers' unions, youth forums and even the children's organisation actively supported the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist movement and were the backbone of the Communist movement in Malabar. When the Communist Party of India began to function in Kerala in 1940, these mass organisations stood behind the party and even when the party was banned, they kept the simmer on.

The membership of mass organisations have increased substantially in the State since the formation of some of them on the recommendations of Salkia Plenum in 1978; but these outfits are invariably treated as appendages of the party and it controlled their functions in an undesirable way. Instead of encouraging them to develop into a body of critical thinking individuals, the Party prefers strict control over them. This was a point of discussion even in the 1970s and the Salkia Plenum, in 1978, after extensive discussion, held as follows:

Party members themselves often fail to develop the trade unions as the democratic organisations of the working class with the workers themselves democratically deciding all policy questions. Guidance by the Party committees, at all levels, to improve this situation is necessary.¹⁰³

¹⁰³Salkia Plenum, p. 49.

This idea was taken up by the CPI (M) further and a Central Committee document in 1981 and expressed itself explicitly on the need for certain amount of autonomy and independent space for the mass organisations. It is important to note here that this was in the wake of forming new mass organisations.¹⁰⁴

Similar concerns had come up again, almost a decade later in the 14th Congress of the CPI (M) in 1992 and the resolution on *Organisation and Tasks Ahead*, which referred to the 1981 resolution. It said:

In practice this understanding is being violated still in most states and mass organisations. The mass organisations are narrowed in scope to the Party's periphery by utilising them as Party platforms and mechanically transmitting Party slogans and understanding. In many weak states, in the Kisan Sabha, in youth and student organisations, this problem constantly crops up. A determined struggle has to be waged to rectify and reorient the Party's outlook to mass organisations, if further growth has to be made.¹⁰⁵

Despite such pronouncements, the mass organisations continue to function under the tutelage of the party leaders and without an independent structure and leadership. Rather than encouraging their democratic functioning and build them as a platform for all the progressive ideas these mass organisations are straining at the leash of the Party and thus losing their character. This is, notwithstanding the fact that the Party leadership has gone on record conceding this as a problem. As late as in 2004, the party held:

¹⁰⁴ It stated: "The mass organisations fulfill the role of rousing the elementary consciousness of the sections which they organise and through it growingly link the backward masses with Party's activities. The guiding role of the Party consists in consistently raising the consciousness of the concerned sections without shutting the organisation to the continuous inflow of backward sections. Otherwise the organisation will be an organisation of the militants nearest to the Party and in spite of its strength in numbers will be isolated from the main mass and unable to activate them. The mass organisations are required because Party's direct slogans of basic change -- revolution, capture of power etc are unable to rouse these masses immediately. The wide masses are attracted immediately on the basis of partial demands, immediate demands which are or appear to be possible of achievement without a complete overhaul of the social order. The education and experience gained in these struggles train the consciousness of the masses under the guidance of the Party and directs it in revolutionary channels. The work of the Party in this connection should not be identified with the work of the mass organisations among the masses, otherwise the link with the masses will be broken. This is an absolute law of guidance of mass organisations. To substitute the role of the Party by making the mass organisation itself the spokesman of the Party is bound to lead to harmful consequences." On Approach To Mass Organisations (Adopted by the Central Committee At its October 29-31, 2004 Meeting www.cpiim.org) accessed on 17/9/2015.

¹⁰⁵ Report on Organisation and Tasks, The 14th Congress of the CPI (M).

There is a persisting tendency even now to treat the class and mass organisations as adjuncts of the Party. In practice, the distinction between them gets obliterated. Often there is no difference in the slogans raised in the Party platform and the mass organisation or in the style of functioning. The basic work of the mass organisations should be to take up the immediate problems and long-term issues affecting that section of the people. Though progress has been registered overall in taking up the local and immediate issues, more emphasis and attention has to be paid to developing the local struggles and movements.¹⁰⁶

The unjustifiable presence large number of CPI (M) leaders in the conferences and meetings of the mass organisations especially in States like Kerala where the “Party leaders inaugurate/address delegates’ conferences of the mass organisations” became a major concern.¹⁰⁷ They treat those organisations as the adjunct of the Party and do not distinguish the mass organisations from Party platform.

Interestingly, Kerala need not look elsewhere to find a model of mass organisation. The example set up by the KSSP, a left oriented progressive mass organisation, is a successful model. Though its members come from the Left and progressive section of the people, it acts in an autonomous domain; wherever it is necessary it differ from the policies of the Left. The Silent Valley movement, for instance, led by the KSSP while the proposed hydroelectric project was supported by the Left, especially the CPI (M). Whereas the KSSP was an important stakeholder of the Literacy Campaign of 1991 and it was the backbone the People’s Planning Programme of the LDF in 1996-2001. In the recent past the KSSP supported the Palcimada movement where CPI (M) kept themselves away initially. Examples are exhaustive; the CPI (M) can shape up its mass organisations which have huge membership in this model and use it a vehicle for socio-cultural change.

¹⁰⁶On Approach To Mass Organisations,.

¹⁰⁷ A list of suggestion /recommendations are given by the CPI (M) to its members regarding this in the document On Approach To Mass Organisations. Ibid.

