

**COMMUNISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE:  
*EXPLORING THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT  
IN MALABAR, 1939-1957***

**THESIS**

**Submitted to the UNIVERSITY of CALICUT  
for the award of the Degree of  
DOCTOR of PHILOSOPHY in HISTORY**

**SIJESH.K**



**RESEARCH AND POST GRADUATE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
MALABAR CHRISTIAN COLLEGE  
KOZHIKODE**

**MAY 2023**

## **DECLARATION**

I, SIJESH.K., hereby declare that the **thesis COMMUNISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE: *EXPLORING THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN MALABAR, 1939-1957*** is a bonafide record of research work done by me and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any other degrees.

**SIJESH.K**

Research Scholar

Research and Post Graduate Department of History

Malabar Christian College

Kozhikode

C U Campus,

Date : 31.05.2023.

**Dr. Godwin samraj D.P.**  
Research Supervisor  
P.G. & Research Department of History  
Malabar Christian College, Kozhikode.

## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis titled **COMMUNISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE: *EXPLORING THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN MALABAR, 1939-1957***, is the result of bonafide research carried out by **SIJESH.K**, at the P.G. & Research Department of History, Malabar Christian College, Kozhikode, under my supervision and submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY and that the thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma or other similar titles.

The examiners have not recommended any modifications or suggestions and therefore the original thesis is resubmitted as such. Soft copy attached is the same as that of the resubmitted copy.

Kozhikode,  
Date:

**Dr. Godwin Samraj.D.P**  
(Supervising Teacher)

## **Acknowledgement**

With the accomplishment of the thesis titled “**COMMUNISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE:EXPLORING THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN MALABAR, 1939-1957**”, a long cherished dream got materialised. This work is the result of six years continuous hard work which would not have been possible without the assistance extended by several individuals and institutions.

It is my privilege to be a research scholar under the guidance of Dr.Godwin Samraj.D.P., Associate Professor, Post Graduate Department of History, Malabar Christian College and currently the Controller of Examinations, University of Calicut. He always insisted upon me to make use of the primary, fresh and corroborating evidences in order to make the thesis more objective and trustworthy. His constructive, timely interventions and criticisms helped me a lot to make the presentation of the thesis more effective. First of all, I express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr.Godwin Samraj.D.P. Without his affectionate and relentless guidance, this work would not have been successful.

I express my sincere gratitude to Dr.K.C.Vijayaraghavan, retired Professor of History, S.A.R.B.T.M. Govt. College, Koyilandy and K.M.Jayasree, retired Principal and Professor of History, S.A.R.B.T.M. Govt. College, Koyilandy who welcomed me at their residence and spared precious hours with me. With all the research spirit, they allowed me to consult many works which they collected over several years.

I greatly owe gratitude to the people who spent their precious time with me for interviews. Many of them are octogenarians and nonagenarians who were struggling with a lot of age old diseases. Despite their ailments,

they were very cooperative in giving details of their past experiences. Unfortunately some of them are not alive at the time of the submission of the thesis. I remember the help I received from Krishnan in Thillankeri who accompanied me to different parts of Kannur arranging persons to be interviewed. I extend my hearty gratitude to them all. I also thank to K.K.Shailaja Teacher, former Health Minister of Kerala and her husband C.Bhaskaran Master for giving necessary books and also details of Communist party activities in Kannur.

The support extended by my friends including academicians is not trivial. I express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues in the department of History, English and Oriental Languages for their assistance and encouragement. To name, Dr.Hari.K., Dr. Rajendran.K, Mr. Dinesh Kumar.K, Mr. Divakaran.M, Mr. Anwar.N.K. and Dr. Vinodhan Navath. Along with my colleagues I express my gratitude to the staff of the library of the college department. I express my sincere gratitude to Mr.Shaiju Hendriks, who introduced me to my research supervising teacher. I thank Dr.Shinoy Jesinth, Head of the Research Centre, Malabar Christian College for facilitating the smooth conduct of research related duties.

I am grateful to several institutions of different characteristics which have rendered their contribution for the successful completion of this thesis. I acknowledge my gratitude to Central Archives-Thiruvananthapuram, Regional Archives-Kozhikode, *Pattiam Gopalan Smaraka Patana Gaveshana Kendram*, Kannur, *Kelu Ettan Padana Gaveshana Kendram*, Kozhikode and *K.Damodaran Padana Gaveshana Kendram*, Tirur. I also thank to the Department and General libraries of Kannur and Calicut Universities and Government College Madappally, Vatakara and Malabar Christian College, Calicut. I am thankful to A.K.G Centre, Thiruvananthapuram which is a repository of a good number of Communist Party publications including

*Deshabhimani* in 1940s and 1950s and also to the libraries attached with different political party offices across Malabar.

The assistance I received from several *vayanasala* libraries across Malabar deserves special mention. I express my sincere thanks to all these libraries across Malabar which provided me abundant materials in the form of souvenirs and books required for the research work. Some of the *vayanasalas* were constructed in memory of Communists who lost their lives in the struggle against imperialism and landlordism. The *vayanasala* authorities are very much co-operative and helpful in arranging required books even from neighbouring institutions. The following are the names of a few: *Cherukad library* at Kuttoth, *Kairali Vayanasala* at Pazhankavu, *Sakhavu Krishna Pillai Smaraka Vayanasala* at Kandakkai, and K Damodaran Memorial Library, Palakkad.

This work is made possible only due to the support extended by my family. I am grateful to my wife Anusree.C.S. for her emotional and moral assistance to complete the thesis. My parents and relatives also stood firm with me for the successful completion of this work.

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgment

Contents

Abbreviations

<b>Introduction</b>		<b>1 – 22</b>
<b>Chapter I</b>	<b>Rise and Growth of Communist Movement in Malabar</b>	<b>23 – 78</b>
<b>Chapter II</b>	<b>Communist Organisation and Malabar Society</b>	<b>79 – 129</b>
<b>Chapter III</b>	<b>Communists and Health Care Activities</b>	<b>130 – 177</b>
<b>Chapter IV</b>	<b>Land Struggles and Communist Intervention</b>	<b>178 – 218</b>
<b>Chapter V</b>	<b>Communist Values and Social Change</b>	<b>219 – 261</b>
<b>Chapter VI</b>	<b>Ideological Transformation through Public Sphere</b>	<b>262 – 293</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>		<b>294 – 307</b>
<b>Glossary</b>		<b>308 – 311</b>
<b>Maps</b>		<b>312 – 314</b>
<b>Appendices</b>		<b>315 – 324</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>		<b>325 – 347</b>

## Abbreviations

ABYS	:	<i>Abhinav Bharath Yuvak Sangh</i>
AICC	:	All India Congress Committee
ANS	:	<i>Aikya Nanaya Sangham</i>
CDM	:	Civil Disobedience Movement
CPI	:	Communist Party of India
CPIM	:	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CSP	:	Congress Socialist Party
DMRT	:	<i>Devadhar</i> Malabar Reconstruction Trust
DRS	:	<i>Desa Raksha Sena</i>
INC	:	Indian National Congress
IPTA	:	Indian People's Theatre Association
KCSP	:	Kerala Congress Socialist Party
KPCC	:	Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee
KS	:	<i>Karshaka Sangham</i>
MSP	:	Malabar Special Police
PCC	:	Producer-cum- Consumer Cooperative Society
PSP	:	<i>Praja</i> Socialist Party
RAK	:	Regional Archives Kozhikode
RI	:	Rigorous Imprisonment
RIN	:	Royal Indian Navy
TNSA	:	Tamil Nadu State Archives
USA	:	United States of America
USSR	:	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



## **Introduction**

The emergence of the Communist movement in Malayali land as a progressive force occupies a unique place in the history of modern India. Since the formation of the Kerala unit of Communist Party of India (hereafter CPI) in 1939 the Left movement under it has exercised a tremendous influence in all walks of life of the people. As a progressive force, the Communist party played a leading role in setting up a major socio-cultural base in Kerala. Communists were at the helm of different types of distress relief activities particularly during the times of epidemics, famine and poverty. Involvement in these type of activities helped the party expand its popular base in Kerala especially in Malabar. This aspect in the history of Communist movement remains unearthed; earlier studies were concentrated on the struggles of peasants and workers organised under the red flag.

The principal object of the present study is to mark out the interference of the Communists in the everyday life of the people in Malabar in a wider perspective beginning from the inception of the party in 1939 down to the assumption of power by the party in April 1939. Its history can be traced to the activities of Congress Socialist Party (hereafter CSP) and Karshaka Sangham (hereafter KS) units formed as early as 1934 and 1935 respectively and therefore, the year 1939 just marked a transformation of the entire Kerala CSP unit into CPI unit.

There are certain definite personal reasons for the researcher in identifying this topic for study. First of all, the researcher has been curious even from the childhood to know about some of the leading personalities in the locality like M.K.Kelu popularly called Keluettan, who was then residing at a place hardly one kilometre away from the researcher's home. The

researcher used to listen the talks of grand parents about such persons. If any question asked about them, they used to say that they were great and respected persons. It was while the researcher doing Post Graduation in History at Government College Madappally in Vatakara that the interest to know about Keluettan got evinced once again. As part of the dissertation for partial fulfilment of the Master of Arts the researcher took M.K.Kelu as main subject and it was at this time that the social service and distress relief works of the party in the 1940s and 1950s, caused a spark in researcher's mind. This factor coupled with the academic requirement, prompted the researcher to undertake a serious study of the intervention of the party in the everyday life of the people in the form of distress relief and humanitarian activities in Malabar.

Kerala, the southernmost state of India, has created a niche in modern Indian history. It is at this state that the entire world, in the mid twentieth century, turned and concentrated its full attention. For the first time in united Kerala, CPI came to power in any Indian state, and this victory was accomplished by means of a victory at the polls in a free and fair election in 1957. Even the newspapers in mighty capitalist countries like USA reported the stunning victory of the communists. The victory was a heated discussion in the political circles across the world. Some characterised Kerala as *Yenan* of India<sup>1</sup>. Out of the 16 states formed according to state's reorganisation act in 1956, Kerala is the only state which travelled in a different direction. It is a matter of question of why the people's choice fell on the CPI in the Legislative Assembly election of 1957.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Yenan* is a place in China from where the communists started their victory towards the establishment of People's Republic in 1949. In India communists assumed power in Kerala for the first time and it is in this sense that the state is called so by some scholars.

The emergence of the Communist movement in Kerala was an important area of research. Many wrote comprehensively on the relentless struggles and resistances organised by the CPI against existing social and economic systems. There are hundreds of works with regard to the background, growth and activities of the party in Kerala. The review of related literature indicates that large majority of the works which were written on the party were related with the struggles of the peasants and workers. The distress relief and humanitarian activities of the party could not find enough space in such works.

There are only a few and stray references of the intervention of the party in the everyday life of the people in the works written on the party. Hence it has been a Herculean task on the part of the researcher to explore the necessary materials for writing and to identify and hold interviews with the persons who are able to provide details of such activities. Many of whom are octogenarians and nonagenarians and a few centenarians who were directly involved in such works or witnessed them. As the sources on the distress relief works of the party are scanty, only those who lived then and survive today can give a complete picture of them. This study is the result of the personal conviction that the victory of the Party in Kerala in 1957 was the result of the distress relief works of the Communists and it could better be understood by viewing them through the eyes of those who directly took part in or witness to it. The references of the distress relief work of the party in some literary works have to be verified with trustworthy accounts. The present study is an attempt to gather a fair qualitative knowledge of the intervention of the party in the everyday life of the people in Malabar and to give a comprehensive view of the topic by focussing on the then naked social realities and the ripples of the communists' works in society and the like in a wider historical perspective.

The present study is titled “**Communism in Everyday Life:Exploring the Communist Movement in Malabar, 1939-1957**”.

### **Operational Definition of Key Terms**

Communism: Communism is a political and economic ideology. Communism, by general agreement, is a system in a society in which the difference between different social classes does not exist. Under this system the methods of production are owned and controlled by all its members, and everyone works as much as they can and receives what they need. It directly opposes the ideas of capitalism and private ownership of resources. The communist ideology was developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and advocated the usage of resources of society, by society and for society.

The basic idea of communism emerged much before Marx. Plato and Aristotle discussed these ideas in ancient times. The word communism derived from the French word ‘*communisme*’ having developed from the Latin word ‘*communis*’. One of the first modern usages of the term ‘Communism’ originated in a letter by Victor d’Hupay around 1785 where he described himself as *auteur communiste* or communist author. John Goodwyn Barmby is credited with the first English usage of the word ‘communism’ in 1840<sup>2</sup>.It was Marx and his manifesto that evolved it as a popular doctrine that later was accepted as a practice.

Malabar: Malabar, lying on the west coast of peninsular India, was one of the districts of the Madras Presidency during the colonial era. It was the only Malayalam–speaking district in the presidency and had the second highest literacy rate of any district in the presidency. For the administrative convenience, the district, with Calicut as the headquarters, was divided into nine taluks of Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kurumbranad, Kozhikode, Waynad,

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Economic Times*, April 30, 2023

Ernad, Valluvanad, Ponnani and Palakkad. According to William Logan, the boundaries of Malabar are- north, South Canara District; east, Coorg, Mysore, Nilgiris and Coimbatore; south, the Native State of Cochin; west, the Arabian Sea. Presently it consists of northern Kerala districts including Palakkad, Malappuram, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasargod.

### **Need and Significance of the Study**

The success of the party in 1957 lies in the fact that it could effectively make use of its machinery which consists of a dedicated and duty-bound functionary. They have a lot to lose in their life but dedicated themselves for the cause of the poor. Large majority of the communist leaders in Malabar were Caste Hindus. They sacrificed everything in their life for the movement. Despite stiff opposition from their families, these leaders worked for the poor and the downtrodden. As the party ideologue Krishna Pillai underlined in the party mouth piece, *Deshabhimani*, in 1946 that welfare of the humanity was the hallmark of the communist ideology and it was the duty of every communist to get actively and dedicatedly engaged in such works. It is noted that the party in Malabar appeared before the people with distress relief on one hand and communist ideology on the other. While working in Congress and Socialist parties, the progressive-minded Communists were visible in all the resistance movements launched by peasants and workers. At a time when they were fighting against landlords and colonial authority, they tried to take care of the people in distresses due to famine and epidemics.

The palliative care activities and philanthropic works carried out by the present-day political parties have their roots in the distress relief activities in the 1940s and 1950s of twentieth century. The food supply to the patients and their bystanders at some hospitals in Kerala by some religious and cultural organisations affiliated to political parties is reminiscent of the food distribution programme launched by KS under the tutelage of the party in the

war period. In some assembly constituencies, parties are fielding candidates known very much in the field of palliative care activities taking the chance of winnability into consideration. This electoral strategy has proven success in many constituencies. Nowadays, it is also common among the political parties to form social service organisations for organising palliative care and philanthropic activities. It can obviously be said that the beginning of these activities of the political parties can be traced back to the distress relief activities of the Communist party in Malabar. This aspect in the history of the communist party has not been seriously taken up for studies. Such a study is very significant against the backdrop of the palliative care and philanthropic activities gathering momentum in Kerala state.

The distress relief works of the Communist party have left a distress relief tradition in the state. Earlier studies made by E.M.S.Namboothirippad and some others as well as present day historians have made efforts to bring out the history of the Communist movement in Kerala which resulted in the publication of a large number of works. All these works are related with the struggles of the peasants and the workers in Kerala held under the red flag. It is an undisputable fact that the history of CPI is the history of the struggles and resistances. From the very beginning itself, the party had to encounter the suppressive measures by the state machinery and its growth was through different stages of challenges. In two times party got isolated from the people: during the times of People's War Policy in the war period and in the post-Calcutta thesis period which brought the party on the verge of an extinction. There was none in the villages to voice for the party and even to carry red flags. But party was there in the minds of the people because of their earlier distress relief works. When the ban on the party was lifted and it adopted parliamentary democracy, the party activities came back to normalcy. In 1950s, Party managed to have a strong base in a short period of time and assume power in the state because of this popular support. Nevertheless, this

relevant aspect in the history of the party received little attention in the previous works. Here comes the need for undertaking such a study in a serious manner.

The present study is looking into the intervention of the Communists into the everyday life of the people by launching relief activities to redress the grievances of the people who were reeling under poverty and epidemics. Using the testimonies, autobiographies, memoirs, biographies, newspapers and the like, the researcher is able to bring to light the hitherto unknown aspect in the history of CPI in Malabar.

### **Scope of the Study**

Scope of the present study can be identified in the following areas;

The study mainly focuses on the distress relief works of the Communist volunteers during the times of famine and cholera and small pox epidemics in the fifth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was the famine and epidemics which disrupted the social life in Malabar. It was a time in Malabar when people got scared of even going out of their houses. The intensity of fear and panic caused by the outbreak of cholera and small pox can be understood from the words of those who really suffered from them. It was at this time that Communists launched distress relief works. There are only a few references of these works and hence it was felt necessary to peep into this hitherto unexplored area in the history of the communist movement.

A significant aspect of the CPI in Malabar was that it was able to develop highly disciplined and dedicated cadres who were ready to sacrifice their lives for the movement. Party required its members to place the interests of the people and the party above personal interests and to cultivate comradely relations towards the people living at the bottom of society. It was this disciplined and dedicated volunteers who got involved in redressing the

grievances of the people. The Communists took care of the people by settling different types of family and social issues and extended assistances to them at the time of necessities. They were at the forefront of organising different types of protests and struggles against landlords and customary practices and also launching social reform activities by challenging the orthodoxy. These aspects in the history of the Communist movement have been given adequate space in the present study.