VI

The Left in Kerala is in a deep identity crisis today. Ideological deviation is an important concern. The argument that when the bourgeoisie controls the State apparatus, the dominant ideology will be the bourgeois' ideology and when the Communist parties choose to work under a parliamentary constitutional set up, the interaction between the bourgeois parties is only natural and these interactions will lead to the penetration of the dominant ideology into the Left parties have veracity. But the problem arises when this 'alien' ideology begins to dominate the political, ideological, social and cultural discourses of Left and the deterrents fail to act. Today, the Left not only affecting a counter/alternative culture, but succumbs to the bourgeois ideology and culture. This section will look into certain ideological crisis that the Left is in and nevertheless to say it will be mainly dealing with the CPI (M)

It is not that the CPI (M) is not conscious of this deviation and it acknowledges the fact in a self-criticism mode. It emphasised the need for the Party "to consistently counter such influences and penetration. Rectification has to be a continuous process and not a one-off effort in order to protect the revolutionary character of the Party."¹⁰⁸ The problems are manifold: lack of proper and constant ideological orientation especially in the new context of the world and the country (consequent poor political consciousness), of the party leaders and cadres, absence of a mechanism to prevent the penetration and influence of the bourgeois ideology and values and so on. When the Party activities are centred around electioneering (on tactics) and related manoeuvres, the strategy of building up a People's United Front for the people's democratic revolution meet with a setback. For that matter, political

¹⁰⁸On Rectification Campaign, p. 61.

praxis does not gesture any hopes for future revolution; it safely remain in the haven of theoretical framework.

First and foremost, the ideological education, an important component of any revolutionary party, is no longer a strong forte of the Communist parties. That was a thing in the past. A.K. Gopalan expressed this concern as early as in the 1970s. He said:

Except during the early days of the Party, there was no systematic attempt to teach the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism. The system of organising classes to give political education to young Party members soon became a thing of the past. Some of these schools which had a fairly long innings had been organised on an all- India and state level. But there was no instruction provided in these schools on the basic principles of Marxism.¹⁰⁹

This, indeed, is a far more serious concern given that as much as forty per cent of its members happen to be those who joined the Party after 2001¹¹⁰ for whom the ideological education is vital. With the fall of the Socialist countries, people, by and large, lost hope in socialism and this led to a kind of ideological pauperism which is evident in Kerala. The neoliberal onslaught and its implications on the socio-economic and cultural realms- also contributed to an ideological vacuum.

Yet another concern is the thrust on the Parliamentary road. The CPI (M) has conceded to the fact that ‘Parliamentarism’ among its members is a major factor to be reckoned with. The trend was apparent, though not so significant, in the earlier period when it came to power in Kerala. This is the growing trend, especially where the Party has been in power. Interestingly, whenever, the Party loses an election, the subsequent election review criticise this tendency as one of the main reasons for its election rout. For instance, the state committee review has noted the growing trend of parliamentarism in the 2011 Assembly elections and it criticised the trend of

¹⁰⁹ While discussing about the need for constant ideological education, AK Gopalan felt that this was not the priority of the Party now (he was describing a situation in the late 1960s and early 1970s when he wrote this book). It does not seem the situation changed considerably since then. Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p.265.

¹¹⁰ On Rectification Campaign, p. 64.

seeking the candidature and achieving it through political manoeuvring which has become common place in the Party. It is interesting to recall that A. K. Gopalan had warned against this as early as in 1952; this was soon after his own election to Parliament from the Kanur Lok Sabha constituency. He said:

A new life, a new environment, a new alliance. I found myself in an environment calculated to ruin a man. First class travel, comfortable chambers in Parliament, a surfeit of money, magnificent quarters, and a life free of heavy responsibility. All circumstances favourable to a life of pleasure. Daily garden parties and tea parties given either by the Prime Minister or by the President or the Vice President. . . Is anything more necessary to turn a man's head? . . . On the other hand, people from all strata of the society were arriving daily to meet parliament members to present petitions and memoranda. We were thus faced with a combination of circumstances that brought us face to face with temptations of authoritarianism and luxurious living, as well as self-conceit . . . If a person was weak-willed he ran the risk of being ensnared.¹¹¹

The luxury that A.K. Gopalan talked about has grown in multi-fold now; the paraphernalia around an elected MP has increased considerably; the first class travel by train has now become air travel; the salary and other perks have increased considerably and though he did not mention about the number of Parliamentary Committees which guarantee extensive travel across the country and even visits abroad and on many instances the huge money for these come from the Central Public Sector Undertakings; such visits, most often, are mere pleasure trips undertaken by the MPs and yield very little, if not nothing to the process of democracy. As a result, the people's representatives succumb to the bourgeois culture. The Communist Parties did not have a strict mechanism in place to monitor the activities and conduct of their MPs and MLAs and other elected representatives inside and outside their fora. This leads to ideological bankruptcy. The 1996 Rectification document had correctly pointed out this deviation as:

The bane of parliamentarism should not be seen merely as a deviation among individual leaders and cadres for holding elected positions and power. It is a totally reformist outlook that confines the Party's activities to electoral work and the illusion that the Party's advance can be ensured solely through fighting elections. Neglecting the work of organising the mass

¹¹¹Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, pp.181-182.

movements, launching struggles and building the Party is a result of this parliamentary outlook.¹¹²

Interestingly, the same concerns were couched differently in the rectification campaign document of 2009, a decade and a half later.

This was sharply contrasting with the picture when the CPI contested the first ever elections since the Kerala State was formed in November 1956. In the 1957 election, unlike the INC which was infected with faction fights and could not decide on the candidates till the last moment, the Communists were systematic and according to H D Malaviya:

The most astonishing feature of the Communist election management in Kerala is [was]the ease with which the selection of candidates was effected. In fact nothing else so sharply brings forth the basic and diametrically opposite difference between the Congress and Communist Party as the selection of the candidates by the two Parties. What was the former's greatest weakness proved to be the latter's strongest point. Here was no scramble for tickets, no factions and groupings for the purpose. On the other hand there was the spectacle of comrades sincerely anxious to stand down to make way for the best ones.¹¹³

Indeed, this was evident from the selection of the ministers where independents like Joseph Mundassery, Dr. A. R. Menon and V.R. Krishna Iyer were selected purely on the basis of their competency in the designated area and their track record.

Yet another serious factor is that the leadership of the Party still does not belong to the working classes. The leading committees of the CPI (M) is still dominated by those belongs to middle and upper middle classes, despite the majority of the cadres arrived from working classes and poor peasants. In short, the Party

¹¹²On Rectification Campaign”, p. 65. “The penetration of alien bourgeois influences finds one manifestation in the form of parliamentary opportunism. The growth of parliamentarism is also connected to the desire for acquiring more material positions and a better life style. Since the salaries and perks of MPs and MLAs are much more than what cadres can get as Party functionaries, there is a hankering and desire to be in such positions. In many states, the Party does not take the bulk of the salaries and allowances of MLAs. Despite this, some legislators do not pay the levy due from them or follow the norms for MLA development fund. There is the problem of the elected representative not integrating his or her work with the Party and mass organisations, particularly in the weaker states.” Ibid, p. 66.

¹¹³Malaviya, *A Report to the Nation*, pp.15-16.

failed in training the cadres belonged to the fundamental classes to take up the leadership. A 2009 document of the CPI (M) acknowledged this squarely. It said:

An analysis of the class composition of the Party shows that 75 per cent of the membership comes from the working class, poor peasants and agricultural workers. But in the leading committees of the Party only around 30 per cent belong to these classes. 70 per cent come from the middle classes and other sections. This provides the basis for alien class influences.¹¹⁴

Interestingly, one does not have to do a deep research referring various documents and sources to understand the current situation of the Communist Party as the CPI (M) had analysed the issues to the core. There is no dearth of literature on this matter. However, the fact is about the extent to which these have been monitored and corrected and particularly in the context of a party that functions from the framework of democratic centralism; the record, in this regard has been abysmal. There is an apparent detachment from theory and practice.

The political manoeuvrings of the communist parties ('the tactical alliance with bourgeois parties', according to them) for electoral alliances had caused the Left a lot in the ideological front. As for the CPI (M), the line attached by the Salkia Plenum for mass alliances with other democratic parties¹¹⁵ had opened up new avenues for manoeuvring. In the process, the distinct identity of the Left, which delineated them from the bourgeois parties had thinned down. No doubt the CPI (M) safeguarded its distinct vocabulary, rooted in classical Marxist terms (like, revisionism, bourgeois ideology, reactionary, sectarian, renegade, democratic revolution, socialist consciousness, and so on) and the cardinal structure of the Party – democratic centralism. This does not mean that these words have lost their meaning in today's context. So long as class based oppression – a society divided between the oppressors and the oppressed - exists in any format, these terms retain their relevance.

¹¹⁴*On Rectification Campaign*, p. 66.

¹¹⁵It is worth mentioning here that the Salkia Plenum did not even attempt to outline the basis on which such 'democratic parties' are to be identified and the end result was that the CPI (M) entered into electoral alliances with all sorts of political outfits as long as they were anti-Congress in the given instance.

However, the point here is about the widening gulf between the precepts and practice in the CPI (M). It is a fact that many institutional practices of the Left from its tradition have now become mere rituals and spectacles re-enacted periodically; lavish decorations and flex boards and blaring revolutionary songs mark such rituals such as the annual visits by leaders to Punnapra-Vayalar or before the election campaign begins.

The culture of simplicity, a prominent feature in the lives of the leaders during the freedom struggle, that distinguished them from the Congress members and the ethos continued for some more time after independence. Life was a difficult proposition for a communist then, susceptible to many hazards; they lived dangerously.¹¹⁶ Black tea and *parippu* (Dhal) *vada* became metaphoric to the simplicity and austerity of the Communists. Some of them retain their Khadi attire not as remembrance of their Congress days but for them it represented the ideals that Gandhi represented and they followed it till the end. That did not make them un-Marxist or less Marxist. In other words, the communists cultivated a distinct identity over a period of time as a party of the working class and toiling masses. It is evident from the criticism of the Party that with the fading away of that generation, the culture of simple living also vanished. The new generation of the communists (exceptions vary) lead a luxurious life. About the life style of certain comrades, a Party document commented that it is similar to that of the bourgeois political leaders.¹¹⁷ The party was

¹¹⁶ For instance P Krishna Pillai, one of the founding members of the Communist Party and great leader of the CSP was killed by a snake bite at the age of 42 while he was in underground. In the 1930s and 40s many lost their lives for being a communist.

¹¹⁷The CPI (M)'s review of the 2001 Assembly election results emphasised that the Party should always seek to project the distinct identity as a party of the working class and toiling masses. The document stated, without mincing words that the state committee admits in its review report that the life style of certain comrades is similar to that of the bourgeois political leaders. 'Review of the May 2001 Assembly Elections'.

conscious about its image among the people and that they did not see much difference between the Communist Party and other bourgeois Parties and stated forthright:

The Party should make a serious introspection and take necessary steps for rectification. The common people are generously contributing to the Party fund. Sufficient care and attention should be shown to its expenditure at all levels. There are criticisms about the assets of certain comrades that they are disproportionate to their known sources of income. There are also criticisms about certain comrades that they regularly collect funds from tainted businessmen.¹¹⁸

In short, according to the Party documents, the Party is infested with an array of ideological issues: factionalism, careerism, individualism and absence of collective functioning, The problem of federalism, unethical methods being used to influence elections in conferences, the absence of criticism and self-criticism¹¹⁹ (instead self-justification), bureaucratic behaviour and refusal to tolerate criticism, leakage of inner-Party discussions in leading committees to the (bourgeois) media, systematic use of the bourgeois media to project individual or factional interests, weakening of the link with masses. So far the experience of the Party shows that treatment for the immediate symptom does not work in the long time. It should take on the roots¹²⁰ the symptoms of the problem when they manifest themselves. As far as Kerala is concerned, the devastating effect of factional squabbles has tarnished the image of the

¹¹⁸ Ibid. This statement was further reiterated in the agenda set for the rectification campaign of 2009. "If some leaders and cadres fail to live up to the communist standards and values, there is the danger of the image of the Party getting blurred and it being seen as no different from bourgeois parties. The penetration of alien bourgeois and petty bourgeois values is manifested in a lavish lifestyle, building houses which are far above the minimum needs required, spending large amounts on weddings of children, organising festivities on a lavish scale etc. Increasingly, these are being acquiesced in and no questions are being asked within the Party. There are examples of comrades who have acquired assets and incur expenses disproportionate to their known sources of income. Care should be taken to see that family members and close relatives of Party leaders and those holding public office do not take advantage of their position to acquire pecuniary gains or assets disproportionate to their known sources of income." On Rectification Campaign, p. 68.