The study also looks into the Communist works of utilising the emerging public spheres like tea shops, *vayanasalas* etc. which were mostly attended by the proletariats. The party workers played a significant role in transforming this proletarian public sphere to communist public sphere through their skilful intervention. It is through the discussions at these centres that communism and communist works including distress reliefs were taken to the bottom of society. As it is an essential part, one chapter mainly focuses on the role of Communists in the public sphere.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the background of the formation of the Communist party in Kerala
2. To look into the nature of the activities of the Communist volunteers
3. To examine the distress relief activities in Malabar conducted by the party workers.
4. To look into the nature of the livelihood of the rural folk and their vulnerability to epidemics
5. To study the discipline of the Communists in organizing party programmes.



6. To examine the interference of the Communists in the problems of the everyday life of the people.
7. To make enquiry about the people who died while treating the patients caught by epidemics.
8. To study how the Communist Party regained its lost popularity after its decision in 1942 to support the British government in latter's fight against fascism.
9. To examine whether the distress relief activities of the Communist party were organized to gain political ends.

### **Hypothesis**

The existing social system in Malabar was oppressive and exploitative for the subaltern groups. In the agrarian society, peasantry was the dependants of the *janmis*. As eviction was a common threat in the hands of the *janmis*, the life of the poor peasantry was under the magnanimity of the former. The famine during the Second World War period created a lot of hardship for the poor. It was accompanied by the outbreak of epidemics like cholera and small pox which took a heavy toll of human lives. The government machinery also failed to rise up to the expectations of the people. In short, a large number of people in Malabar, during this period, were in extreme distress. The intervention of the Communists helped a lot alleviate their sufferings. They supplied food and medicine to the needy and took care of the infected and the family of the victims of the epidemics. Besides, the Communist intervention brought the downtrodden to the mainstream of society by making them literate through socio-economic and cultural programmes. These types of interventions of the Communists awarded them a space in the heart of the people which was instrumental in widening the base of the party. It also

helped the party win several seats from Malabar in Kerala Legislative Assembly election in 1957.

### **Methodology**

The study attempts to examine the intervention of the Communists in the everyday life of the people in Malabar. An analytical and descriptive method has been used in the research. The study is an integration of an accepted historical research methodology such as the scrutiny of archival sources, autobiographies, biographies, newspapers and interviews with the persons who got engaged in or witnessed to the works or events. Oral history and traditional source of historical information have been thoroughly examined and used in corroboration with other historical evidences before accepting them for writing and utmost care has been taken to preserve the memory of the old generation. Some of the surviving official documents of the period are preserved in repositories and archives in the state and they were made use of.

While analyzing and interpreting the data and in presentation also, all scientific historical methods have been strictly adhered to. Internal and external criticism helped to strengthen the sources. Reasoning, both positive and negative, was used either to substantiate or negate certain established facts or assumptions. Since the topic remains to be an unexplored area to a larger extent, utmost care is taken to tap the hitherto neglected primary data and hence, it is more empirical than the theoretical. It aims at the renewal of existing knowledge and applying newly gathered data to widen the contours of the subject. This is not possible only through logical or methodological application, but can rather be understood only in the context of real social process.

## **Sources**

The present study is based on the systematic analysis of primary and secondary sources available in both English and Malayalam. Authenticity of any historical study is dependent on the amount of the primary sources collected and processed. Adhering to this, utmost care was taken to procure primary data in all the possible ways. They are variegated in nature and found scattered. These sources consist of official and administrative reports in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, census reports, autobiographies, testimonies, newspapers, election records and so on. Many of these documents are kept in the regional archives in Kozhikode and central archives in Trivandrum. Besides, news papers were available at respective offices of dailies and also in AKG Center in Trivandrum.

### **Autobiographies and Biographies**

Authenticity of any historical study is dependent on the amount of the primary sources collected and processed. It was a habit for some people to write diaries or keep memoirs with a view of informing the posterity of their experiences. The value of autobiographies is as much as the life of the persons concerned. At the time of an interview (with Krishnan of Memunda), a person used to refer a small note in his hand to clarify doubts on years and places he talked about. The autobiographies of E.K.Nayanar, E.M.S.Namboothiripad, A.K.Gopalan, K.Madhavan, Moyyarath Sankaran and others have been extensively used to elaborate different aspects of the party activities. Similarly, innumerable biographies on the lives of the politicians, be it Communists, Socialists or Nationalists are available in almost all the libraries across Malabar and they are very much useful in locating the communist works in Malabar. The present study has taken much effort in collecting the autobiographies and biographies of the politicians in Malabar.

## **Testimonies**

The present study is also based on the interviews with persons who have direct experience with the events or are witnesses to the events. The researcher is very fortunate to get opportunity to interview with nonagenarians and centenarians. The veracity of references in secondary sources have to be verified with their testimonies. Much effort has been taken to identify the persons to get interviewed in the area ranging from Palakkad in the south to Kasargod in the north.

## **Smaranikas**

They are published in commemoration of particular events or persons having much fame in a locality. Each *vayanasala* in Malabar has prepared *smaranikas* on the occasion of its platinum or silver jubilee celebrations. *Smaranika* consists of articles on a particular institution or event or person in whose memory *smaranika* was named and published. The articles in them are contributed by the persons who are closely related with the incident or the person concerned. They are the treasure trove of large volume of knowledge about the past. They are prepared by amateur historians and hence, it is imperative to check their veracity. The researcher has explored and used a number of *smaranikas* which have been very much useful as they threw much light on different aspect of the research.

## **Official Documents**

They are mainly related with the medical reports in the backdrop of the pandemic in 1943. The colonial reports with regard to the actions to be taken to contain the pandemic and the reports submitted by the officials concerned about the pandemic throw light onto the social condition and the public health system during the period. The review report on cholera epidemic in Calicut municipality prepared by Director of Public Health in 1943 and the Cholera

Inspection Report by W.V Perumal, A.D.P.H.(B) in 1943 and Report of the Cannanore Municipal Health Officer, helped a lot to identify the intensity of the pandemic in the district. Besides, the letters from officials persons like Director of Public Health, District Collector, Municipal Chairman, M.P, M.L.A have been found much useful. The Madras assembly proceedings are also helpful to a large extent.

### **Newspapers**

Newspaper reports are the living witnesses of the social and political developments in Malabar. They are the first hand materials and provide a complete picture of the then social realities. Both Malayalam and English news papers in the 1940s and 1950s have been widely used for the study. *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *Mathrubhumi*, *Prabhatham*, *Deshabhimani* etc. were some of the newspapers in circulation then. Of these papers *Prabhatham* and *Deshabhimani* were party mouthpieces which reported all the works related with party programmes and policies. The newspaper reports especially in *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express* at the time of pandemic in 1943 are the manifestations of the miserable and pitiable conditions of the poor. The analysis of the paper reports related with the election results specially of 1957 assembly election of Kerala state provides a comprehensive picture of the thought process of the people. Besides, the present day newspapers have also been found useful to know the traditions of the political parties in Kerala.

### **Articles**

There are hundreds of articles related with the different aspects of the Communist movement in Kerala. Some of them were written by the party leaders while many others were written with academic interest. Many of them deal with the growth of the party in different states. Majority of them are related with the Communist party in Kerala and its survival despite national

level decay. These articles are helpful to understand the different aspects of the movement.

### **Area and Period of the Study**

The British Malabar, lying on the west coast of peninsular India and one of the districts of the Madras Presidency, is the area taken for the study. Malabar, though generally neglected by the government of Madras as its only Malayalam-speaking district, had the second highest literacy rate of any district in the presidency. For the administrative convenience, the district, with Calicut as the headquarters, was divided by the colonial administration into nine taluks of Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kurumbranad, Kozhikode, Waynad, Ernad, Valluvanad, Ponnani and Palakkad. The boundaries of Malabar proper are-north, South Canara District; east, Coorg, Mysore, Nilgiris and Coimbatore; south, the Native State of Cochin; west, the Arabian Sea. Southern parts of Kasaragod taluk (part of erstwhile South Canara district), also form an integral part of the study.

The present study covers the period from 1939 to 1957. The year 1939 marks the formation of CPI unit in the state and it was in the year 1957 that the first Communist ministry assumed power in the state. History of the Communist activities can be traced to the programmes of CSP and KS in the 1930s. So it can be said that the Party formation in 1939 was just a transformation of the entire CSP unit into Communist party unit. The works and struggles organised under Kerala CSP (hereafter KCSP) and KS before 1939 have been incorporated in the present study.

### **Review of Related Literature**

In the past seventy years there have been a score of scholarly works and articles on the Communist movement in Kerala and a survey of the related studies would give a definite direction and orientation to a new study.

It enables to understand what has been done and what is to be done. Careful reading of such secondary works enables to formulate a methodological framework for the study. Hence an attempt has been made here to make a general survey of the relevant works related to the Communist movement in India.

One of the path-breaking studies on the Communist movement in Kerala was taken up by E.Balakrishnan. His *History of Communist Movement in Kerala* is largely based on the party documents and government records. The work provides an impartial picture of the rise and growth of the party in Kerala. Giving a comprehensive picture of the Socialist movement, he says that the Communist party in Kerala was the outcome of the Socialist party works within the Congress. The author underlines the fact that the party blindly obeyed the USSR by keeping away national interests.

Robin Jeffrey's works look into the caste composition of the Communist party in Kerala. In *Matriliny Marxism and Birth of Communist Party in Kerala 1930- 1940*, he points out the social disintegration which followed the destruction of the matrilineal system in Kerala. According to Jeffrey, the vital elements in propelling large numbers of men and women toward Marxism were the social dislocation and the discrediting of traditional ideology. Dileep M Menon, in his *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in Malabar 1900-1948*, offers a similar explanation for the growth of Communist power in Kerala. The major reason why the Communists came to power in Malabar, according to him, was the reshaping of Communism into a doctrine of caste equality. This was done through the forging of feelings of community. Abandoning class as a marker of identity even when discussing class related agitations, he puts forward the notion of conjectural community instead.

The CPIM publications of its histories in Kerala, including those of each district, have been utilised to an extent. Besides, the works on the party

written by party leaders and sympathisers are also helpful to reconstruct the history of the Communist party machinery. The history of the rise and growth of the Party in Kerala can be traced through these works apart from a few references of the relief works undertaken by the Communist workers. The works of E.M.S. Namboothirippad, including his autobiography, like *The Frontline Years, History, Society and Land Relations; Selected Essays, Indian Swathanthrya Samara Charithram, Keralathile Communist Prasthanam Udhbhavavum Valarchayum* etc. have been taken for serious studies for peeping into the background and growth of the movement. Besides, N.E.Balaram's monumental work *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam*, A.K.Gopalan's *Manninuvendi* and E.K.Nayanar's *Olivukala Smrithikal* are also noteworthy. As they are publications of the Party and its leaders, events related with the party are likely to be eulogised and hence, they were accepted only after their veracity is checked with other available sources.

K.K.N.Kurup, in his *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala*, studies the struggles and resistances organised under the banner of KS, a feeder organisation of the Communist party. The peasant uprisings in the post-war period and in the post-Calcutta thesis period have been described in the work and they are all much useful in the present study. The book also gives a detailed account of the Socialist and Communist activities in Malabar including the *kuli struggles*. Besides this, he has authored many scholarly articles and works including *Kayyur Riot* which shed much light on the various aspects of Malabar society and intervention of peasant organisations in the social and political issues.

No researcher on modern Kerala history can ignore the monumental work of K.N Panikkar *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921*. In the work he sets out to re-examine causes, character and consequences of the nineteenth century outbreaks and of



the massive upheaval which shook Malabar in the beginning of 1920s. Though the work presents a full picture of the peasant uprisings in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a comprehensive picture of the socio-political condition of Malabar can be traced through the work.

M.Raghavan's work *State Failure and Human Miseries* is one of the outstanding works on Malabar. Though the work has nothing to do with the history of Communist party it throws light on the pathetic conditions in Malabar including famines, epidemic and the failure of the colonial administration in tackling such situations. In order to understand the growth of the party it is imperative to know such situations that were effectively utilised by the Communists to get into the masses. Raghavan's work is the result of a brilliant scholarship as a large number of primary sources were used in the work. It helps to give a comprehensive picture of the social and economic condition in Malabar in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*The Age of Pandemics, 1817-1920* written by Chinmay Tumble is a work on different pandemics including those of cholera across the globe. The author gives details of the cholera pandemic in the first of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the situation in India during this period. The work is useful for the present study as it deals with the naked social realities in India when cholera started to spread and took a heavy toll of human life. The case of Malabar was not much different from that in other parts of the country. It is to be noted that it was in such a terrible situation that Communists launched their distress relief works. So a good understanding of the pandemic situation is essential before going into the distress relief works.

The works written on the National movement must be gone through for identifying its different stages especially that of the radicalisation period. It is imperative to know the relation between the National movement and the Socialist and Communist movements. It was Bipan Chandra who made

detailed studies on the nature and character of the National movement apart from the resistance movements of peasants and workers. In his earlier studies he used the term 'bourgeois' movement to characterise the movement though later he used the epithet 'popular' with reference to it. His *India's Struggle for Independence* jointly written by Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, K.N. Panikkar and Sucheta Mahajan is an in-depth and detailed overview on Indian independence movement. Similarly, his *India After Independence, 1947-2000* written with Aditya Mukherjee and Mridula Mukherjee is a work which is also useful for the present study.

Serious study on Indian peasantry and National movement was taken up by A.R.Desai. In his *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Desai holds that the introduction of British economic policies ruined the traditional self-sufficient village economy in India. The emergence of modern industry deprived artisan class of their traditional occupations and the new revenue policies brought changes in the existing land relations in India which resulted in the impoverishment of the Indians. He also discusses the organisation of peasantry as a class in India and their role in the freedom movement.

The studies made by British Marxist historian R.Palme Dutt on Indian National movement discusses the ruin of the traditional Indian economy after the colonial intervention. His work *India Today*, also deals with the emergence of trade union movements and also the growth of the Communist movement in India. The work *Modern India 1885-1947* of Sumit Sarkar analyses with the British revenue policies and the nature of the anti-colonial movements in the country.

## **Limitations of the Study**

One of the chief limitations of the study is that many of the persons who were directly or indirectly involved in the Communist party works are not alive today and a few surviving are able to recollect their old memories. Many of the interviewed persons, who were mostly, octogenarians and nonagenarians, were finding it difficult to recollect their bygone days. The veracity of the information extracted from *smaranikas* and other secondary works have to be verified with eyewitnesses and it is to be written taking their emotions and experiences into consideration.

Likewise, this study is also not attempting to present huge statistical data of the beneficiaries of the works done by the party workers at all levels; but gives more importance to qualitative aspect of these works. Besides not many studies have been brought out on the intervention of the party in the everyday life of the people in Malabar which affected the chances of referring them.

## **Chapterisation**

The present study includes six chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion.

The introductory chapter deals with the need and significance, scope, objectives and methodology of the study. It also includes an extensive survey and review of related literature and sources used for the study. A brief description of the different chapters has also been included in this chapter.

The first chapter is entitled 'Rise and Growth of Communist Movement in Malabar' which examines the background of the party formation in 1939 and its growth up to the period of 1957. Besides analysing the national situation, the chapter provides details of the political

circumstances that prevailed in Kerala in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The genesis of the Communist movement is intertwined with different factors which began from the Congress and Socialist activities. Formation of CSP and KS and different stages of the growth of the party, which ranged from the agrarian struggles to the adoption of parliamentary democracy, have been dealt with in detail. Considerable space has been given to the narration of the People's War Policy which the party adopted during the Second World War period and the Calcutta thesis in 1948 which led to imposing ban on the party.

The second chapter titled 'Communist Organisation and Malabar Society' focuses on the nature of the party machinery in Malabar including local level units and the class and mass organisations of workers, peasants, youths, women and students. Special mention has been made of arts club formed under the aegis of the party and also to print media like *Deshabhimani*. Besides this, the chapter discusses the discipline and other requirements that a party member has to possess in his public life. It will be seen that the party could successfully and effectively organise its programmes and launch distress relief activities only through its dedicated and disciplined band of cadres and hence due space has been given to describe them. The party fund drives, underground activities and the commune life etc. have also been incorporated in this chapter.

'Communists and Health Care Activities' is the name accorded to the third chapter. The chapter gives detailed account of the cholera pandemic of 1943 and small pox epidemic in 1944-45 periods in Malabar. It is felt necessary to give a comprehensive picture of the epidemics, which took a heavy toll of human lives especially the starving poor and created much panic in society and hence, people were afraid of even to come out of their houses and take care of their fellow beings. The interventions of the party workers

including the treatments of the patients, burial of the dead and awareness campaign to contain the pandemic have been dealt with in detail.

The efforts of the Communists to organise the peasantry against the exploitation and oppression by the *janmis* have been included in the fourth chapter which is entitled 'Land Struggles and Communist Intervention'. The resistances put up by party local units against eviction moves of the landlords, the collective farming as part of Grow More Food programme, community kitchen etc. have been included in the chapter. Besides, different types of protests and struggles related with the everyday life problems of the rural folk including *Nelleduppu Samarangal*, *Pullariyal strike*, *Thol Viraku Samaram* and *Vila Koithu Samaram* have been dealt with in detail and each struggle has been given as separate sub topics.

The fifth chapter, entitled 'Communist Values and Social Change' concentrates on the socio-reform activities including the social feast, bathing and temple entry struggles and other forms of protests against untouchability held under the red flag. The protests against different customs and practices like *sheelakashu*, *varamkodukkal*, *vechhukanal* etc. have been given due place in this chapter. Apart from them, the Communist programmes of seizing the vehicles which were illegally carrying paddy to be black-marketed, formation of PCCs and *Aikya Nanaya Sanghams* also come under this chapter. The role of Communists in finding out solutions to many family and social issues as mediators has also been included in this chapter.

'Ideological Transformation through Public Sphere' is the sixth chapter. It mainly deals with the Communists' work of utilizing the representational spaces in communicating communism to the masses. The Communist party ensured the presence of its educated members to interact with the people in these spaces and thereby, transform Proletarian public sphere to Communist public sphere. The role of tea shops, *beedi* companies,

*vayanasalas* etc. in the emerging public sphere have been included in the chapter. Kerala legislative assembly election in 1957 and its results have also taken their spaces in the chapter.

The concluding chapter is an overall analysis of the works of the Communist volunteers and their effects on the life of the people. The chapter also includes the major findings of the researcher: the effective and skilful intervention of the Communist party, with their dedicated and disciplined band of volunteers, in the everyday life problems of the people in Malabar who were reeling under famine, epidemics etc. was instrumental in building a strong base for the Communist movement in Malabar.

## Chapter 1

### Rise and Growth of Communist Movement in Malabar

Study of the Communist movement in Kerala is an important subject of enquiry which holds the key for understanding several political developments since the inception of the movement. The present study covers the period from 1939 which marked the formation of CPI in Kerala to 1957, the year when the party assumed power in the newly formed state through ballot box. This is the period during which communist movement marked a significant growth in Kerala especially in Malabar. It progressed through several crucial tests before the assumption of power in the state.

Basically communism is the system of society in which property and the means of production come under the common ownership. Communism as a theory of government and social reform may be said to have begun with the Greek vision of Golden Age, and more particularly with Plato, who in his Utopian treaties *Republic* gave a system of communism of property and wives for the purpose of an ideal state<sup>1</sup>. But it was Karl Marx who proposed a scientific theory of communism in the nineteenth century and in that sense he is regarded as the father of scientific socialism.

The Marxian philosophy centres round the materialistic interpretation of society. To him it is the material condition of the society that matters most, and the mass phenomena of history is dependent on this economic factor. A significant aspect of Marxian philosophy is the concept of class struggle. It is a corollary to the economic interpretation of history. Class struggle is the outcome of productive forces which divide society into two classes, one of

---

<sup>1</sup> Taufiq Ahmad Nizami, *Marxism and the Communist Party of India*, The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 29, No. 2 (April-June 1968), p.108

which carries out the actual process of production such as slave, serf and labourer while the others like slave-owners, feudal lords and capitalists enjoys a part of the product without having the work to produce it. In such societies the former is always subjected to exploitation through the appropriation of surplus value by the latter and this was the primary reason for the antagonism between the classes.

Marx forecasts an inevitable revolution in the modern society i.e., the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship. In “*Manifesto of the Communist Party*” which was written by Marx and Frederick Engels as the Communist League’s programme on the instruction of its Second Congress (London, November 29-December 8, 1847), Marx exhorts workers of all countries to unite<sup>2</sup>. Only by revolution, says Marx, can these conflicts be resolved. Marx believed that Revolution was both fundamentally essential and inevitable to the progress of human society. He anticipated that eventually the workers of the world would realise they ‘have nothing to lose but their chains’ and revolt against the industrialists and capitalists who covertly controlled their lives. According to Marx and Engels “the aim of the communists was same as that of the other proletarian parties: “formation of a proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy and conquest of political power by the proletariat”<sup>3</sup>. In the aftermath of the Revolution, a new global ‘Communist’ society would be created, where all would be equal regardless of their wealth, status or nationality. Concepts such as nations and currency would, in fact, be abolished in the new world order. However, Communism is a not a compact ideology that remains static everywhere and at all times. It is an

---

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, February 1848, Translated: Samuel Moore in cooperation with Frederick Engels, 1888, Marxists Internet Archive. visit <https://www.marxists.org>

<sup>3</sup> CPI (M) Publication, *History of the Communist Movement in India*, Vol.I, New Delhi, 2005, p.7



internationally routed ideology, flexibly accommodated in different locations of the world.

It can be said that it was the October revolution in 1917 that took Marxian ideology across the globe. The revolution also opened up a new era for mankind in which CPI was born. The victory of the Russian working class, peasants and other toilers led by the Bolsheviks and guided by Lenin attracted the militant youth of India as of all lands. It inspired them to study, accept and apply the science of Marxism so that they too could lead their people forward along the road of revolutionary struggle for national and social liberation. In the preamble to the party constitution adopted at the extraordinary congress at Amritsar in April 1958 it was stated that "The Communist Party of India arose in the course of the liberation struggle as a result of the efforts of Indian revolutionaries, who under the inspiration of the Great October Revolution were seeking new paths for achieving national independence,"<sup>4</sup>

Emergence of the Communist movement in India was the result of tremendous historical developments at home and abroad. It was after the Russian Revolution that ideas of Marx became more popular in India. The working class was still an embryonic stage and socialism not yet proletarian or Marxian. But gradually Karl Marx and his ideas became popular among the progressive intellectuals. The news of the February Revolution in Russia in 1917 was enthusiastically received in India. Almost all sections of Indians were together in welcoming the revolution in Russia. By 1919, news about the Russian revolution, the Bolsheviks and Lenin had become more easily available in India. Indian newspapers started giving far greater prominence to revolutionary Russia. The formation of the Third Communist International in

---

<sup>4</sup> G. Adhikari, *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol.1, The People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1971. p.1

March 1919 was instrumental in organizing the Communist parties in the colonies. It decided to support nationalist movements in the East as they tend to upset the existing authority while not opposing revolutionary aspirations.<sup>5</sup>

Indian national revolutionaries operating from abroad in the period of the first world war and thereafter from Germany, the USA, Turkey and Afghanistan, who earlier functioned through the Berlin Committee and the "provisional government of independent India", came to be influenced by the October Revolution amongst whom outstanding names are V. Chaitopadhyaya, M. Barakatullah, M.P.B.T. Acharya, M.N. Roy and Abani Mukherji<sup>6</sup>. It was the duty of the communists to organise themselves as an independent revolutionary political force to forge a firm alliance with the agrarian masses and rally all other sections of the Indian people, including the forward-looking elements in the bourgeoisie and landlord classes. It was with this perspective that, on the initiative of the Communist International, an organisation called 'the CPI' was formed by some revolutionaries in the soviet city of Tashkent.<sup>7</sup> The party formed at Tashkent on October 17, 1920, had seven members-M.N.Roy, Evelyn Roy, Abani Mukherjee, Rosa Fitingot, Mohammad Ali, Mohamad Shafiq and M.P.B.T.Acharya<sup>8</sup>. Later Abdul Sehrai, Masud Ali Shah, and Akbar Shah also joined<sup>9</sup>. Muhammad Shafeeq was selected as secretary and M.N.Roy as *Terk* bureau secretary and Acharya as chairman on 7 October 1920<sup>10</sup>. Shaukat Usmani in his

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.105

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1

<sup>7</sup> E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *The Front Line Years*, LeftWord Books, New Delhi, 2009. p.228

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Devendra Kaushik, *About the Founding of the CPI at Tashkent* in *New Age* ( Monthly) October 1964 which was also referred in the article of S.V Ghate, *CPM Distorts History about Formation of CP of India* in *New Age* daily, 30 August 1970.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Harkishan Singh Surjeet, et. al., *Indian Communist Prasthanam Oru Charithram*, Vol 1, Second edition, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2005.p.78

unpublished autobiography also gives an account of the formation of the CPI in Tashkent<sup>11</sup>. The inaugural meeting adopted the principles proclaimed by the Comintern, and decided to work out a programme of the CPI suited to the conditions of India. The Tashkent theory of party formation is the official stand of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)<sup>12</sup>.

The Communist group, characterised itself as Tashkent group, came to publish several articles and letters and the diplomatic relations it established, helped Congress a lot in improving itself<sup>13</sup>. The group received support and advisories from the Communist International. It is a fact, as per the version of Muzaffar Ahmad, that as early as 1921 it was affiliated to the Communist International<sup>14</sup>.

In India individuals and groups who were disillusioned with Gandhian ideology of non-violent resistance after the debacle of the movement in 1921-22 or those who never accepted the same began to turn to scientific socialism and the class organisation of workers and peasants under the impact of the October Revolution and later became the founders of the early communist groups in different parts of the country, e.g. Dange in Bombay, Singara Velu in Madras, Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta and the *Inqilab* group in Lahore<sup>15</sup>. These Communist groups or their representatives came together at the first Indian Communist Conference at Kanpur in 1925, which was convened by Satyabhakta with his own ideas, but which was taken over by the

---

<sup>11</sup> G. Adhikari, *op. cit.*, p.229

<sup>12</sup> CPIM was formed in 1964 following some ideological differences with the parent party CPI.

<sup>13</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam Ulbhavavum Valarchayum*, Chintha, Trivandrum, 2008. p.19

<sup>14</sup> Muzaffar Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India and its Formation Abroad* in G. Adhikari, *op. cit.*, p.228

<sup>15</sup> G. Adhikari, *op. cit.*, p.2

real Communists rejecting his ideas. The Kanpur Communist Conference held in the last week of December 1925.

The CPI holds the view that it was at the Kanpur conference in 1925 that the party was formed and rejects the Tashkent theory of the Party formation. The Party leader M.Basavapunniah writes that though the party was formed in 1920 at the initiative of M.N.Roy there is no evidence to prove this and on the contrary all the evidences shows that Roy was opposed to its formation<sup>16</sup>. The Kanpur conference was attended by more than 500 delegates. Prominent among them were Muzaffar Ahmad from Calcutta; S.V.Ghate, R.S Nimbkar, and J.B. Bagerhatta from Bombay; Abdul Majeed from Lahore and C.K. Iyengar and Singaravelu Chettiar from Madras. Before 1925 there were individual communists and communist groups working in different centres in the country. But it was in 1925, at a meeting of representatives of these various groups of communists in the country held at Kanpur, that the CPI was formed” which is explicit in a letter written and signed by B.T.Ranadive on behalf of the CPI Secretariat<sup>17</sup>.

In the period 1922 to 1924, the publication of the *Vanguard of Indian Independence* by M.N.Roy, the first declared organ of the CPI from Berlin, helped to spread Communist propaganda and ideas in India<sup>18</sup>. Between 1925 and 1927, Roy and his comrades published *Mass of India*. Both were smuggled into the country and distributed underground. Roy became the first

---

<sup>16</sup> S.V Ghate's report, *CPM Distorts History about Formation of CP of India* in *New Age* daily, 30 August 1970. It was a group of *Muhajirs* who were dissatisfied with the deposition of the Sultan of Turkey and left the country who wanted to fight under the banner of Kemal Pasha and joined the CPI in Tashkent later. Roy was not keen to found CPI with such elements. But Muzaffar Ahmad seemed to hold different views, being himself of pan-Islamist sympathy.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Brinda Karat, *100 Year of Formation Booklet*, C.P.I.M., 2019, p.12

Indian to be elected to the leadership of the Communist International<sup>19</sup>. Meanwhile communist groups were springing up in many places within India. They were active in bringing out publications, and organizing or participating in struggles of workers, peasants and various sections of the people. The resolution adopted by the 6<sup>th</sup> world congress of the Communist International, which laid down the strategy and tactics to be followed in India and certain other areas gave a call that the Communists must unmask the national reformism of the Congress and oppose all the phrases of the *Swarajists*, *Gandhists* etc. about passive resistance<sup>20</sup>. The untiring work of Communists contributed to a great wave of working class struggles which were guided by the principles of class struggle more than 100,000 workers every year. There was an increase in the number of strikes from 141 in 1929 to 148 in 1930 and 166 in 1931, involving more than 100,000 workers every year<sup>21</sup>.

The British rulers were acutely aware of these activities and regular intelligence reports in colonial records suggest that they were deeply worried about the spread of what they referred to as ‘Bolshevik’ ideas. So, it was not surprising that they cracked down on the fledgling party. In 1921, just a year after its formation, the first group of Communists returning to India from the Soviet Union was arrested as they entered Peshawar in June 1921<sup>22</sup>. The British arrested them on grounds of conspiring to spread ‘Bolshevik’ ideas in India. Just as the main Peshawar cases were concluding, the British started arresting several other leaders of Communist groups from various parts of the country. In 1924, the government arrested Muzaffar Ahmed and S.A.Dange,

---

<sup>19</sup> Bipan Chandra, *History of Modern India*, Orient Blackswan, 2009, Delhi, p.298

<sup>20</sup> M.R.Masani. *The Communist Party in India*, Pacific Affairs, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Mar., 1951), University of British Columbia. p.19.

<sup>21</sup> R.P. Dutt, *India Today*, Satya Bhattacharjee Manisha Granthalaya (P) Ltd. Calcutta, 1997, p. 424

<sup>22</sup> Brinda Karat, *op. cit.*, p.14

accused them of spreading Communist ideas, and tried them along with others in the Kanpur conspiracy case<sup>23</sup>.

The major setback suffered by the Communist party was that which came to be known as the Meerut Conspiracy Case<sup>24</sup>. On 20<sup>th</sup> March 1929, 31 key Communists and labour leaders were arrested by the British government from different parts of India in a planned move, which involved simultaneous raids across the country on multiple offices and homes, and charged with conspiring to overthrow the colonial rule. The arrested leaders were taken to a prison at Meerut with a view of not getting much publicity to the trial and legal aid to the accused<sup>25</sup>. The government dragged out the trial for three and half years-four critical years of India's history, during which the best leaders of the working class were thus removed<sup>26</sup>.

In December 1933, an all India conference of Communists was convened in Calcutta in which the released Meerut leaders as well as those who had continued work outside met for a stock-taking. The Conference elected an adhoc central committee and approved the draft of the political thesis and party constitution<sup>27</sup>. The Conference elected a provisional Central Committee, and adopted a Draft Political Theses which stressed the building of a centralised party to guide the movement<sup>28</sup>. Just a few months after the Calcutta Conference, the British government decided to once again crack down and declared the party illegal in July 1934. The CPI thus remained organizationally weak and constrained to operate clandestinely until the party

---

<sup>23</sup> Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, p.298

<sup>24</sup> Harkishan Sing Surjeet, et. al., *op cit.*, p.260

<sup>25</sup> C. Bhaskaran, *Communist Prasthanam Indiyil*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2007. p.34

<sup>26</sup> R.P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 421

<sup>27</sup> Harkishan Sing Surjeet, et. al., *op. cit.* p.316

<sup>28</sup> Brinda Karat, *op. cit.*, p.29

was legalized in 1942. Hence, the Communists found asylum in CSP and continued their activities till the socialist executive came into possession of a Communist party secret document which contained a detailed survey of the progress of the efforts made by various Communists in the ranks of the CSP to disrupt and capture the organisation<sup>29</sup>. It, along with other developments, led the Socialist executive deciding to expel all Communists from the Socialist party and to sever relation with the CPI. The CSP was being made use of as a legal front or cover by growing numbers of convinced communists, as the CPI remained illegal from 1934 to 1942<sup>30</sup>.

Karl Marx and the *Communist Manifesto* were not totally unknown in Kerala in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Probably the first biography of Marx in any Indian language had been published in Malayalam. It was Swadeshbhimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai who wrote the biography of Karl Marx (1912) in *Malayalam*. In the 1920's, A.K. Pillai, (1893-1949) himself an erratic political flibbertigibbet, had advised a number of young men on the left-wing books they should read<sup>31</sup>. P. Kesava Dev, who claims expansively to have been Kerala's first Communist, discovered *The Communist Manifesto* in A.K. Pillai's bungalow in Trivandrum in 1927. He went from there to another classic which a number of young men had read in the late 1920s, John Reed's account of the Russian revolution, *Ten Days that Shook the World*<sup>32</sup>.

---

<sup>29</sup> M.R. Masani. *op. cit.*, p.23

<sup>30</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1989 , p.334

<sup>31</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *Matriliny, Marxism, and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940*, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Nov., 1978) , p.87. A.K. Pillai had published a long biographical article on Lenin when the latter died in 1924.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p.87

The October revolution created strong ripples among the Malayali intellectuals<sup>33</sup>. It was after the revolution that Russian literature became more and more popular in Kerala. Novelist like Maxim Gorky and his novels like ‘Mother’ became widely read and circulated in Kerala. Several journals published articles on Russian revolution. In 1917 a journal called *Pauran*, published from Travancore had articles on Russian revolution. It states that “the Russian revolution was the most important event in the history of modern era and declared the victory of the masses over the corrupt and biased dictators and landlords”.<sup>34</sup>

Dr.V.V.Velukutty penned an article on Russian revolution in his weekly *Arayan* and similarly, *Mithavadhi*, a publication from Kozhikode also had published writings of C.Krishnan on the revolution<sup>35</sup>. It was amongst the ranks of the fighters for national freedom that the message of October Revolution struck a sympathetic chord and drew them into the various pioneer communist groups that were formed in India and abroad<sup>36</sup>. However, the knowledge of Marxism was very rudimentary and based on secondary sources. In the early 1930s, there were no Marxist works at all in Malayalam. E.M.S.Namboothirippad, K.Damodaran, and others were to remedy this situation with a vigorous translation program in the late 1930s and early 1940s, but even then, their main source was Stalin's *History of the CPSU*<sup>37</sup>. In 1935, Namboothirippad published in Malayalam one of the manuscripts he wrote in

---

<sup>33</sup> To social reformers like Sahodharan Ayyappan it was the social equality of the Soviet revolution that appealed most. For rationalists like E. Madhavan it was the great victory of anti- religious movement. To some it signalled the dawn of the epoch of *Sudras*.