¹¹⁹ As Gramsci rightly pointed out in the write up on Criticism and Hypocrisy of Self Criticism that in reality it has turned out that self-criticism offers an opportunity for fine speeches and pointless declarations, and for nothing else; self-criticism has been parliamenatrised", Gramsci, Prison Note Book, p.255.

¹²⁰On Rectification Campaign", p.65.

party beyond imagination. Interestingly, the CPI (M)'s Kerala unit has identified “the root of factionalism in Kerala” to the “disease of parliamentarism.”¹²¹

¹²¹Review Report of the Assembly Elections (Adopted by the Central Committee at its June 11-12, 2011 Meeting, www.cpim.org accessed on 17/9/2015.

CONCLUSION

The Communist experience in Kerala was an experiment under the specific conditions of parliamentary democracy within the four corners of the constitution. This Marxist praxis, indeed, was a novel concept in the 1950s when the available references were the Russian model and the Chinese path, characterised by armed revolution. However, over a period of time, especially after the fall of the Socialist countries or perhaps even before, when the enormities of Stalinist un-democracy began to pour out, a search for new strands of Marxist praxis had begun. The concepts like democracy, democratisation, and participation were attached to socialist praxis to overcome the passiveness and detestation. In the process, in many places, the traditional communist parties that were formed under the prescriptions of the Comintern in the 1920s, in a rigid Stalinist – Leninist structure, ceased to exist or lost its relevance before the reinventions of Marxist praxis. Kerala's experience with communism, over a period of seventy years has been analyzed in the context of the historical changes that took place in the timeline.

The Communists victory in Kerala in 1957 owes its success to the understanding of definite historical realities by the communists in the region. The horrendous feudal oppression in the social and economic arena and the repressive state apparatus dominated their thoughts and thus created the space for public discussions on these. With the shared experience of a whole lot of movements involving the peasantry including the tradition of the Moplah revolt, they began to organise the peasantry while active in the Indian National Congress. As a culmination of a quest for radicalisation of the freedom struggle by foregrounding the role of the workers and the peasants and the disillusionment with the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement by Gandhi, the radicals in the Congress formed a CSP unit

in Malabar 1935. The emphasis here is that unlike other parts of the country, it was not the communists and socialists who flocked into the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala; but the radical Congress members transformed to CSP organically.

The communist experience in Kerala was influenced by some of these features and hence distinct from that in some other parts where the CPI was a force. Kerala, unlike Bengal, Bombay and even Madras, was a predominantly agrarian society and hence the CPI too was driven by concerns that were different from elsewhere, where the trade unions formed its pivot. (This is not to shroud the legacy of Tebhaga in West Bengal and the Telengana armed struggle involving the peasantry). In the search for allies in the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggle, they stratified the peasantry rustically (a sound knowledge of theory was lacking then) and identified the classes to bond them in an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist united front of the peasants, workers and the petty bourgeoisie since the mid-1930s.

The protracted struggle waged by the radical CSP and then the communists against the social oppression and the economic exploitation accounted for the social changes in the Kerala society. Thus, in a way, the communists in Kerala established a historical continuity of the social reform movement in the State too. In this process, they did hegemonise the national liberation movement in Kerala. In the early 1940s, when the communist party was formed in Kerala, classes became the base of the Party which operated in a Marxist-Gandhian framework. This is the uniqueness of the Marxist Praxis in Kerala. It is this organic evolution of the CPI in Kerala that led to the CPI's emergence as a strong force in the context of the transition from colonial domination to Parliamentary Democracy in 1951-52 and the CPI winning the majority in the 1957 elections to the state assembly.

When the CPI formed its government in Kerala in March 1957, the party was caught in a crisis; this certainly had its impact on the ministry and its future. In 1957, the communists had before them such models as the Russian and the Chinese revolutions and the tenets of Marxism as extolled by Marx, Engels and Lenin in times when Parliamentary democracy had only been in a rudimentary stage even in Western Europe. Such experiments as the election of Salvador Allende in Chile were still a couple of decades away; leave alone the experience in Latin America where shades of the Left would win elections and form governments and launch measures to confront neo-colonial onslaughts, in Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, etc., as discussed in Chapter I of this thesis.

Though the anti-democratic *liberation struggle* was the physical force that brought down the first ever democratically elected communist government in the world, the nemesis of its defeat was scripted in the ideological confusion (rather different perceptions) that was derived out of the practice of the political praxis. The genesis of E.M.S. Namboodiripad's thesis, presented in the Plenum held in May 1957, just a month after the formation of the Ministry, was born out of this state of confusion. The Report called for a new perspective, new methods of organisation and also a new style of work for the entire Party as the Party is faced with new responsibility [of running a government]. This is one of the most relevant documents till date. The subsequent document: *Kerala: Problems and Possibilities* (by the same author which incidentally began with a quote from Gandhi: "Every prospect pleases man alone is vile"), again in 1957 prescribed political praxis for the government. There is circumstantial evidence that this report and the document were not treated with the seriousness that held.

The period that followed by was chaotic to describe. The violent *liberation movement* by the communal forces, supported by political parties of all shades forced the Nehru government to succumb to their pressure; the government was dismissed.