<sup>34</sup> P. Sivadasan, ‘*The Dawn of Marxism and Politicization of the Masses in Kerala- 1912-1920*’, in *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. XXXIII, 2006. pp. 143-144

<sup>35</sup> V. Karthikeyan Nair, *Communist Partiyum Bharanavum* in *Kalakaumudhi* weekly, April 03-10, 2022

<sup>36</sup> M. Thomas Isaac, *The National Movement and the Communist Party in Kerala*, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 14, No. 8/9, Aug. - Sep., 1986, p.61

<sup>37</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.* p.88



prison: 1917, based on Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. The preface expressed deep admiration for the work of the "World Hero," Trotsky<sup>38</sup>.

It was in 1931 that the Communists made their first attempt to function openly in Kerala. Communist League was formed at Trivandrum in 1931 and N.C.Shekhar was one of its members<sup>39</sup>. Besides, some worked on the Marxist literature unmindful of the developments against the party by the state machinery. N.P.Gurukkal as the organising secretary of the "Kerala Provincial Organisation" published a hand bill, "*The Indian Communist Party*"<sup>40</sup>. The government reacted sharply, invoked section 26 of the police regulation IV of 1920 and prevented its printing and dissemination in Travancore. Very soon the Communists found asylum in the CSP and continued their activities within the party until 1939.

Malabar, lying on the west coast of peninsular India, underwent drastic changes with the arrival of the European powers towards the close of the fifteenth century. In 1792 with the Sreerangapattanam treaty the British assumed the control over the region and incorporated it with Madras Presidency. William Logan has clearly marked the boundaries of Malabar being a district of the Madras presidency which includes South Canara in the north, Coorg, Mysore, Nilgiris and Coimbatore in the east, princely state of Cochin in the south and Arabian Sea in the West<sup>41</sup>. For the administrative convenience the district was divided into nine taluks of Chirakkal, Kottayam,

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.48

<sup>39</sup> Andalath, *Sakhakale Munnottu*, Vol.1, Chintha Publishers, Trivandrum 1978, p.356. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Communist Party Keralathil*, Chintha Publishers, 2009, p.24. N.C.Shekhar was one of the four founders of the Communist Party unit formed at Calicut in 1937.

<sup>40</sup> K.K. Kusuman, *The Extremist Movement in Kerala*, Chaithram Publications, Trivandrum, 1977, p.49.

<sup>41</sup> William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol.1, Madras, 1987. p.2.

Kurumbranad, Calicut, Wynad, Ernad, Valluvanad, Ponnani and Palakkad. The district was one of the most backward districts in the Madras presidency and it received scant attention from the government of Madras.

The district played a great part in the national movement, culminating in India's independence in 1947. In 1910 District Congress Committee started working in Malabar with C. Kunhirama Menon as secretary<sup>42</sup>. A branch of the All India Home Rule League, which was founded by Mrs. Annie Besant in 1916, started functioning in the district. Besides, political conferences were held at different places and resolutions were passed. During the early stages, the congress had mainly drawn its members from the educated middle class and hence, it could not spread its ideas among the common masses. By 1927, the Congress party was getting radicalised with Jawaharlal Nehru coming to the leadership and its repercussions were felt in Kerala as well. It was in such circumstances that the Fourth Kerala State Conference was held which was presided over by Nehru himself. The conference was held at a ground near the Madathumpadi temple in Payyannur from 25th to 27th May 1928<sup>43</sup>. At the conference, which requested the national leadership of Congress to declare its aim as the attainment of *poorna swaraj*, Nehru gave an inspiring speech on future India along with the line of socialist ideology which instilled a radical thought and a new spirit among the youths.

It was the Civil Disobedience Movement (hereafter CDM) that drew a large number of youths and students to the vortex of nationalist movement. During 1930-34, the ideology of nationalism was vigorously propagated, the salt law was broken, shops selling foreign cloth and liquor shops picketed, trees of government reserve forest cut, meetings and demonstrations held and

---

<sup>42</sup> A.K. Pillai, *Congressum Keralavum*, Prabhath Edition, 1986, Trivandrum, p.293.

<sup>43</sup> K. Madhavan, *Oru Gandhiyan Communistinte Ormakal*, (Autobiography) Prabhath Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 2010, p.47

a temple entry *satyagraha* organised<sup>44</sup>. The liquor prohibition movement, *swadeshi* movement and *khadi* movement had triggered off intense action<sup>45</sup>. Though the movement gathered momentum during the course of time, its social base was very weak and many younger members of the Congress were aware of this and critical of the same. A.K.Pillai wrote that “the Congress needed a new programme of action which would involve the peasants and workers”<sup>46</sup>. Many had doubts about the success of a movement led by a few educated middle classes. They felt that a new programme of action and new techniques and new leadership were necessary to lead the movement.

### **Formation of KCSP**

The year 1927 witnessed many portents of national recovery and the emergence of the new trend of socialism<sup>47</sup>. Marxism and other socialist ideas spread rapidly. The rise of the Soviet Union through Centralised Planning at a time when most of the western capitalist countries were experiencing a crisis was listened by a section within the Congress party. The success of the model of Soviet Union strengthened their belief in socialism. Nehru and Subash Chandra Bose appeared for them, as leaders capable of providing the nation with a new programme. Nehru was considered to be ‘the high priest of communism’<sup>48</sup>. This increasing radicalisation of the congress in the left direction aroused intense interest and enthusiasm among the younger generation of the Congress in Kerala.

---

<sup>44</sup> K. Gopalan Kutty, *Radical Movements in Twentieth Century* in P.J. Cherian’s *Perspectives on Kerala History*, Kerala state Gazatteer, Vol.II, Part II, Government of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1999. p.547

<sup>45</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *My Struggles, An Autobiography*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1982, p.7

<sup>46</sup> *Mathrubhumi* weekly, 18 January, 1932 in K. Gopalan Kutty, *op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.* p.298

<sup>48</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p.332

The disenchantment of the youth with the Gandhian tactics was evident in the relative failure of the Second Civil Disobedience Campaign in 1932<sup>49</sup>. The sudden withdrawal of the CDM by Gandhi created strong protest and discontent among the young blood in the Congress. Their disappointment was intense and deep because they had thrown themselves into the movement with huge desires and expectations. Subhas Bose and Vithalbai Patel declared that “the Mahatma as a political leader has failed”<sup>50</sup>. Even during the time of salt *satyagraha* there were heated arguments between the elite leaders of Congress on one side and large number of ordinary volunteers on the other side at *satyagraha* camps<sup>51</sup>. Consequent to the withdrawal of CDM many, who believed that freedom was at the door step, got disappointed and inactive<sup>52</sup>. Thus, those who got disillusioned by the Gandhian mode of struggle gradually started moving towards the Left.

The real conversion of significant numbers of young men to Marxist and revolutionary doctrines happened at the jails. The young *satyagrahis* in Congress, while in jail after being arrested for their participation in civil disobedience activities, had come into contact with the representatives of left trends within Congress as well as non-congress nationalists such as the terrorist groups. Kannur central jail contained political prisoners from different revolutionary group like Gaddar party, Hindustan Socialist Army, Anusheelan Samithi etc. Prominent among them were Motto Singh, a Punjabi revolutionary, Sharachandra Bose and Bava Singh Kher<sup>53</sup>. One inmate was Kamalanath Tiwari, the youngest of those accused with Bhagat Singh in the

---

<sup>49</sup> M. Thomas Isaac, *op. cit.*, p.61

<sup>50</sup> Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 309

<sup>51</sup> E.M.S. Namboothirippad, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam Ulbhavavum Valarchayum*, Chintha, Thirunanandapuram, 2008 p.27

<sup>52</sup> K. Madhavan, *op. cit.*, p. 94

<sup>53</sup> N.C. Shekhar, *Agniveethikal*, Prabhath Book House, Thiruvananthapuram 1987. pp. 86-91

Lahore Conspiracy Case which arose out of a bomb-throwing in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1929<sup>54</sup>. According to E.M.S. Namboothirippad, "it would not be wrong to say that Kamalnath Tiwari in the Cannanore Jail sowed the seed of the Congress left wing and the Congress Socialist movement in Kerala."

A true measure of the real outcome, the real impact, of the CDM was the heroes' welcome given to political prisoners on their release in 1934<sup>55</sup>. When the Malayali prisoners began to come out of jail in late 1933 and 1934, many felt both a sense of dismay at the failure of Gandhian methods, and a sense of considerable ideological confusion. The younger members were on the verge of an ideological shift to socialism. Though, the affinity towards terrorism lingered in on some of them; the leaders like P. Krishna Pillai and K.P.Gopalan toyed briefly with the *Anushilan Samiti*. Nevertheless, they realised its futility and the potential of a mass based movement.

In May 1934 the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (hereafter KPCC) reconstituted itself at a meeting in Calicut and at the same time, militant Congressmen formed a Kerala branch of the CSP which had been founded at Patna a few months earlier by Jayaprakash Narayan and others to work within the Congress as a left-wing pressure group<sup>56</sup>. The Socialist leaders received support from a minority of moderates in the parent body including K. Kelappan, C.K. Govindan Nair, KCSP's first secretary and K.A. Damodara Menon, later editor of *Mathrubhumi*, and established a working

---

<sup>54</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op.cit.*, p.87

<sup>55</sup> Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, p.309

<sup>56</sup> E.M.S. Namboothirippad, *op. cit.*, p.345. He writes that before the Patna conference, a meeting was held at Kozhikode to discuss the formation of a Kerala unit of CSP. The meeting which was presided over by K. Kelappan, constituted a new committee with C.K. Govindan Nair and K. Krishna Pillai as president and secretary respectively.

alliance with the nationalist Muslims<sup>57</sup>. The new party attracted the members of youth leagues and student organizations, as well as the teachers and peasant intellectuals who were disconnected with Gandhian vagaries and wanted to give a more consistently radical direction to congress policy<sup>58</sup>.

Throughout July and August 1934, the KCSP carried out a drive for Congress members and enrolled 4,000, mostly in Malabar district. Not surprisingly, most of these new members were left-wing sympathizers, and on the basis of this support, the Congress Socialists won a majority on the KPCC in September 1934. In October they elected a new ten-member committee of the KCSP<sup>59</sup>. Krishna Pillai was the general secretary, and E.M.S.Namboothirippad, the president<sup>60</sup>. Within a year of the formation of the CSP in Malabar the leading cadres had been in active contact with CPI and increasingly taken a Marxist-Leninist position in their ideological approach<sup>61</sup>.

The leftists' first attempt at-mass organization after they emerged from the jails in 1934 concentrated on the unorganised workers in Calicut, Tellicherry, and Cannanore. The programme was part of a strategy formulated by Dimitrov at Seventh Comintern Congress to convert Congress into an anti-imperialist people's front. Within a year the CSP activists had established a 'congress' committee in almost every village in Malabar outside the Mopla

---

<sup>57</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala: A study of Political Adaptation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1982. p.71

<sup>58</sup> George Woodcock, *Kerala a Portrait of the Malabar Coast*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1967, p.244

<sup>59</sup> Seven of them became members of the Communist Party in 1940s

<sup>60</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, p.88

<sup>61</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac, *op. cit.*, p.64. The author says that there was nothing conspiratorial in it as CSP itself had formally accepted Marxist-Leninist ideology and communists were active within the CSP following CSP-CPI accord of 1936 at the national level.

zone, backed by reading rooms where local activists taught the illiterate to read socialist books and pamphlets and conducted study classes<sup>62</sup>.

The Socialists began to organise hitherto unorganised sections like the workers and the peasants. In April 1934, a Calicut Labour Union and night school were formed under K.P.Gopalan's direction, and P.Kesava Dev, writer and self-proclaimed communist, was one of the regular speakers<sup>63</sup>. By the end of the year, the KPCC which was still controlled by the Congress Socialists, had set up a sub-committee to organize labourers. Special attention was paid to attracting the young by means of youth work, generously interpreted to include football matches and competitions<sup>64</sup>.

In Malabar, the development of capitalism was still backward. In the industries employing 200 to 300 workers the capitalists were invariably also landlords, and the workers were not only wage labourers but linked to the land. They, therefore, suffered double oppression of the capitalist in the town and the landlord in the rural area<sup>65</sup>. Factory conditions were also poor and, in some cases, deplorable. Lack of effective government regulation led to unsafe and unhealthy work site. Workers had to do long hours of work and face wage cut and job instability. Retrenchment was also common in factories apart from working in unhygienic conditions.

Before 1934 there were only five to six workers unions which consisted of nearly 1500 workers in Kozhikode. In 1935 it increased to 16<sup>66</sup>. From 1935 onwards militant trade unions were formed in and around

---

<sup>62</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *op.cit.*, p.72

<sup>63</sup> *The Hindu*, 25 April 1934 in Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, p.88

<sup>64</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *op.cit.*, p.72

<sup>65</sup> Prakash Karat, *The Peasant Movement in Malabar, 1934-40*, Social Scientist, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Sep., 1976). p.33

<sup>66</sup> Andalat, *Keralahile Thozhilali Vargathinte Piravi*, Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1984. p. 106.

Kozhikode. The tile factory workers and spinning mill workers were the first sections to be organised and it was followed by soap workers union, the press workers union, and the cart load workers union, and the umbrella workers union etc.<sup>67</sup>In May 1935, an All Kerala Workers Conference was organised in Kozhikode and an All Kerala Workers Union was formed with P.Krishna Pillai as the secretary<sup>68</sup>.

Under the leadership of the Socialists, strikes were launched in different factories where the working conditions were bad. Many of these strikes were localised and centered in a factory or two. The workers exhibited a feeling of collective consciousness and the number of strikes and the participants increased in the succeeding years. P. Krishna Pillai, K. P. Gopalan, and other left-wingers were in the thick of it. The Socialists organised public meetings during and after the strikes and formed relief committees to help the striking workers. The strikes sharpened conflict within the KPCC. In the middle of 1935, the Gandhians were able to recapture control of the organization, and they sought to restrain the socialists in their support to the strikers at the end of the year<sup>69</sup>.

Organisation of the peasantry was accorded too much importance as it was necessary to put an end to the age old feudal system. After the British upheld the supreme authority of *janmi* over land in Malabar, tenants had to face untold miseries and cruelties. “The eviction had been almost unheard of during pre-colonial period; they came into vogue only with the development

---

<sup>67</sup> K. Gopalan Kutty, *op. cit.*, p.551

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, p.89. Some of the Gandhians, like Samuel Aaron and Shyamji Sunderdas, were merchants and factory-owners themselves.



of a market in *kanam* lands and the power conferred on the landlords by the revenue and judicial policies of the British”<sup>70</sup>.

Before the advent of British, the *janmis* did not have the power for arbitrary evictions, rack renting and the same thing was pointed out by William Logan<sup>71</sup>. If the tenant made any default on the payment of *pattam* due to reasons like natural calamities the *janmi* or the government showed little leniency towards them. Along with the economic exploitation as well as physical torture by the *janmis* and *kanakkars*, social oppression let loose by the rigid caste system was very common in Malabar. It was amongst such unorganised peasants that socialists launched their works. The proclaimed goal of KCSP as follows: “the establishment of the rule of peasants and workers-of the oppressed masses whose rights are denied-is our aim. Political freedom which ignores economic freedom cannot but be acceptable to the masses. The basis of political freedom must be economic freedom”.<sup>72</sup>

It was in July 1935 that KS was formed at Chirakkal, with V.M. Vishnu Bharatheeyan and K.A. Keraleeyan as president and secretary<sup>73</sup>. At the meeting, which was attended by around 36 peasants, leaders like Vishnu Bharatheeyan, K.A. Keraleeyan, K.P. Gopalan, and K.P.R. Gopalan were present<sup>74</sup>. In November 1936 a taluk conference of the KS was held in Chirakkal and a resolution dealing with rent, debt, and land tax was

---

<sup>70</sup> K.N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921*, OUP, 1992. p.40

<sup>71</sup> William Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>72</sup> E. Balakrishnan, *History of the Communist Movement in Kerala*, Kurukshethra, Ernakulam, 1998. p. 80.

<sup>73</sup> E.K. Nayanar *Olivukala Smrithikal*, Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1995, pp.11-12. The meeting was held at Bharatheeya Mandhir of Vishnu Bharatheeyan in Naaniyur.