For the Communists, this was also a period of huge learning- it learnt that how far it can push a radical agenda while it had to work within the limitations of a “bourgeois” Constitution. The Education Bill was the best example for this. Even judicial luminaries like Krishna Iyer, being part of the government, could not bring it to the notice of other members about the implications of Article 30 [1] while Bill was formulated. It was reviewed later in the context of the defeat of the Party in 1960, though. The most impressive part of the history of the Communist Party at this juncture was that it was open to criticism and self-criticism and had expressed its willingness to learn from it.

Another major learning was about the deep rooted communalism in Kerala. Though the communists organised the workers and peasants on class basis, there were evidence that the liberation struggle led by the communal forces could easily manipulate the workers and poor peasants to get them as feeders; the communal feelings overpowered the class consciousness. The ‘motely feudal ties’ were reestablished for that matter it was never severed completely. It polarized the Kerala society deeply and the Left had learnt that it had to operate in such social reality.

The relevance of the 1957- 1959 communist government in Kerala is that it operated in a larger theoretical framework of Marxism and Gandhism. While the Marxist praxis such as agrarian restructuring, renewing the education system and the revamping the police policy were put in practice, on the other hand, it also strengthened and extended the cooperative movement into new areas. Decentralisation of power was another serious concern of the Government. Towards

the realization of the transformation of the local bodies into local self-government, the Panchayat Act was passed and the District council Bill was introduced. And people's participation was conceived as local committees in education and health sectors, formation of food committees and so on. Informal mechanisms were in place to gather stakeholders' views on important Bills like agrarian restructuring and so on. This uniqueness of the political praxis – what A.K. Gopalan described as 'concretely associate the people with planning and development activities' in his autobiography *In the Cause of the People*- of the first communist government in Kerala. And the radical programme followed by them within the structure of the Constitution had given the Left a distinct identity that none of other parties can claim in India. Particularly in Kerala, Left could develop and expand the concept of political democracy. The major contribution of the communists to the political culture of the state being *the space for public action*.

It is true that these political praxis of the Left did not impact at the extent of bringing changes in the correlation of forces in the country as it was one of the main objectives of the Left. But in Kerala, by and large, it could reach relief to the people and more than that. It is fact that it raised the hope of the communists all over India that the Party will be able to capture the power at the center too thus it will be able to complete the People's Democratic Revolution, then to the transition to socialism. The Malayalam slogan *Parrikkum parikkum, chengodi jnagal parikkum, chengottaiyilum parikkum*(we will see to that the red flag fluttering at the Red Fort, Delhi one day) was born out of this ultimate hope.

The 1960s was a chaotic period for the Left. The ideological differences in the CPI reached its peak which led to the split in 1964. And when it happened in 1964, it had far reaching implications for the Kerala Party being an accomplished political

force in the state. In the battle for hegemony, the Communist parties were pitted against each other in the 1965 elections. The opportunist alliances, even with communal parties like Indian Union Muslim League had far reaching implications in Kerala's politics. Though the CPI (M) could prove its mettle and ensure the electoral rout of the CPI, both the parties together were responsible for ruining another opportunity to come to power in 1965. And the government that followed in 1967, though both the communists came together in an alliance, had catastrophic effect on the Left in Kerala.

The CPI (M) and the CPI came together in an alliance with five other parties including the IUML and this time they succeeded in forming a government. But the alliance was built on mutual distrust and apprehensions. It was proved soon, for the communists, the wounds were still wide open, and the differences were irreconcilable at that point of time. The temporary truce broke sooner than expected. This was a historical blunder that the Communists went ahead formed an alliance negating the famous prescription of Lenin- concrete analysis of concrete situation. The CPI along with the other main partners in the coalition ensured the end of the Namboodiripad led Ministry in 1969. This postponed the prospects of the communist parties coming together in an electoral alliance for a decade since then. However, by this time, both the communist parties graduated in the art of making coalitions. The Left Front became the Left Democratic front (unlike in West Bengal) to accommodate other political parties in the electoral alliance.

One of the immediate consequences of the shameful fall of the second Communist ministry was that the Congress with a single aim to rout the CPI (M) (as it was the main opposition party to the Congress in Kerala), supported the CPI headed government from outside in the beginning and formed a government together in

1970. The Congress was *liberal* enough to leave the Chief Minister's job to CPI's Achutha Menon, even when the former secured seats twice as the number of seats of the latter. It ensured a temporary victory for the CPI over the CPI (M). An unintended impact of this Congress-communist dispensation was that the government became the longest one in the history of Kerala; it went beyond the customary five year term owes to the national Emergency. More importantly, it almost continued the policies of the previous (Left Democratic) government.

The fact that as a political entity, despite the CPI's complete rout across the country due essentially to its support to the national emergency, in the 1977 election, the CPI secured its highest ever vote share in its history in Kerala. It can be safely concluded that it was, by and large, a return for its good governance in the State. This is no way an attempt to justify the Emergency and its enormities in the State when the government was headed by the CPI.

The Emergency was a trial period for the Left and the trade unions in general. And in Kerala, the main resistance against the Emergency came from the Naxalite; the mainstream Left, the CPI (M), by and large, took refuge of wait and see. The CPI (M) expected that the inner conflicts of the bourgeois –landlord parties will lead to a new alignment of political forces. And in turn that will create a favourable situation to bring changes in the correlation of forces in the country. However, nothing came out of this 'inevitability' theory other than the CPI (M) losing its vote share in the 1977 general election while other opposition parties could make use of the people's wrath against the Congress. In Kerala, the people perceived and treated democracy as an ethical question, a way of life, resisted the Emergency- among that there were Naxalites (who incidentally, had opposed the bourgeois democracy and hence even

refrained from elections as it was the festival of asses), Marxists, Socialists, Gandhians, RSS and other independent souls.