<sup>74</sup> S.K. Pottakkad et. al., *Mohamed Abdurahiman*, MA Sahib Memorial Committee, Calicut, 1978. p.544

passed<sup>75</sup>. Similar conferences were held in other parts of Malabar. The peasant movement developed in Malabar demanding reduction in rent and for amending the Tenancy Act in favour of inferior tenants<sup>76</sup>. By mid-1937, taluk peasant conferences were meeting under the red flag, and in May 1938, an All-Malabar Peasants' Union (All Malabar Karshaka Sangham) was formed<sup>77</sup>. It organised movements demanding amendments to the Malabar tenancy act of 1929. Deputations were sent to the District Collector, Malabar, raising this demand and resolutions in similar nature were also sent to Madras government<sup>78</sup>.

Starting with the campaign against illegal feudal exactions and oppressive social customs the peasant movement developed to the brink of a no-rent campaign<sup>79</sup>. Boycotts and social ostracism were used against stubborn landlords and even against tenants who would not fall in with the programs of the Peasants' Union. Rents were withheld, and there were speeches about a possible no-revenue campaign. Uniformed volunteers were organized to protect the Union interests even at the risk of their lives. Processions were taken out to the *kovilakam* of Chirakkal Raja and to the houses of landlords against illegal exactions and the corrupt practices. Peasants took out processions to Vengayil Nayanar, Koodali Talathu Veetil, Kurumattur Namboothirippad, Karikkattidathil Nayanar etc.<sup>80</sup> When the landlords happened to be spotted anywhere near the demonstrations, the demonstrators cried out 'down with landlords' and even the children did the same<sup>81</sup>. This

---

<sup>75</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 20 August, 1936 in K. Gopalan Kutty, *op.cit.*, p.556

<sup>76</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac. *op.cit.* p.63

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> K. Gopalan Kutty, *op.cit.*, p.557

<sup>79</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac, *op. cit.*, p.63

<sup>80</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 18 July 1937 in K. Gopalan Kutty, *op. cit.*, p.557

<sup>81</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *My Struggles, An Autobiography*, p.20

type of protest was an obvious proof of the growing awareness of poor peasants and agricultural workers. From 03-01-1939 to May last, during the five months time, there were 33 village Kisan meetings held as per *Prabhatham* news report<sup>82</sup>.

The CSP also took up economic and social problems of the people to build up mass movements. New methods of political propaganda gradually surfaced in the northern parts of Malabar under the leadership of Socialists. A.K. Gopalan and Chandroth took initiative in organising the unemployed. The *pattinijatha* under A.K. Gopalan from Malabar to Madras is an instance of this form of agitation. It was the *pattini jatha* to the sub-collector of Malabar at Tellicherry, in May 1936 that prompted the organisers to take out another *jatha* to Madras. This historic *jatha* under the leadership of A.K.Gopalan reached Madras on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1936 after getting accorded receptions at many centres<sup>83</sup>. The *jatha*, though failed to accomplish its goal, succeeded in bringing to light the sincere and dedicated effort of the Socialists to find solution to the issues of the people.

The Socialists could broadbase the peasant movement by integrating the anti-landlord movement with the movement against imperialism. They effectively used the Congress platform to enrol people simultaneously to Congress party and to KS. Joint meetings of the Congress and the KS were held and the nexus between the colonial government and the landlords were exposed in these meetings. Philosophers like Brahmananda Siva Yogi, Vagbhatananda and other reformers came to the help of peasant activists in an ideological struggle against the dominant feudal class<sup>84</sup>. By the end of 1938, the All-Malabar Peasants' Union had a paid-up membership of about

---

<sup>82</sup> N.E. Balaram, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam*, Vol.1,Prabhath, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990. p.122

<sup>83</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, Orient Longmans, New Delhi,1973. p.84

<sup>84</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Peasantry and the Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Kerala*, pp. 35-45

30,000:5,000 members 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<sup>85</sup>.

Literary and art forms were consciously used for developing people's movements and a powerful progressive literary movement emerged. Malabar in the later half of the 1930s witnessed a cultural awakening and national movement embraced every aspect of life of the people<sup>86</sup>. Extensive demonstrations to achieve the rights of the peasants were organised when the class consciousness and organisation power of peasants increased. Youth organizations were established, and an increasing amount of left-wing literature, ranging from Jayprakash Narayan's *What Is Socialism?* (translated by E.M.S. Namboothirippad) to the *Internationale*, became available in Malayalam.

Plays were one of the boosting factors for the growth of peasant and labour movements. K.Damodaran's plays, such as *Rakthapanam* and *Pattabakki*, found enthusiastic audiences both in Calicut and in rural areas<sup>87</sup>. The *Pattabakki* had an important part in encouraging and providing leadership for the peasant movement in Malabar<sup>88</sup>. This drama gave an artistic portrayal of the economic and social hardships of the peasants. It was staged in many places in Malabar especially on the sidelines of the peasants' conferences. In 1937-38 period, it is said, there was no one in Malabar who had not heard of *Pattabakki*. In 1946 a play named *Usha Nirudham* was staged in which a song was sung which was full of sarcasm against Kallyattu *Janmi*<sup>89</sup>. The play

---

<sup>85</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, p.91

<sup>86</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac, *op.cit.* p.64

<sup>87</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op.cit.*, p.91

<sup>88</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.27

<sup>89</sup> P. Jayarajan(ed.), *Kannur Jilla Communist Party Charithram*, PATTYAM GOPALAN Smaraka Patana GAVESHANA KENDRAM, Kannur, 2011, p.249

entitled *Prathima* was written in a sarcastic manner by Kuttanadu Ramakrishna Pillai in the context of building a statue for Sir C.P Ramaswami Aiyar on his eighteenth birthday. *Jedhakkal* of Ponkunnam Varkey, *Thottilla* of Thakazhi, *Vellapokkam* of Kuttanadu Ramakrishna Pillai etc. were other plays during this period<sup>90</sup>.

Similarly, novels also contributed much in the emergence of class conscience among the labouring class. Kesava Dev's "*Odayil Ninnu*" (1942) and Thakazhi's "*Thottiyude Makan*"(1947) and *Randidangazhi* (1948) showcased the existing degenerated social system and pathetic condition of the peasantry and working classes. Poems were also used to empower the people in their struggle against imperialism and colonialism. T.S.Tirumumpu, a writer wrote poems for the propagation of Marxian ideology in Malabar. *Marxism Jayikkatte* and *Lalsalam* are examples for his protest against imperialism and feudalism under the light of Communist ideology<sup>91</sup>. Likewise Keraleeyan also wrote many dazzling poems in the style of *Vadakkan Pattukal* (Northern ballads). His poems were directed against colonialism and landlordism and had touched the hearts of illiterate peasants. Novels including R.S.Kurup's *Thotti* and *Premalekhanam* of Vaikkam Muhammad Basheer fall under this category<sup>92</sup>.

Mass organisations began to be built up by the socialists as part of the mobilisation programme. Besides the peasantry, the most important was the elementary teachers' movement. Though there were efforts at unionisation among the primary school teachers during the time of CDM, the teachers'

---

<sup>90</sup> K.N. Ganesh(ed), *Keralathile Communist Partyude Charithram 1940-1952*, Second Part, Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 2020, p.172. These plays including *Prathima* were banned by the princely state of Travancore

<sup>91</sup> K. Aneesh, *Literature and Social Mobilisation: Reading Kerala Renaissance*, Indian History Congress, Platinum Jubilee, 2014, Vol.75. p.755. E.M.S. Nampoothirippad praises him as the singing sword of the progressive movements in Kerala.

<sup>92</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.172. These novels were banned.

movement gained ground only after the formation of the KCSP and along with the movements of the workers and the peasants<sup>93</sup>. Their regular union activities began in 1934 and in that year an aided school teachers' union was formed in Kallyasseri. The village teachers became the backbone of the library movement and literary campaign and frequently the chief organisers of political and mass activities in the villages<sup>94</sup>. By the late 1930s, the leftists had also won over large numbers of teachers in Malabar's widespread system of vernacular schools. A. K. Gopalan himself had been a teacher in such schools, and the left wing controlled the teachers union they claimed 4,000-5,000 members<sup>95</sup>. It was these teachers who later became the leaders of the communist movement in the country sides of Malabar. Along with the peasants and workers, the teachers, holding red flag in their hands, participated in the struggles, courted arrest and encountered bullets. Similarly youths, students and women organisations played their own parts in providing political platforms from which later emerged a large number of leaders and workers of communist parties.

The Socialist leaders in Malabar worked as an institutionalised left wing of the Congress party, but apparently it remained as an independent identity. Soon after the formation, the CSP leaders had unleashed sharp criticism against the right wing national leadership of the Congress party. Such types of criticism paved the way for the emergence of internal conflicts in the Congress party. It was found very much difficult for the left leaders to adjust with stubborn right wing Gandhians in the KPCC. For the sake of unity of the Congress organisation, the Socialists had to sacrifice many of their political programmes which proved to be a hindrance to the growth of the class consciousness.

---

<sup>93</sup> K. Gopalan Kutty, *op.cit.*, p.561

<sup>94</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac, *op.cit.*, p.64

<sup>95</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op.cit.*, p.92

The contest between the right and the left within the Congress made it highly desirable for the Socialists to have a newspaper, for Gandhians controlled Malabar's most important Malayalam daily, *Mathrubhumi* of Calicut. Within months after the formation of CSP a new Malayalam weekly started publication known as *Prabhatam*, a weekly<sup>96</sup>. It was E.M.S.Namboothirippad who in January 1935, began to edit the weekly, in which socialist education was imparted and the Gandhians were bitterly attacked<sup>97</sup>. *Prabhatam* spelled out the aims of the Socialists and it contained sketches of Lenin's life, eulogies about the Soviet Union, and attacks on the British government. Although its print run probably never exceeded 1000 copies, it was widely used throughout the district in connection with a program of study classes conducted by A.K. Pillai, P. Krishna Pillai, K.P. Gopalan, and others in mid-1935.<sup>98</sup>

The process of socialist-communist group, which had then become a minority group, taking control of the KPCC had been started after a socialist E.M.S.Namboothirippad was made the organisational secretary of it in 1937<sup>99</sup>. By the end of 1937, even Madras Congressmen understood that the Congress in Kerala was being used for non-Gandhian ends<sup>100</sup>. In January 1938, the leftists, their numbers swollen by their successful mobilization of peasants in north Malabar and with consistent work at the grass root level, by building up a wide spread network of village Congress committees and

---

<sup>96</sup> E.M.S. Namboothirippad, *op. cit.*, p.30.

<sup>97</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op.cit.*, p.89

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* pp.89-90.The paper stopped publishing in August 1935 when the Madras Government demanded a Rs. 2,000 security; it was revived in 1938 and survived until 1940.

<sup>99</sup> E.M.S. Namboothirippad, *op. cit.*, p.55

<sup>100</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*,p.85. When the Madras chief minister, C. Rajagopalachari, met with leftist-inspired (but ostensibly Congress) demonstrators on his tour of Malabar in November 1937, he told them: "You cannot take advantage of our meetings to present your demands".

tactical alliance with the nationalist Muslim faction within the Congress, the CSP captured the leadership of the KPCC in 1938<sup>101</sup>. The Congress cover shielded them effectively until the resignation of the Congress ministries in October 1939. Skilfully using the sanctified Congress label, they retained control until supersession of the KPCC by the Working Committee of the AICC in October 1940.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 was the decisive event as far as the Socialists in Kerala were concerned. The Communists were attempting to drive the Congress at the all-India level into militant opposition to the war. With the outbreak of the war and the CPI tactics of unconditional resistance to war efforts, the struggle between the Gandhians and the Socialists reached a new high pitch. The major issue confronting the Communist-Congress men was opposition to the war. While the national leadership of the Congress equivocated throughout 1940, the Communists in Kerala conducted vigorous agitation against both the war and the Gandhian Congress. Anti-war demonstrations were organised and thus Malabar witnessed to the peasant protest struggles and consequent police firings and atrocities on the protesters.

There was an up tide in peasant and workers agitations and widespread police repression in Malabar in September 1940. KPCC which mostly consisted of the leftists decided to observe an Anti-Repression Day on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1940. Consequently, the District Magistrate banned meetings and demonstrations in the district of Malabar through the Defence of India rules on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1940<sup>102</sup>. The ban was respected throughout south Malabar but was defied in the north. Mass mobilisation, conducted despite the disapproval of the right leadership on Anti-Repression Day led to violent

---

<sup>101</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac, *op.cit.* p.65

<sup>102</sup> G.O.Home (MS) No.4654, dated 24th October 1941.



confrontation in many centres with the police<sup>103</sup>. In spite of prohibitory orders, the peasants and workers participated in large numbers in processions organized on that day. Places like Tellicherry, Mattannur and Morazha there were firings against the demonstrators. In the ensuing riots, the police were overpowered at some places, and a few policemen were killed. Following these developments the KS and its local units were banned by the government. The observance of anti-imperialist day on 15th September, 1940 followed violent clashes between the police and the people which culminated in the Kayyur Episode on 26-03-1941 where some police personnel were attacked and killed<sup>104</sup>. Four of the accused persons in this case were sentenced death and executed at the Central Jail<sup>105</sup>.

The developments triggered by the Anti-Imperialist Day provided the rightists in the Congress with an opportunity to carry out a purge to cleanse the Congress organisation of the Communists. The AICC reacted decisively; KPCC was dismissed and a three member ad hoc committee was appointed to co-ordinate and supervise all the future activities of Congress in Kerala<sup>106</sup>. The organisational break of CPI and Congress in Malabar was complete. By the time the Communists got separated from the nationalists, the former had built up a strong foundation and organisational machinery in the form of socialist party. In fact, the history of Communism in Kerala, until the establishment of an independent Communist party in 1940, was the history of its struggle

---

<sup>103</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac, *op.cit.*, p.65

<sup>104</sup> District Census Handbook, 2001, Kasaragod, Part XII-A & B, Series-33. p.4

<sup>105</sup> For more details see K.K.N. Kurup's *The Kayyur Riot: A Terrorist Episode in the Nationalist Movement in Kerala*, Sandhya Publication, Trivandrum, 1978.

<sup>106</sup> P. Govinda Pillai, (ed), *E M S inte Sampoorana Krithikal*, Vol.III, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p.10.

against foreign domination and for the introduction of political, economic and social reforms along with the Congress party<sup>107</sup>.

The platform of CSP to work within the organisational discipline and programmatic understanding of Congress had become a hindrance to the growth of the class organisations in Malabar<sup>108</sup>. It was not possible to raise the slogan of abolition of landlordism from the platform of Congress. It was a reality recognised by the Socialist leaders that the peasants could be organised only around their own class demands. The Congress leaders were not inclined to take up class demands and as a consequence, the struggles were confined to 'socio-political' and not to 'economic' ones<sup>109</sup>. Hence, the Socialists were on the verge of breaking their all ties with the so-called bourgeois party for the sake of the sanctity of communist ideology. And, the immediate background of the formation of the CPI in Kerala was the sharp clash within the national movement regarding the tactics to be adopted to exploit the crisis created by the outbreak of the Second World War.

### **From CSP to CPI**

The formation of the Communist party unit of Kerala was the culmination of a series of processes. The initiative of the Communist International in bringing about unity among the Communist groups in the country opened a new chapter in the history of the Communist movement in India. By the releasing of the comrades detained following the Meerut Conspiracy Case a new leadership took over the party with P.C. Joshi as

---

<sup>107</sup> Victor M. Fic. *Kerala: Yenan of India*, Nachiketa Publications, Bombay, 1970. p.8

<sup>108</sup> For example, the peasant movement in northern Malabar that had developed into a no rent campaign had to be diverted to a campaign for amending the Tenancy Act for the nationalists. Besides, for the sake of unity of the congress organisation, even the suggestion of separate volunteer corps for the peasant movement had to be given up.

<sup>109</sup> K. Gopalan Kutty, *op.cit.*, p.547

General Secretary<sup>110</sup>. Sundarayya, the Andhra communist and S.V Ghate, a Bombay Communist based in Madras, were members of the central committee formed then and they were having constant contact, meeting and discussions with Kerala comrades. They paid visits in Kerala many times and kept good relation with CSP leaders. The meeting of Sundarayya with two CSP leaders in Kerala, E.M.S.Namboothirippad and Krishna Pillai, was the first of this series of processes. This relation was crucial in bringing CSP members to Communist party<sup>111</sup>. The first links were formed in 1935 when Namboothirippad and Krishna Pillai had long discussions with P. Sundarayya, during a Congress conference in Madras.<sup>112</sup>

Consequent to the reorganisation of the central leadership of the Communist Party, provincial committees were formed including in those of Kerala in 1937. Early in 1937, the CPI apparently sent S.V. Ghate, to Malabar to link up with the communist-inclined leftists. When S.V.Ghate went to Calicut with the message from the Party centre, all comrades directed him to Krishna Pillai. Pillai agreed to call a meeting of his group which became the first Communist party unit in Malabar<sup>113</sup>. Apart from P. Krishna Pillai, three other leaders including K.Damodaran, N.C.Sekhar, and E.M.S.Namboodiripad, who was then organising secretary of KPCC, secretly met at Calicut in the presence of S.V. Ghate and formed the CPI state unit. The meeting of these four CSP activists was the culmination of a series of processes that began two years ago. This secret CPI unit of 4 leading cadres of the CSP in Malabar played an important role in rapid dissemination of Marxist ideology within the movement. Though party fraction was formed in

---

<sup>110</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *op. cit.*, p.21

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* p.16

<sup>112</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op.cit.*,p.92

<sup>113</sup> *New Age Weekly*, 7 April 1957 in Andalat, *Sakhakale Munnottu*, Vol.1, Chinthra, 1978, Thirunandapuram, pp.354-355.

1937 it was through congress-socialism- a very broad church of the left -that communism gained its mass base in Kerala by 1939-40<sup>114</sup>. The meeting of CSP held at Thalasseri from 16 to 18 June 1938 was a kind of rehearsal for the birth of a revolutionary party. By this time an organisational set up based on scientific socialism had been prepared<sup>115</sup>.

The four communist converts in Malabar determined to keep their membership in the CPI a secret and to exploit the reputation of the Congress to the greatest possible extent. About the same time, members of KCSP began attending conferences of the national CSP. In the two years between his joining the CPI and the outbreak of war in September 1939, Krishna Pillai interviewed dozens of radical Congressmen in Malabar and got a clear idea of which way most would move when the question of the joining the CPI was ultimately raised<sup>116</sup>.

Immediately after the Wardha session of the AICC, CSP members met secretly at a *vayanasalabuilding* in Parappuram in Pinaray village near Tellichery towards the close of 1939 and formalised the transformation of the KCSP into the Kerala CPI<sup>117</sup>. The historic meeting attended by 90 leading cadres of CSP was presided over by K.P. Gopalan<sup>118</sup>. It is significant that all the 90 participants who assembled there were unanimous in their decision to transform their organisation into a unit of the CPI. The decision was kept secret and prominent leaders went underground and there was no public activity in its name especially since the party was banned in Tiruvitamkur. Formation of the party was announced on 26 January 1940 through wall

---

<sup>114</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *op.cit.*, p.65

<sup>115</sup> G.D. Nair, *C.H.Kanaran Jeevithavum Samaravum*, Progress Publication, Calicut, 2015, p.39.

<sup>116</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op.cit.*, p.92

<sup>117</sup> T.J.Nossiter, *op.cit.*, p.76

<sup>118</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op cit.* p.362. See also N.E. Balaram, *op. cit.*, p.242

writings in the absence of a news daily<sup>119</sup>. The Party in Kerala, thus, became a separate entity and Communists got an identity of their own. At the time of its formation none of the members had a clear idea of what socialism meant or how it should be attained<sup>120</sup>.

At this time, many of the Communists stopped wearing *khadi*. The party machinery working underground got reorganised in tune with the changing situation. The house of one Nellikandi Pokkan, a toddy tapping worker, at Mavilayi near Kannur was selected to be the first state committee office of the party<sup>121</sup>. Underground party units started functioning from January 1940 onwards with Chirakkal as its headquarters. The secret offices were called *Pathala Lokam Office* (PLO). There were 11 divisions in the Kerala Communist Committee at Mangalore, Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kurumbranad, Kozhikode, Eranad, Valluvanad, Palakkad, Ponnani, Trissur and Travancore and Each division office was known as PLO.1, PL0.2, ...etc<sup>122</sup>. Special cells were constituted with the purpose of conducting classes to impart political education to cadres with K.P.G.Namboothiri, Sankaranarayanan Thambi, M.S.Devadas, Unniraja as members; the prominent book used for the study classes was *A Handbook Of Marxism*.<sup>123</sup>

As per the decision of the party in 1939, efforts were made to form party cells in villages which was the basic unit of the party machinery. On 29 December 1939 first party cell in Vatakara was formed at Kunnumakkara with Mandotti Kannan as secretary and by 1940 party cell at Kalliassery was

---

<sup>119</sup> *Deshabhimani* weekly, 19-08-1973 in Andalath's *Sakhakale Munnottu*, Vol.1, Chintha,1978, Trivandrum, p.357

<sup>120</sup> This was stated by Krishna Pillai in an article in 1939, *Prabhatham*, 17-04-1939.

<sup>121</sup> *Deshabhimani* weekly, *op. cit.* p.357

<sup>122</sup> P. Priya, *The Question of Nationalism and Internationalism: A Page from the History of Communist Movement in Kerala*, Indian History Congress, Vol. 76, 2015. p.460

<sup>123</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.43

formed under K.P.R. Gopalan<sup>124</sup>. By the end of the 1940, party cells were a formed throughout Malabar including those at Madikkai, Neeleswaram, Kurumbranadu, Koyilandy, Meppayur, Eranadu, Malappuram, Kondotty, Parappanangadi, Nilmbur, Ramanattukara, Valluvanadu, Alathur, Vandazhi, Mudappallur, Kizhakkanchery, and Palakkad<sup>125</sup>.

While ban on the party continued and police intensified searches for the leaders, efforts were going on to convert socialists into communists, a curriculum of Marxist ideology was framed within a few weeks after the second world war was broken out.<sup>126</sup> This Marxian study had continued during the two and half years of underground activities. Two works: *Proletarian Path* and *Partikalum Rashtreeyavum* which were critical of the policies of the Congress Party, Socialist Party and Forward Block, prepared an ideological base for the Communists across the country and became a sharp weapons of the communists in their fight for propagating communism<sup>127</sup>. Basic Marxist works translated to Malayalam like *Socialism: Sankalpikavum Sastreeyavum* of Engels, Lenin's *Enthu Cheyyanam*, Stalin's *Leninisathinte Adisthana Thathwangal* etc. were taught to the cadres of the Communist party. Even while working underground, party could lure a large number of youngsters through the vigorous propaganda carried out at the local level. P.Bhaskaran recorded that he was attracted to the party by the pamphlet titled, *Mugham Moodi Valichu Cheenthappetta Parttikalum Indian Rashtreeyavum* and the book entitled *Why Socialism* by Jayaprakash Narayan<sup>128</sup>. Translations of many of the Marxist works, thus, were made for the education of the new comers.

---

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* pp.43-45

<sup>126</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *op. cit.*, p.82

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* p.80

<sup>128</sup> P. Priya. *op. cit.*, p.460

As the government's search for party members intensified, the cadre's inexperience in underground work began to show<sup>129</sup>. Leaders absconding in the *Chettakudil* or huts of the untouchables and in the *illams* and *taravads* of the upper castes were sketched and hunted down by the MSP. By mid-1941 almost all the key figures of the party except for E.M.S.Namboothirippad had been detained. P. Krishna Pillai was arrested from Vaikom and imprisoned in the Shucheendram jail. A.K.G and K. Damodaran were put in the Vellore jail. A further blow was the arrest of 60 Kisan leaders and the prohibition of the All Malabar Peasants Union in the wake of an agrarian clash at Kayyur in March 1941<sup>130</sup>.

### **People's War Policy**

In June 1941, with certain international events, the CPI had to make drastic changes in its policies. Contrary to the established position, the party stopped its fight against the British with Hitler's invasion of Soviet Union that had forced the International Communists to transform the imperialist war into a 'People's War'. When Britain became an ally of USSR and the communists in India began to support Britain in the war against fascism<sup>131</sup>. While this decision resulted in the release from detention of the communist leaders and

---

<sup>129</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *op. cit.*, p.142

<sup>130</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *op.cit.*, p.84

<sup>131</sup> The Communist leaders like S.A.Dange, B.T.Ranadive and S.V.Ghate in Deoli jail prepared a thesis known as 'Deoli thesis' which argued for People's War policy. It notes that "Nazism is the main enemy of the international proletariat and the people of the world and the war against it is a People's war. The Soviet people are fighting not for national preservation but for the existence as a socialist state." The Deoli thesis asked party workers to stop their fight against the British, instead extend help in its war against fascist forces.

ultimately in the lifting of the ban on the party itself -thus enabling it to function as a legal party for the first time<sup>132</sup>.

Legalization of CPI in July 1942 brought organizational advantages, for Communists had been persecuted by the British right from the formation of their first groups in the early 1920s, and the Party had been illegal since 1934. The many sided activity during the period of crisis in 1942-45, despite the heavy odds, led to a signal growth in the member of the party. Starting with a bare 4,000 in July 1942, it had jumped to 15,000 by May 1943, 30,000 by January 1944 and over 53,000 by the summer of 1946<sup>133</sup>.

The People's War policy placed party in a state of ideological confusion with some cadres coming out in open against it. In Vellur central jail communists were not unanimous in adopting the new policy. A.K. Gopalan, K.B. Krishna, P.K. Balan, Balachandra Menon advocated that the change of strategy but majority co-prisoners like Chandroth Kunjiraman Nair, Kambambadi Sathya Narayan advocated the continuation of the present strategy. K. Damodaran, author of the play *Pattabakki* also was against People's War policy<sup>134</sup>. This discussion even led to the quarrelling and the shouting among the co-prisoners<sup>135</sup>. While there was no doubt in the mind of any communist on the need rally to the defence of international socialism, there was much confusion as how to link up this international task with the struggle for national liberation<sup>136</sup>. International outlook was a distinctive characteristic of the party but it failed to take into account the patriotic

---

<sup>132</sup> M.R. Masani, *The Communist Party in India*, p.24. In the new circumstances, on 23-07-1942, the ban on the party was lifted and a large number of communists were released from the jail.

<sup>133</sup> R.P. Dutt, *India Today*, Peoples Publishing House, Bombay, 1949. p. 435

<sup>134</sup> For more details see M. Rashid, *K.Damodaran*, Biography, D.C.Books, Kottayam.1982, pp.77-78

<sup>135</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *Ente Jeevithakatha*, Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram 2013.

<sup>136</sup> T.M.Thomas Isaac, *op.cit.*, p.72



motives of the masses while evolving tactics. Leaders like Sardar Vallabhai Patel accused the communists of betraying the nation and freedom struggle and the party workers were called as traitors<sup>137</sup>.

The conversion of imperialist war into People's war created a lot of problems for the party<sup>138</sup>. Communists were branded as anti-nationals and attacked. At Bombay, party's central office and press were stormed by the opponents and vandalised<sup>139</sup>. In Malabar, the leaders who were proceeding to explain party's new stance in the party meetings, were attacked and the houses of the Communists were vandalised by the Congress workers<sup>140</sup>. The leaders, at party cell meetings in the villages, had to face stiff opposition while explaining the changed policy of the party to the workers<sup>141</sup>. The explanations given by the leaders to questions related with the People's War policy raised by ordinary party workers were said to be unsatisfactory and some of the questions of the party workers had irked the speakers as well<sup>142</sup>. A large section among the workers turned against the party; they took out processions holding congress flags and raised slogans against the

---

<sup>137</sup> E. Rajan, *Cominternum Indian Communist Partiyum*, ( Malayalam translation of Sobhanlal Datta Gupta's *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919-1943* ), Prabhatham , Thiruvananthapuram, 2010, p.293

<sup>138</sup> Significant development was the splintering of the mass movements. To counter the mass influence of the communists the Congress pursued a policy of splitting the existing mass organisations or setting up rival organisations. With the adoption of the People's War Policy Kisan Congress was formed under nationalist banner . It also led to schism in the trade union movement leading to the formation of rival trade unions.

<sup>139</sup> P. Narayanan Nair, *Aranootandiloode* (Autobiography), Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, 1973, p. 237

<sup>140</sup> At Kannur Krishna Pillai was attacked on his transit for party programmes

<sup>141</sup> Cherukadu, *Jeevithappatha*, (Autobiography), Current Books, Trissur, 2006, pp.378-382

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

party<sup>143</sup>. Some of the party workers who could not digest the policy change, quit the party.

The Communists in Kerala fully grasped the implications of the People's War policy at the grass root level and designed new programmes to counter the allegations of the opponents and stop the erosion of the workers and sympathisers. The party, as part of its programmes, decided itself to organise *kalasamitis*, plays, *melas* etc. during the time of fascist aggression from 1941 to 1945<sup>144</sup>. In line with the opposition to the fascist aggression the Communists started 'anti-Jap *melas*' in places like Ottapalam, Maraakkara, Kozhikode and Vatakara<sup>145</sup>. They used all their organizational capacity for anti- Jap propaganda and wide propaganda campaigns, meetings and processions were organized. The party also utilized all the cultural forms like *Kathakali*, *Koothu*, *Kootiyattam*, *Theyyattam*, drama etc. for anti- Jap campaigns. The well known song, '*Naniyude Swapnam*', highlighting socialism and Soviet Union, composed by K.P.G.Namboothiri got public attention<sup>146</sup>. These programmes could turn the public attention to the threat posed by the Japanese forces<sup>147</sup>. Book stalls were opened under the supervision of anti-Jap committees and Soviet exhibitions were conducted. At Guruvayoor in 1942 a book stall was opened near the eastern gate of the temple and anti-jap pamphlets and books were sold out as mode of propaganda<sup>148</sup>. Ten to fifteen squads consisting of three or four members including M.P.Bhattathirippadu with songs and music got engaged in the

---

<sup>143</sup> K. Madhavan, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>144</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *Purogamana Sahithya Prasthanathinte Valarcha*, National Book Stall, Kottayam, p.13

<sup>145</sup> P. Narayanan Nair, *op. cit.* Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, 1973, p.228

<sup>146</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.113

<sup>147</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam Ulbhavavum Valarchayum*, *op. cit.*, pp.91-92

<sup>148</sup> Cherukadu, *op. cit.*, p.382

book sale among the public. Thousands of copies of the song book “*Vallatha Kaalam*” composed by M.P.Bhattathirippadu were sold out<sup>149</sup>. While the support extended to the British in their war efforts was going on, there was no slackening of anti-British campaign or struggles on mass issues.

The party took advantage of its legality to build a more effective organisation. First Kerala state conference was held from 20 to 21 March 1943 at Kozhikode in which 650 participated which had been preceded by the formation of Cell and *Farkka* committees<sup>150</sup>. After 8 years of ban (till 22 July 1942), the first party congress was held from 23 May to 1 June 1943 at Bombay<sup>151</sup>. Every opportunity provided by the newly granted legality to the party was used to educate the masses. Special attention was paid to the development of student, youth and women movement. The party publishing house, party school, cultural squads etc. gave a new thrust to the feverish political activity<sup>152</sup>.

Under the guise of cooperating with the authorities in anti-fascist propaganda party used every opportunity to proselytize<sup>153</sup>. Grow More Food campaign was carried on, connecting it with the everyday needs of the people. The pauperised peasantry and the agricultural labourers adopted an action programme to cultivate more wastelands by the landowning class and the government. The landlords and hoarders were the target of the food campaign. The people’s food committees worked in all villages to prevent

---

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, pp.77-78

<sup>151</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, pp.51-52. First party conference was held in 1943 with P.Krishnapillai, Keraleeyan, E.M.S, E.P.Gopalan, K.P.R Gopalan, M.K.Kelu, T.S.Thirumunpu, N.E.Balaram, K.Madhavan,, K.Damodaran, N.C.Shekhar as members from Kerala.

<sup>152</sup> T.M.Thomas Isaac, *op. cit.*, p.74.

<sup>153</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *op.cit.*, p.85

essential commodities from disappearing into black-market<sup>154</sup>. In most of the villages in Malabar a kind of informal rationing system was effected by the cooperation of the people and the authorities. The party also maintained some organisations by means of the distress relief committees, initially formed after a cyclone had hit the area in 1940, and the food committees arising from the famine conditions of 1942-43<sup>155</sup>. The communists were in the forefront of every activity that could give relief to the distress caused by the war such as famine, scarcity of necessities like cloth and kerosene, outbreak of epidemics, natural calamities etc<sup>156</sup>. Through these activities party workers managed to keep a good rapport with the public and thus, became a part of their lives<sup>157</sup>. It is right to say that the tactics of People's War Policy had not created any adverse long term impact on the party. In 1939 the total number of membership in the party stood at 4000 and it rose to 16000 in 1943<sup>158</sup>.

While anti-fascist programmes were going on with full vigour, it was felt for the government that the party was not co-operating with the war efforts of the Britain. The official reports cleared that even during the times of People's War policy the government followed a suspicious eye towards the Communists<sup>159</sup>. Intelligence reports claimed that cells and study classes were actively discussing the possibility of planned uprisings in the event of a breakdown of law and order at the end of war<sup>160</sup>. A Madras official reported

---

<sup>154</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *My Struggles, An Autobiography*, *op. cit.*, p. 65

<sup>155</sup> E.M.S. Namboothirippad, *The National Question in Kerala*, p.155

<sup>156</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac. *op. cit.*, p.74

<sup>157</sup> E.M.S. Namboothirippad, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam Ulbhavavum Valarchayum*, p.104

<sup>158</sup> P. Narayanan Nair, *op. cit.*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum,1973. p.236

<sup>159</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.110

<sup>160</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *op.cit.*, p.86. In a letter to Viceroy Linlithgow, Roger Lumley, the Governor of Bombay observed that the Communists offered their help in the recruitment to the navy and police. But it seems quite unacceptable. A general release of Communists may eventually be unavoidable. The same opinion was reported by T.Stewart, Governor of Bihar.

that 'the Malabar comrades' were 10% anti-Nazi and 90% anti-British government and collectors generally find them intolerable friends of the government<sup>161</sup>.

### **Post War Upsurge**

The post-war period witnessed elections to the central legislative and provincial assemblies based on restricted franchise. In the election to the Madras Legislative Assembly held in March 1946, Congress gained comfortable majority by winning 163 seats out of 215 and Communist party also had contested in the election. It arrayed E.M.S Namboodiripad from Malappuram, K.P.Gopalan from Chirakkal, C.H.Kanaran from Kottayam and A.K.Gopalan from Kozhikode. Even though this election was not conducted based on universal suffrage, the voting pattern gave a strong signal about the growth and strength of Communist Party in Malabar. The Communists attained 27% of votes as against 17% votes in 1937 election<sup>162</sup>.