The Salkia Plenum of 1978 was an important watermark in the history of the CPI (M) in Kerala. The Plenum had made a clarion call for the development of Party in terms of organisation and membership; the impetus was substantial to the Kerala Party. The call for the formation of new mass organisations of women, youth and agricultural workers, conceived with an objective of expanding and strengthening the Party, paid rich dividends in the State. Evoking the spirit of the Plenum, the Kerala CPI (M) had developed as a mass revolutionary Party soon and the mass organisations increased their strength in no time. It also recorded substantial growth of the Party in terms of membership and infrastructure in the State. The criticism remains that the Party lost its revolutionary zeal in the process of prefixing the 'mass' before the revolutionary party.

The 1980s was a significant period for the CPI (M) as far as the elections were concerned. First and foremost, the CPI had returned to the LDF in 1979. Secondly, the CPI (M) was successful in bringing a winnable coalition of parties together and won the Assembly election in 1980. Though, the government fell in 1982, the CPI (M) learnt its lessons well and also it learnt the art of surviving in a coalition of parties with different interests and ideologies. And in 1987 the LDF came to power again. The marked characteristics of the period between 1987 and 2011 is that there has been governmental stability in Kerala since then. There was near continuity of the policies too. The major difference between the two fronts was that the LDF was less corrupt and more people oriented. As far as the political struggles were concerned, the 1980s was the swansong for the Left in Kerala.

A major break to this monotony was the CPI (M) initiated People's Planning Campaign for the Ninth Plan in 1996. This should be treated as a continuity of the policies of the first communist government. In the political context it was an effort to renew the Marxist praxis. The role of KSSP should be acknowledged on this front. The PPC lost its momentum as the LDF in general, and the CPI (M) in specific, lost its political will to carry on with such an experiment. More over the Party was infested with factional fights which was going beyond redemption. While the Party establishment had grown considerably and it was managed well professionally, the revolutionary agenda had taken a back seat. Electioneering became the major political programme of the CPI (M). And this was also the middle classes began to determine the political line of the Left. When the middle class, the 'social scums' whom Marx describe as reactionaries for 'they try to roll back the wheel of history' became a major class force of the CPI (M), the poor had to search for its allies elsewhere.

This period was also marked with the proliferation of identity politics of - the Dalits and the Adivasis - in the State. This should be assessed in the context of the alienation of these social groups from the CPI (M). Therefore, it may be concluded that the movements for land for livelihood have direct link with the changes in the development concerns of the Left in State. Though the Left in Kerala did not go to the extent of accommodating the neo-liberal agenda like in West Bengal, where the CPI (M) lost its electoral base after Singur and Nadhigram incidents, the LDF government's project agreement with ADB in December 2006 (Kerala Sustainable Urban Development Project -KSUDP) and the nature of the new cooperative ventures of the CPI (M) are indicators where the Party is heading to.

The arrival of new social movements in the State is an uncontestable fact now, though their ideological moorings is open to contest. The number of such movements

are growing in the last twenty years and they are there to stay. The Left is not only inconsiderate about accommodating them but also misconstrues them to a large extent. Ignoring such movements, without distinguishing them ideologically, and often labelling them NGOI-sation or CIA supported activities, in the long run, will be Left's loss.

The pronounced changes in the development concerns of the Party 2000 place the CPI (M) one more step closer to the bourgeoisie Parties, though theoretically and ideologically, the CPI (M) remains a revolutionary Party. However, in practice, the concerns of the Party is restricted to electioneering than building up a People's Democratic Front of revolutionary classes. People's Democratic Revolution has become a distant dream or not a dream at all. The ideological gap between the Communist Parties and other political parties in the State has narrowed down considerably. This has had adverse influence on the cultural process too.

To conclude, when the world over, there is a rethinking of new socialism- Socialism with democracy, with a human face - and pursuing alternatives for development, the last strong bastion of the communists, Kerala, must look for left alternatives. Rethinking of the tenets of Marxism has become necessary not just because the Soviet experiment of socialism failed; but it has become a necessity today when a spectre – transnational finance capital – is haunting the world. Unlike what Marx and Engels perceived in their own times, the 'bourgeoisie today need not nestle everywhere, settle everywhere to establish its connections everywhere anywhere.' Without nestling and without settling it can brutally extend its claws anywhere and everywhere. Hence the search for a people oriented alternative is inescapable. More importantly, a wider diaspora of the Left agenda cannot be and should not be sectorial. A new social, political and cultural format for change is the need of the hour.

Alternative theses like *Fourth world* should be looked at in the changed format of the world. In that formulation, Gandhism is not *obscurantist* any longer. Neither is it antithetical to Marxism in the changed context of the world; it can blend with Marxist praxis.

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Appendix

1957/31

I(2)

MAY 57, CC. MEETING.

REPORT OF. COMRADE E.M.S. IN THE PLENUM
HELD ON 24 - 26 MAY' 1957. ON THE POLITICAL
RESOLUTION.

- Hence it is old
- Police
- Labour Policy
- Regarding Agrarian Policy
- Regarding Administrative Reform.

(Typed Notes Original)

Joshi

Confidential

REPORT OF COM. E.M.S. IN THE PLENUM
(HELD ON 24-26 MAY '57) ON THE
POLITICAL RESOLUTION

At the outset I want Comrades to recognise the limitations of the report of the discussion.

Main reason for this is that the Party is faced with a new responsibility calling for a new perspective new methods of organisation and also new style of work of not only the entire Party but each Party member.

We must accept that we are groping on all these.

This Plenum and discussion should be seen as a first step to evolve a new understanding on all these. I expect that discussion should continue on all levels simultaneously with work.

The draft resolution and Com.M.N.'s report have indicated the general direction of the tasks.

I want to supplement the report by a reference specifically to the work done by the Ministry and the Party after assumption of office and the problems and difficulties we have had to face and what in my view the main direction of the Governmental and the Party attitude should be. In this regard, I will deal with only six major departments - (1) Food, (2) Land Relations, (3) Police, (4) Planning, (5) Labour Policy and (6) Administrative reforms.