In the post-war period party became a part of the struggle of the people for national freedom and the liquidation of feudal monarchies in Kerala<sup>163</sup>. It was only by the middle of 1946, that the CPI national leadership realised the sweep of the post War upsurge in struggles as evidenced in the outbursts in Thebaga, Worli, Telengana and the RIN Mutiny and worked out the "main slogans of developing the partial struggles for the achievement of democratic revolution and seizure of power by the people<sup>164</sup>. With the August Resolution of 1946, the Communists once again decided to carry out their anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggles

---

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> P. Govinda Pillai, *E M Sinte Sampoorana Krithikal*, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-76.

<sup>163</sup> In Travancore the Party started struggle against American model government which was devised by Diwan, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyyar that led to violent clash with the army and to the deaths of thousands of communists.

<sup>164</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac, *op. cit.*, p.75

In Malabar party's main thrust was in the agrarian sector where protest were brewing against the government policy in favour of the landlords and its decision to cut short the ration rice. The peasants were motivated by the political ideology of 'revolutionary upsurge' and activation of peasantry as demanded in the party document, *Forward to Final Struggle* of 5th August 1946<sup>165</sup>. As per the Communist Party programme, Malabar Karshaka Sangham called upon the peasants to forcibly enter all the barren lands and cultivate them if the government did not take any steps by 15 December 1946<sup>166</sup>. The party organised an Anti-black Marketing day on 6 October 1946 across Malabar and burnt the effigies of black marketeers, as a prelude to the programme of 15 December<sup>167</sup>. Protest meetings were held in many places and KS workers resisted the attempt of paddy shifting made by landlords in connivance with the police<sup>168</sup>. Public meetings were organised by Communist party in protest against the cut short of rice allocation and a resolutions were passed which raised the demand to open the *patthayapuras* or paddy granaries of the landlords under the supervision of popular committees<sup>169</sup>.

In November 1946 the peasants of Kuyiloor took out processions to Tellicherry and Calicut and represented their grievances to the sub-collector and collector of Malabar respectively and requested to make available

---

<sup>165</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Peasantry and the Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Kerala*, Social Scientist, Vol. 16, No. 9, 1988. p.41

<sup>166</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.67

<sup>167</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala*, CBH Publications, Nagercoil, 1989, p.24

<sup>168</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 16-05-1947. At places like Kuruppath and Kottkara local people donated cash to telegraph message to the Madras government. At Vatakara a combined meeting of Communist Party, Beedi-cigar Workers Union, Kisan Sangh etc. held on 13-05-1947 called upon the government to save the life of the people by guiding the PCCs in right way and also to strengthen the procurement of paddy by bringing societies under popular control.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

wastelands for cultivation<sup>170</sup>. After that, they held a meeting at Calicut and authorised K.A.Keraleeyan, P.Narayanan Nair, A.Kunhikannanand Chandroth Kunhiraman Nair to place the petition before K.R.Karant, the Revenue Minister of Madras.<sup>171</sup> A similar memorandum had also been forwarded to T.Prakasam, Chief Minister of Madras for granting Mangat Paramba wasteland for cultivation. When nothing came out of these representations Kisan Sabah planned to take forcible possession of barren lands across Malabar and to start cultivation with wilful defiance of authority. The landlords intensified threats and torture. So, to escape the torture the peasants organised volunteer units everywhere. At the same time authority was also determined and decided to give protection to the private property of the landlords. When the two sides were not ready to withdraw from their established stands bloodshed became inevitable.

The struggle organised by the peasantry under communist party against black-marketing took a more vigorous shape in northern parts of Malabar. In many parts of northern Malabar the KS workers resisted the attempt of shifting the paddy by landlords. The peasants in the villages of Kankol, Korom and Vellur in Kannur seized paddy which was carrying without permit for black marketing and measured it at co-operative societies; consequently the protesters were arrested and three of them at Kankol were sentenced to 10 months imprisonment<sup>172</sup>. Paddy seizures were reported from other places as well.

The peasants at Paccheni resisted an effort of the landlord, Appukutty Nair, to move paddy which he sold in the black-market, with the escort of

---

<sup>170</sup> E.K Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.69

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.69-70

<sup>172</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 13-05-1947

MSP<sup>173</sup>. At Malappattam, peasants seized paddy which was being shifted without permit by landlord Illikkalathu Abubekkar and measured and sold it at the Irikkoor Cooperative Society paying the sale proceeds to the landlord<sup>174</sup>. Likewise, a case was registered at Thalassery special first class magistrate court against seven Communist activists including Chovvanganadan Kunhiraman hailing from Kandoth for seizing and measuring paddy which was kept to be black marketed by one Mr.Srank Koran<sup>175</sup>.

The intervention of the police on the side of the landlord-black marketeer nexus led to firings and killing of innocent and poor peasants. At Kavumbaikunnu peasants' attempt to get out of the police cordon was failed and 5 peasants were killed in the police firing and subsequent torturing. The police registered case against 180 persons<sup>176</sup>. Another attempt of the peasantry to trespass into an estate of a capitalist planter in Hosdurg met with police torture and charging case against leaders<sup>177</sup>. At Mangat Paramba the peasants encroached upon the waste land in October 1946 and brought a few acres of land under cultivation. The government issued eviction orders and later by September 1947 the land was evicted completely from the Communists and crops were sold for an amount of Rs. 430<sup>178</sup>.

The post-war peasant revolts caused widespread hunt of Communists in north Malabar. The hardship of the people who are already in distress due to the famine and price hike, had to face a terrible situation. The police and officials unleashed a reign of terror sponsored by the state in the name of

---

<sup>173</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.69

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Deshabhimani, op. cit.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 01-05-1947

<sup>177</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala, op. cit.*, pp.37-38

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.* p.34



nabbing the Communists throughout north Malabar<sup>179</sup>. Hundreds lost their valuables and in some places records including ration cards of the peasant families were seized and burnt down by MSP. Obtaining new ration cards in the changed situation was not possible for them as they had to approach for that the officials who are the agents of the landlords whose houses are now working as MSP camps. In places like Mokeri, ration rice was denied to women who turned up ration shops and the shop managers maintained that ration, as per the instruction from the police inspector, could not be given unless male members in the family turned up<sup>180</sup>. The ration shop owners and the police, in their plan to arrest communist party workers, actually tore the families into distress by denying them ration.

The houses of the workers and sympathisers of Communist party and Kisan Sangh activists were raided with the help of congress volunteers known as *Desha Raksha Sena*<sup>181</sup>. Their houses were looted and many were sealed and some were burnt down<sup>182</sup>. At the time of independence prominent Communists in Malabar were kept in prison and some of the wanted accused in several cases continued their life underground. In fact the party organisation had been under ban although a legal ban was not imposed<sup>183</sup>.

### **Calcutta Thesis**

By late 1947, sections of party were arguing that the CPI was becoming an appendage of congress, was neglecting the opportunity to lead a mass upsurge against imperialism and feudalism, and was inviting repression by

---

<sup>179</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 29-03-1947.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> It was also called *Desha Raksha samithi*. They were formed to resist the communist activities in the villages.

<sup>182</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 28-06-1947

<sup>183</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p.53

its very timidity<sup>184</sup>. This leftist faction won control of the party's higher counsels by December 1947. It was at this time that the second congress of the Communist Party met at Calcutta from 28 February to 6 March 1948<sup>185</sup>. As part of its political thesis, the party analysed the Indian situation and freedom. Such an analysis of the agrarian situation compelled the party to formulate new tasks in the struggle for People's Democratic Revolution<sup>186</sup>. The congress adopted the Calcutta or Ranadive ( its main protagonist ) Thesis as party policy<sup>187</sup>. For that purpose, the party decided to build All India Kisan Sabha as the fighting central organisation of India's peasantry.

At this time prominent Communists in Malabar like A.K.Gopalan were kept in prison by the executive. Some of the wanted, accused in several cases continued their life underground. In fact the party organisation had been under ban although a legal ban was not imposed. When the party followed the path of armed struggle, the Kerala committee also took steps to organise its machinery according to the new guidelines<sup>188</sup>. E.M.S. Namboothirippad accepted the change in the party's line at the Calcutta congress and the Ranadive line was readily accepted, though some voiced against it, by the membership in Kerala.

The new line of thought influenced considerably the agrarian struggles in Malabar especially north Malabar. To cope with the situation the existing party branches in Kerala were dissolved and revolutionary groups and cells

---

<sup>184</sup> T. J. Nossitter, *Communism in Kerala*, p.87

<sup>185</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op. cit.*, p.53

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87. As per the Thesis, Indian independence was dismissed as a chimera. The earlier distribution between progressive and reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie was rejected and with it any collaboration with congress. The objective now was people's democracy-democracy and socialism combined- to be achieved by a prolonged struggle.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p.56.

were organised in April 1948<sup>189</sup>. In accordance with the programme the local leadership in Malabar and Kasargod decided to mobilize the peasantry which was reeling under famine triggered by the war<sup>190</sup>. As the famine situation continued, essential commodities were highly priced by hoarders and black-marketeers. The Producer-cum-Consumer Co-operative societies (hereafter PCC's) in Malabar could not function effectively for want of proper supplies. When the government failed to rise to the occasion the black marketer and hoarders exploited the situation. Starvation and rural poverty continued; the hope and happiness of the peasants in the independence of the nation began to fade.

It was the festival season of *Vishu* in April 1948 and the starving peasants wanted to get food grains. In several villages the peasants moved in procession demanding paddy from the landlords and broke up the granaries and distributed the paddy among themselves or through cooperative stores. These struggles were called as the *Nelleduppu Samarangal* or paddy lifting struggles. The KS activists of Kankol near Payyanur marched to the house of a landlord, Mavila Kunhambu Nambiar, and carried away the paddy and distributed among themselves free of cost<sup>191</sup>. On 10<sup>th</sup> April 1948 a band of Communists and *Kisans* restrained a cart loaded with paddy belonging to the Kottayam Raja and distributed it among the local people<sup>192</sup>. On 13-04-1948, KS workers under C.Goplala Kurup, and C.Anandhan marched to the house of Sankarankandy Kunhikanna Kurup in Thillankeri and made him release the

---

<sup>189</sup> T.J. Nossitter, *op.cit.*, p.89. The local unit was broadly divided into cadres working on the mass front and those working underground, the latter led by Krishna Pillai, K.C. George and N.C. Sekhar, 'two sets of experiences and methods of work.'

<sup>190</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p.52

<sup>191</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.77

<sup>192</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p.59

paddy<sup>193</sup>. Next day, on *Vishu* day, 14-04-1948, the protesters reached Pullattu *janmi's* house in Pazhassi raising the similar demand<sup>194</sup>. But the developments at Pullattu led to the police firing in which 12 Communists died.

As the peasant movement gathered strength in the wake of the Calcutta Thesis, the authorities stepped up vigil in the villages. Measures were taken to watch each and every movement of the Communists with the help of the *janmigoondas*. The situation got exacerbated when the Congress-supported volunteer corps started to encounter the Communists in the name of restoring law and order. In many places Communists and the congress volunteer, who had administrative back up, encountered each other. On 1 May 1948, the congress volunteers hunted down the peasant union workers of Mavicherry like Kanthalot Kunhambu and K.P.R Gopalan who were in shelter at Mavicheri. The peasants, hearing this news, gathered at various points, and started attacking the volunteers which resulted in the murder of one volunteer<sup>195</sup>. Similar tense situation prevailed in Sivapuram *amsom* of Kottayam taluk following the tussle between the Communist and the Congress party workers.

Even though the security in the villages was stepped up by the police, the Communists did not leave any stone unturned to mobilise the peasantry. Secret meetings and activities continued unabated despite the surveillance of the Congress volunteers. Nearly forty leaders of the peasant struggles in north Malabar secretly assembled at a place called Munayan Kunnu under the

---

<sup>193</sup> Interview with K.Gopalan Nambiar at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021. See also Prof.T.V.K. Kurup, *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal*, in *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal*, Smaranika, Kuthuparamba, 2010-11, p.32

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* p.69

<sup>195</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p.61

leadership of K.C.Kunjappu Master on 1 May 1948<sup>196</sup>. The police, somehow, smelt the news of this meeting and after midnight, a larger party of police moved silently to Munayan Kunnu. After surrounding the area police fired continuously killing six Communists on the spot<sup>197</sup>.

Similar incident reported at Onchiyam in Kurumbranadu taluk, where an underground working committee meeting of the CPI of Kurumbranadu taluk was held on 29 April 1948<sup>198</sup>. Acting on a tip off, the police arrived at the place and by the time, the leaders managed to flee<sup>199</sup>. The police started searching the houses of the villagers for leaders and arrested some of the KS workers. The news of the arrest of leaders spread and a big crowd gathered there and questioned the arrest of their comrades<sup>200</sup>. They demanded unconditional release of the arrested leaders like Puliullathil Choyi, a senior peasant leaders and his son Kanaran and resisted the onward march of the police. Suddenly the police started firing at the crowd and Eight peasants killed in the police firing<sup>201</sup>. The firing was followed by police manhunt, torture, and manhandling in Onchiyam and neighbouring villages.

In the wake of the Calcutta Thesis developments most of the active Communists were arrested and kept in jails and law and order were maintained under “shoot at sight” orders in most of the districts. Besides, the armed conflicts which had taken place in different parts of Madras province constrained the government to take steps for declaring the party unlawful in

---

<sup>196</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op.cit.*, p.79

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p.80

<sup>198</sup> M.K. Kelu, who attended the party congress in Calcutta as a representative of the taluk committee, had to report on the future programme of the party at this meeting.

<sup>199</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op. cit.*, p.62. The news of this secret meeting was smelt by M. Gopala Kurup, the president of the KPCC taluk committee. He informed the police and accordingly they rushed in the mid-night to Onchiyam.

<sup>200</sup> Interview with T.K. Kumaran at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021. P.P.Shaju, *Padanilangalil Poruthi Veennavar*, pp.119-122

<sup>201</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.78

the province and later in Malabar district<sup>202</sup>. The government of Madras decided to ban the CPI and its feeder associations in this province with effect from 27 September 1949. But Government of India was not in favour of a total ban of the party. It explained that no advantage would be gained by declaring the party unlawful in one district of Madras province. The ban prevailed at that time only in Madras, Hyderabad, West Bengal and Travancore-Cochin. There was no unanimous opinion among the chief ministers regarding an all India ban of CPI when they met<sup>203</sup>.

The Congress leaders like K.Kelappan came forward and gave calls to suppress the communists<sup>204</sup>. The sympathisers of KS and the party were subjected to persecution by the *goondas* and congress volunteers; the *goondas* joined the police with hand in hand and established a reign of terror in Malabar during this period. Many a number of the Communists were imprisoned, killed and injured in the police action. The painful incident was the murder of Moyyarth Sankaran, an earlier nationalist activist, by the hands of *goondas* and later by the police, on 11 May 1948<sup>205</sup>.

The Calcutta thesis was a total failure. As a model of revolution it echoed Russian experience but in the Indian situation it overestimated the potential of the working class and underestimated the importance of the

---

<sup>202</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala*, p.56. The government of Madras decided to ban the CPI and its feeder associations in the province with effect from 27 September 1949. But GOI was not in favour of a total ban of the party. The ban prevailed at that time only in Madras, Hyderabad, West Bengal and Travancore-cochin.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p.56

<sup>204</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op.cit.*, p.139

<sup>205</sup> Moyyarth Sankaran, *Athmakatha* (Autobiography), Sahithya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2021, p.208. The last part of the autobiography was prepared as biography. Moyyarth Sankaran was an ardent nationalist and a close associate of congress leaders in Malabar, later he joined communist party. He was caught by the Congress workers and tortured cruelly before handing over to the police. At the police station too, he was repeatedly subjected to police tortures. His post-mortem report, which was done second time also following popular pressure, clarified that his ribs were fractured.

peasantry and landless labour and was un-Marxist in denying the national bourgeoisie and role at all in the revolutionary process<sup>206</sup>. In any case the party lacked the machinery, resources, or influence to implement such a policy. The result was a series of ill-considered and ill-coordinated actions, subsequently labelled ‘adventurist’ by the party, which led to deaths, detentions, the exposure of undercover comrades, loss of influence in the union movement, a split in the peasant organisation, widespread demoralisation and defection, and the accelerated growth of rival congress and socialist mass organisation<sup>207</sup>. At the beginning of 1949 the party turned to terrorism, sabotage, and jail strikes which led to still more determined measures by the authorities<sup>208</sup>. One of the most significant incidents as part of the inside struggle (jail) had taken place on 11-02-1950, in the central jail annexe of Salem. At the jail, Communists declined to wear white cap as put on by the criminal inmates. It led to a tension in the jail and consequent police firing. 22 persons were killed and 30 warders and 103 prisoners injured. The prisoners killed were from Malabar, convicted for participating in struggles at Kavumbayi, Tillamkeri and Pazhassi<sup>209</sup>. Communists call it “*Koje Camp*” (an island of Korea) of the Congress government which was then in power in Madras. Over 3000 party members and sympathisers ‘from Kerala were imprisoned during 1948-50.