Before dealing with these I want to give my assessment of the political situation as it is developing today after the assumption of office. I want to specifically refer to these because I strongly feel that there should be a break from our old understanding during and after the assumption of office in this regard.

What is the crux of the situation here? There is a Communist Party-led Government in Kerala. What is the position of this Government vis-a-vis the Centre; vis-a-vis the Congress here; vis-a-vis the bureaucratic administrative machinery?

On this, both the enemies of the Party, and overwhelming section of the Party itself had views which questioned the life of the Ministry.

Regarding the enemies of the Party, their propaganda before elections and even up to now has been that this ministry will not last.

Before elections, they were telling that the Communist Party will not get majority because there is no United Front; there will be instability.

After elections when Party got 60 plus 5 they said that independents will falter and break.

At the third stage, when actually we assumed office and went ahead, they have raised the slogan of lawlessness and demanded that the Centre should intervene. They have expressed their desire and confidence in this regard through KFGC resolution, Shreeman Narayan's call and the stand of the opposition in the first Assembly.

What is the actual objective situation? All their hopes and desires have not proved true. People, including the Centre do not believe in the "Grim lawlessness". 'Methrubhoomi' editorial has to refer to the position as only a "sense of insecurity" among certain section of the people. Even in regard to the release of political prisoners, commutation of death sentences on which likely could arise, the fact of the position is that these differences have been and are being resolved in our favour.

Another weapon that the Congress banked on to isolate us was Vinoba Bhave's visit and the Sarvodaya Sammelan. They hoped to propagate that Communist is opposed to Sarvodaya and to change the Sammelan itself into an anti-Communist front. Instead of that, our reception to Vinobaji, the message to the Conference and Sri V.R. Krishna Iyer's speech found great echoes in the majority of the delegates of the Conference and the reaction plans were defeated. The basis being the fact that the main plank of Sarvodaya is against private property in land and Vinobaji has accepted the role of land reform also for the change in rural life.

So much about the hopes and desires and plans of reaction. They have turned topsyturvy.

What about our own assessment:- our concern and fear about the dangers of centre intervening, the bureaucracy sabotaging of the internal reaction overpowering us.

The basis of this assessment is that C.P. Government is the Government of the working class party in a set up where in the rest of the States and Centre the Party of the bourgeoisie is in power.

Since these are opposing classes and their programme and policies are opposed to each other, the bourgeois party and its Centre will not and cannot tolerate the existence and functioning of a Government led by the working class. On the other hand as the Communist Government goes on implementing its programme even within the limitations of the Constitution, as agrarian reforms are pushed through, class struggle in the countrywide is bound to increase and as a result of both headlong clash can be expected.

Similarly there is bound to be Jemmy resistance from a bureaucracy - the creation of Foreign Imperialism - a set-up which is continued by the Congress Ruling Party also.

Underlying the above assessment is a conception of a class-struggle - which I think is an oversimplified and dogmatic conception of class struggle.

We should realise that the class struggle in India and our State is developing in a situation influenced by international and national factors. This developing in a situation when socialist system has become the decisive system and when the struggle against

colonial backwardness in India has merged with the struggle for reconstruction of India on socialist lines. In today's situation, the development of the Second Plan, the realisation of the overwhelming majority of the people for a struggle for a new life, urge for a change, the realisation that the Congress itself is not able to put through its professions due to class hold and other forces hamstringing its free initiative.

It is in this situation that our Government has come into being. Our Government therefore has by its very programme - which in essentials also by the character and composition has allies outside our own movement and classes and outside the geographical frontiers of our State.

In our own State, sections of people other than our class desire ardently that we should succeed because they are fed up with Congress misrule of ten years. They desire honest and good government. These belong to the following of the Congress, PSP and other parties.

Outside our own State, sections of people desire that we should succeed so that their cause will be advanced. This applies to the entire Congress and upper class and States like Madras, Orissa who are struggling for greater economic and political powers from the Centre. Our Government's and Party's slogans for greater allotment for backward or less developed ones, and our slogans for decentralisation of powers, i.e., more powers for States find a ready echo in the hearts of vast sections of people and many States.

Thirdly, inside the Congress High Command and the Central Cabinet there are forces - the initiators of the Second Plan - who find that the biggest bottle-neck in the Plan is the administrative machinery which they are not able to tackle and reform. These forces are desirous that we who are pledged to work within the constitution and who are closest to the people should succeed in the implementation of the Plan so that their hands will be strengthened.

So much for the position of ours vis-a-vis Congress, and the Centre, which brings us to the question of bureaucracy and its attitude. As part of the Centre and Congress reaction, we had fear and concern and we still have that the bureaucracy is out to sabotage us. Hundreds of friends all over India ask us the question; do they co-operate with you, or sabotage you or are they sullen.

Our own conception is that the State and bureaucracy are weapons of class and unless we replace it by our own democratic machinery, we cannot proceed to carry out our reforms.

What is the reality? Is the entire administrative machinery deliberately against us? No. The dominant section can be said to be sullen and steeped in inertia born out of discontent and age-long training. The section that is willing to co-operate with us or deliberately hostile to us is negligible.

In this situation the task is to reform the administrative structure by fighting the inertia rousing patriotic spirit of service and yoking their work to rebuilding of a new life. In this struggle the deliberate element hostile to us will get isolated and the better element will find their proper place.

Hence, even with regard to the conception about bureaucracy, their needs to come a change in our conception.

Thus we will see that we have got to give up our sectarian understanding regarding class struggle, by a simple straightline, regarding coming conflict between Centre, bureaucracy and Congress on the one hand as inevitable.

We have to replace it by a dynamic understanding which takes note of the new situation, the new allies we have in our class-struggle and therefore the new opportunities. We have to resolve it in our favour that be it a conflict with Centre or bureaucracy.

It is in this background of the present political situation that we have to evolve our programme so that they become a weapon in our hand to forge ahead the obstacles. This programme is NOT the election manifesto though it should be based on it.

What should be the character and content of the programme which gives us strength, which gives us allies all over? In essence, it is the development of the best of the national tradition of the struggle for a new Kerala as part of new India. It is a new Government though. It is partly true only. Why? because our programme is quintessence of the BEST of the national programme of today with progressive modification.

It is not the CP's programme.

Hence it is old.

But it is new because it is headed and sought to be implemented by the C.P.-led government and it seeks to achieve -

- full and real democracy;
- and democracy to the toiling people.

Why do I say that the fact that the C.P. is there makes the programme NEW.

Because what the Congress has failed to achieve though it planned - agrarian reforms, administrative reform, community development - we can achieve due to the strength and character of our Party.

Thus the political national character of our programme and the political moral and class-character of our Party itself makes our programme a continuation of the old and consummation of the best of the old in a new form.

Once we are able to see this, our Party's immediate and urgent task is to unite the government and the Party and the people to fulfil her and now this programme while popularising and fighting for further new direction in this programme itself.

Concretely I shall deal with the major portfolios or departments and discuss what according to me should be the direction of our activity - governmental and Party.

FOOD. The food situation is serious - very serious, all our India and will continue to be so for 2 years.

- (1) Nonavailability of rice here in India.
- (2) If we go in for buying from foreign we lose exchange which is very necessary for the Second Plan.
- (3) Regarding price also, it is going up, it may go up still - inflation has set in - prices of consumer goods is going up.

What is the way out?

The practicable proposition to face this critical situation is to strive to reach self-sufficiency regarding food as far as our States concerned - or atleast double our production in 2 or 3 years for which there is possibility. This requires that apart from agrarian reforms, etc. we should organise a mass drive for increased production by the introduction of scientific methods of cultivation, manuring, etc., and also introduce new areas for cultivation.

This requires radical orientation of outlook of our Kisan movements and the peasantry as a whole. Our Kisan cadres should initiate this campaign with the help of the Government.

Immediately we may get some rice, but we can't depend always on this beggar bowl business.

POLICE: There are lots of complaints about police - hundreds of memorandums are given to us. They show that the policemen continue their old methods - In certain cases they refuse to act also.

To deal with all the seriousness is difficult. We are strongly to evolve a correct line regarding this. At the moment certain issues have been referred back; more serious are referred to the collector for report; the outstanding and pressing issues are being referred to judicial enquiry.

The basic question however is, with our Government in power, what is the role of the police in maintaining peace, law and order. Where to draw the line for the police to step in - In agrarian, industrial and political mass actions. What is the Party's role in developing them; where the police are to step in. If struggles are organised deliberately as in Chavara and Trivandrum, what is the police to do. Even in case where the workers are moved by just demands but where they overstep limits of peace and law and order, can and should the police intervene. Upto what extent?

It is necessary for us to have a clear conception regarding this, and educate the entire force in their attitude to popular action; to differentiate between genuine and non-genuine, to stress on peaceful solutions to take all steps to prevent the development to critical stages from our end also need to have a clear line.

PLANNING: I think we are suffering from certain mistaken notions about the Plan. For example, we feel that once the second Plan is finalised, we can't change it at all. This is wrong. What cannot be changed is, the all India public sector allotment for railways, industries, etc.

In case of our encouraging private capital to start new industries, we can still negotiate loans and aid from Centre.

Secondly, if we organise industrial co-operatives of coir or fish or co-operative banks, we can get aid from the Centre.

Thirdly, even in the matter of Rs. 87 crores, we can try to get certain changes.

And above all, on the basis of concrete and comprehensive study we can now on organise campaign and movement for a Third Plan.

In the above situation what should be our most urgent and pressing task?

(1) to try to get maximum changes possible in the Second Plan (heavy industries) - 2nd ship-building yard.

(2) In regard to private sectors - draw and encourage people to invest in certain industries and secure aid for them from the Centre. Only thing is the State has got to take a small share and get a loan from the Centre.

(3) Develop boldly small-scale cottage industries as industrial co-operatives - coir and fish.

(4) For development of agricultural production organise co-operatives for distribution of seeds and manures and markets of produce.

All these can be implemented here and now within the framework of the Plan. Almost all these if implemented will mark a beginning of changing the face of our rural life.

How can this be done? This can be done only by:-

a) re-organising the administrative machinery which is creating bottle-necks from top to bottom and

b) the mobilisation of non-official popular effort.

Regarding both, the role of the Government and the Party is clear. The Party should lead in inspiring its cadre, kisan cadre and uniting all sections of the people in participating in implementation of the above plan.

In its role of training cadre in business and cooperative organisations and the role of the Party in throwing its best cadre into these.

LABOUR POLICY. If we are taking the policy declaration about industrial peace seriously, we can help the workers achieve bonus and the most pressing demands of the workers. How?

Firstly, in the Statemanaged concerns we should emerge as model employers. State concerns today are running on a loss. A probe into it and attempt to organise it.

In these we should go a head with the formation of management councils, works committees and the recognition of unions.

In the private-owned concerns, the role of the T.U. movement - in the new set-up.

REGARDING AGRARIAN POLICY

- We should go ahead with the land legislation in the form of one or two bills.

- But immediately take steps for the grow more food.

REGARDING ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

The problems that should engage our attention are:

1. How to introduce the new outlook in the bureaucratic set-up
 - periodic conferences.
 - personally tackle officers.
 - take them along interviews, visits, etc.
2. Extend panchayats into Malabar and improve their powers.
3. Settle the question of Malabar District Board.
4. Help solve the problems of Municipalities.
5. Work out how to implement the policy of decentralisation of powers - District-level elected bodies.
6. Solve the problems of integration on a just and principled basis.

The above in my view are the direction in which Government and the Party have to move in the coming months with the confidence that we can advance.

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