At a time when party was put under ban following the Thesis, many workers started leaving the party<sup>210</sup>. Some in fear of their lives left party and

---

<sup>206</sup> T .J. Nossitter, *op.cit.*, p.87

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> Cherukadu, *Jeevithappatha*,. p.505. Mathrubhumi daily had earmarked a special space for publishing news of the conversion of communists to Congress; one and half rupees was charged for publishing such news from those who wanted to be known as congress workers among the public after deserting Communist party.

joined congress; some even aided congress volunteers to nab absconding communists<sup>211</sup>. Notably, the party lost many of its active functionaries and resulted in the erosion of its popularity. It was a time when the party machinery ceased to exist; red flag disappeared; party hymns and slogans whispered within the four walls; news readings and discussions and arguments at tea shops, *ayurveda* shops and *vayanasalas* died down. Martial law prevailed and no one dared to come forward to work or even to speak for the party. In short, the CPI was, thus, facing an imminent extinction in Malabar.

The atrocities on the Communists continued unabated; Congress backed volunteers in support of the MSP roamed in the villages and even the sympathisers of the party were not spared<sup>212</sup>. Gradually opposition began to surface within the congress party itself against the brutalities on the communists especially after the murder of Moyyarath Sankaran. Congress leaders including C.K.Govindan Nair and K.Kelappan, criticised the police atrocities<sup>213</sup>. K.Kelappan who was the then editor of *Mathrubhumi*, wrote an editorial on 18 May with a caption '*The Danger in Another Form*'<sup>214</sup>. He held the view that the blind hatred against communism had been responsible for the martyrdom of Moyyarath. Such developments, including the dissent voice against the atrocities on the Communists, subsequently created a rupture in the congress organisation.

---

<sup>211</sup> In Malappuram area Communists used to say not to become a deceiver like Ramachandran Nedungadi who was earlier a communist and later left it to join Congress. He was branded as a deceiver as he helped congress workers in nabbing the communists. Such converted party workers were free of MSP hunt. For more details see Cherukad's *Jeevithapatha*, p.505.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with K. Gopalan Nambiar, *op. cit.*

<sup>213</sup> He earlier wanted to suppress Communists but later started criticising the police atrocities especially after the murder of Moyyarath Sankaran. He, after independence, quit congress party to form new party and joined hands with communists.

<sup>214</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p.67



The volunteer corps known as *Desha Raksha Sena* was an organisation under the aegis of the Congress to contain the Communist activities in Malabar. These volunteer groups were differed in their names but uniform in their activities; they were apparently a self defence volunteer corps but acted as a type of militia with communists and their aides as their target. Though the militia was formed earlier it was very active in Malabar especially after the Calcutta thesis in 1948. Those who were apparently suspected to be Communists or even Communist sympathisers were sketched and put behind bars by the police with the help of the *Desha Raksha Sena* activists. The bitter experiences suffered by the congress workers at the hands of the Communists during the time of Quit India movement in 1942 were boiling in the minds of the former. When the time started to turn in its favour any chance for the retaliation against the Communists were not spared by the Congress workers. Its volunteers were prepared to encounter the communists physically and all efforts were made to disrupt their programmes<sup>215</sup>. Its volunteers attired in blue trouser, *khadher* shirt and white cap with a wooden lathi-like stump in hands, wandered around the villages to gather information about the communists and their works. The Communists' activities including their secret meetings and underground activities were spied on to the police. It has been reported that the volunteers conducted door to door visits and advised people not to give asylum and assistance to the Communists. Thus, convincing the people of the consequences of helping Communists they dissuaded people from cooperating with them<sup>216</sup>.

Communists were hunted down and many of their heads were shaved off. Those sketched by the volunteers were nabbed and handed over to the

---

<sup>215</sup> When a procession was taken out by the Communists in Onchiyam the Sena volunteers cut down all the ropes which were used for drawing water from wells in the neighbouring houses to deny water for processionists. For more details see P.P. Shaju's *Padanilangalil Poruthi Veenavar*.

<sup>216</sup> Interview with T.K. Kumaran at Onchiyam.

police and many were caught and handled by the volunteers themselves<sup>217</sup>. In some cases, they even tried the Communists and sentenced and executed punishments in public<sup>218</sup>. In this way the volunteer corps acted as a parallel police system in the post-Calcutta Thesis period. The call given by the congress leaders for the physical suppression of the Communists infused in them with spirit and enthusiasm. Mandodi Kannan in Onchiyam was hunted down by the volunteers and the tragic death of Moyyarath was mainly due to the atrocities committed on him by the volunteers. The Madras government and the police system in Malabar had given all possible help to the volunteers in suppressing the Communists and consequently no one dared to come forward to work for the party or even to help the Communist families in distress.

The ban on the party following the Calcutta Thesis and related developments left the party in the middle of the incensed ocean. All the public and party activities ceased to exist; in many areas no one dared to come forward with party programmes and even the fragments of red flag was not detectable in the stronghold of the Party. It was in such a situation that some of the party workers, after the ban on the party was lifted in 1951, showed their courage by appearing in the public space with red flag in their hands. M.K.Kunhikrishnan Nambiar played an important role in the reorganisation of the party in the Mattannur *farkka* where party activities came to a standstill with almost all the ranks and file were put behind bars<sup>219</sup>.

---

<sup>217</sup> P.P. Shaju, *op. cit.*, p.115

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> *Pazhuzzi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika*, p.55

## **Towards Parliamentary Democracy**

The year 1950 and 1951 were the years of struggle for the party to get its freedom restored.<sup>220</sup> Amidst growing ideological struggle within the party in the Post-Calcutta Thesis period, an editorial appeared in the *For a Lasting Peace, For People's Democracy*, the press organ of the Cominform. And, in the light of the editorial a central committee meeting was held in June 1950 to take stock of the existing situation<sup>221</sup>. The committee took very crucial decisions in order to avoid an imminent extinction of the party. The central committee and Politbureau were reorganised and most of the members of the Politbureau which functioned during 1948-50 were suspended. C.Rajeshwara Rao supplanted B.T.Ranadive as general secretary. Though a new leadership was installed on the top of the party, it was disbanded in December 1950 itself and a new leadership was constituted for the party which was interested in restoring unity in the party<sup>222</sup>. It has been reported that by December 1950, central committee of the party wanted to hold a discussion with central committee of Soviet party. Accordingly, four member of CPI secretly went to Moscow and met soviet leaders like Michael Suslov, V.M.Molotov, and G.M.Malankov under the leadership of Stalin<sup>223</sup>. A programme of the CPI was prepared and published in April 1951. In October 1951, this was amended and adopted by the All India Party Congress held underground in

---

<sup>220</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *op. cit.*, pp.154-155. The deliberations between the delegates of CPI and CPSU took the party to a new direction which helped Indian communists to function within the legal frame work and to draw party's attention to making use of parliamentary forums in organising widespread mass struggles.

<sup>221</sup> C. Bhaskaran, *Communist Prasthanam Indiyil*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2007, p.69

<sup>222</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *op cit.* p.157

<sup>223</sup> Mohan Ram, *Indian Communism*, Pusthaka Prasadhaka Sangham, Panthalam, 1987, p.57

Calcutta; it stated: “it will be neither only the Russian path nor the Chinese path but a path of Leninism applied to the Indian conditions”<sup>224</sup>.

The party, thus, gave up the partisan struggle adopting a new tactical line<sup>225</sup> in 1951 and fought all sorts of legal battles to get freedom for its individuals and restore its activities.<sup>226</sup> Most noteworthy was that the Government of India was not in favour of suspending the fundamental rights and the Supreme Court and High Courts also tried to uphold the individual liberty under the provisions of the constitution. As a result a large number of detenus were gradually released and by the end of 1951 a situation of normalcy was being restored. The change of policy in the party programme and the judgements relating to detention by the Supreme Court and Higher Courts created a new political atmosphere in which the Communists again carried their activities openly and thus, returned to legality.

The resultant 1951 Draft Programme and Statement of Policy, underpinned by the confidential Tactical Line, became official party policy at the third congress at Madurai in 1953 and formed the basis of its aims and tactics until the fourth congress at Palakkad in 1956<sup>227</sup>. The party decided to join hands with the leftist forces and face the congress<sup>228</sup>. At the end of June 1956, the Kerala CPI held a provincial conference at Trichur to prepare its

---

<sup>224</sup> P.Sundarayya, *Telangana People’s Struggle and its Lessons*, in K.K.N. Kurup, *op. cit.*, p.106. As a pre-requisite for the implementation of this policy, the armed struggle of the Telengana peasants was withdrawn on 2 October 1952.

<sup>225</sup> The tactical line did not abandon the concept of revolution in India as the objective of the party and that estimated that this objective could not be “realised by a peaceful , parliamentary way”

<sup>226</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op cit.* p.94. These legal fights had an important role in the restoration of freedom of peasant activists and the communists. SC and HC tried to safeguard the individual liberty as much as possible under the provisions of the existing rules and regulations.

<sup>227</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *op. cit.*, p.87. The document endorsed the concept of armed struggle and the complementarity of peasant partisan war and worker uprisings, but only when the situation was ripe.

<sup>228</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.23

own application of the Palghat Line to the Kerala situation. Further meetings in Ernakulum in October and Aluva in January 1957 underlined the party's commitment to this strategy. At the time of the third Kerala state conference at Trichur in June 1956, when the provincial units of Malabar and Travancore-cochin were amalgamated, the Party had 25000 members, some of whom were candidates (and recent) members<sup>229</sup>. Of these some 2000 were members of long standing, comrades whose commitment had stood trial<sup>230</sup>. At the time of election party claimed to have had nearly 250000 volunteer workers.

The new situation, created after the adoption of parliamentary democracy, took the party to new heights. No opportunity was left to organise the hitherto unorganised sections and party workers effectively made interventions in redressing the grievances of peasants and workers including those of *beedi*-cigar, toddy tapping, tile, coir etc. Apart from Kerala, the communists were also in the forefront of the movements in states like Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra etc. for the formation of linguistic states<sup>231</sup>.

After the adoption of new program and statement of policy, party decided to fight the democratic elections. New strategies were adopted and it started aligning itself with the other leftist parties to create the left front coalition. The first general election, held in independent India in 1951-52, awarded a spectacular victory for the alliance of Communist party mainly in the contest for assembly seats in the state of Madras. In 1953 CPI fought alone in the elections to the Malabar District Board and won the elections and

---

<sup>229</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *op. cit.*, p.143

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.* At the time of election in 1957, party claimed to have had nearly 250000 volunteer workers while at the time of the third Kerala state conference held at Trichur in June 1956, when the provincial units of Malabar and Travancore -Cochin were amalgamated, the party had 25000 members.

<sup>231</sup> C.Bhaskaran, *op. cit.*, p.76

managed to hold the post of President of the board<sup>232</sup>. It is significant that it helped party bring about socialist reforms and further broadened the social base. In 1957, the CPI won a majority in the state election and formed the first government in united Kerala.

The growth of the Communist movement in Malabar is closely related with the struggle against imperialism and landlordism. The party integrated the struggle against imperialism with the struggle against landlordism and thereby, brought a large number of people to the fold of national movement in Malabar. While struggling with the class oppressors, the Communists were at the forefront to provide relief to the people who were reeling under poverty and epidemics. This type of humanitarian and philanthropic works helped the party to retrieve its popularity which was eroded aftermath of People's War policy and Calcutta Thesis. It is to be noted that the adoption of the parliamentary democracy was crucial for the party as it avoided an imminent extinction and helped it work within the constitutional framework and get into the masses.

---

<sup>232</sup> The new executive was formed with P.T Bhaskara Panicker and K.V.Moosan Kutty as President and vice President respectively. T.P.Ramakrishnan, *Kozhikode Jilla communist Party Charithram* , p.206

## **Chapter II**

### **Communist Organisation and Malabar Society**

The chapter examines the structure and features of the Communist organisation. The historic Pinarayi conference in 1939 transformed the loose and open organisational structure of the CSP into a Communist party of steel discipline. The party came to function in a systematic manner when the ban on the party was lifted by the colonial government in 1942 following the adoption of the People's War policy. The lifting of ban on the party has effectively been used by the Communists. Legalization brought obvious organizational advantages for the party which was instrumental in designing systematic programmes to get into the masses.

The nucleus of the Party organization was party unit. Cell was the basic unit of the party. In the beginning, each cell consisted of four to five members and this number was varied in the case of cells in some localities. Cells were formed for day-to-day work in different arenas of party activity: door-to-door agitation, internal education, newspaper circulation, literature sales, information services, communications, and so on. Every local unit in rural areas carefully divided up among its members the work of door-to-door agitation, and extend this work to all villages, estates, and individual houses in the area.

Above the cell, *farkka* committees functioned and higher to this comes *taluk* and district committees and there were three district party committees like Malabar, Kochi and Travancore during 1943-45 period. These party units elected delegates to a series of party organs, reaching the top of the pyramid in the party. According to the party statutes, these bodies were to meet every 3 years and get reorganised at the Party congress. Between sessions the

congress delegates its powers to a central committee, which it elects by secret ballot. The central committee in turn elects a secretariat, an organization bureau which is entrusted with administrative functions, and a *Politbureau* or political bureau. The *Politbureau* is concerned with formulation of party policies and is the real source of authority and power in the party. The members of the *Politbureau* are named by secret ballot in the central committee of the Party. All fundamental problems of party and government policy are first threshed out in the *Politbureau*.

### **Class and Mass Organizations**

A working class party committed to building a revolutionary movement seeks to unite people of different classes overcoming the divisions that exist among them. The united movement helps build class unity among workers, peasants, agricultural workers etc. 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<sup>1</sup>. 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<sup>2</sup>. 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<sup>3</sup>. In

---

<sup>1</sup> CPIM Central Committee document “*On Approach to Mass Organisations*” (Adopted by the Central Committee at its October 29-31, 2004 Meeting. p.3

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*



Indian context Communists realized the need of an Anti-Imperialist People's Front in the 1930s and started to work within the congress and socialist parties. Even before the Dutt-Bradley thesis class organizations had been come into existence in Malabar under the aegis of the Socialists<sup>4</sup>.

### **Karshaka Sangham**

The leftists' first attempt at mass organization after they emerged from the jails in 1934 concentrated on the unorganised workers. While some of the young leftists plunged into labour organization, others involved themselves in agrarian and peasant questions. As part of this, leaders toured the countryside forming *Karshaka Sanghams* in the interior parts of Malabar. It was in July 1935 that KS was formed, with V.M. Vishnu Bharatheeyan and K.A.Keraleeyan as president and secretary at Bharatheeya Mandhir of Vishnu Bharatheeyan in Naaniyur<sup>5</sup>. The 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<sup>6</sup>. By mid-1937, *taluk* peasant conferences were meeting under the red flag, and in May 1938, an All-Malabar Peasants' Union (All Malabar Karshaka Sangham) was formed<sup>7</sup>. The socialists effectively used the congress platform to enrol people simultaneously to Congress party and to KS. Joint meetings of the Congress and Sangham were held and the nexus between the colonial government and the landlords were exposed in these meetings. The KS began to publish a

---

<sup>4</sup> The article "*The Anti-Imperialist People's Front in India*" written in February, 1936 by R.P.Dutt and Ben Bradley, who were leaders of Communist Party in Great Britain, is popularly known as the Dutt-Bradley thesis proposed a United Front tactics and asked communists to work in mass organisations and radicalise them. In accordance with it CPI declared that the agitation was to be carried on both from inside and outside the Congress and emphasised a new concept of "collective affiliation", which aimed at transforming the Congress into a people's front.

<sup>5</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *Olivukala Smrithikal*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 1995, pp.11-12

<sup>6</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac. *The National Movement and the Communist Party in Kerala*, p.63

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

weekly '*Krishikkaran*' as its organ. This weekly, edited by K.A.Keraleeyan, played an important part in the growth of peasant movement in Malabar<sup>8</sup>.

Different types of activities including literary and art forms were used to inject class consciousness among the peasants. Plays were one of the boosting factors for the growth of peasant and labour movements. In Ernad and Valluvanadu regions, plays, including "*Injju Nalla Oru Manisanakan nokku*" written by E.K.Ayamu, instigating the peasantry began to appear. K. Damodaran's plays, such as *Rakthapanam* and *Pattabakki* found enthusiastic audiences both in Calicut and in rural areas<sup>9</sup>. *Pattabakki* had an important part in encouraging and providing leadership for the peasant movement in Malabar<sup>10</sup>. This drama gave an artistic portrayal of the economic and social hardships of the peasants. It was staged in many places in Malabar especially on the sidelines of the peasants' conferences.

The KS played significant role in the growth of the Communist movement in the rural belts of Malabar. The issues pertained to the land and agriculture were taken up by the Sangham units. A number of agrarian disputes were settled with the mediation of the Sangham. Besides, almost all the agrarian struggles for alleviating the distresses of the peasantry in the 40s and 50s of the last century were organized under the banner of Sangham. When the Calcutta Thesis in 1948 gave a call for organizing an armed revolt in the country, KS was the main vehicle of the party to organize the peasantry in Malabar.

---

<sup>8</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *My Struggles, An Autobiography*, p.82

<sup>9</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *Matriliny, Marxism, and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940*, p.91

<sup>10</sup> E.K.Nayanar, *op.cit.*, p.27

## Trade Unions

The Communist party looks at the trade union movement as instruments of class revolution. The CPIM document on trade union movement seems to support this argument. “For the Marxist- Leninist party, the tasks on the trade union front is do not compromise only the tactical line of running the trade unions, as organs of daily struggle for the effective defense of the economic interests of the working class under given conditions. While defending the daily interests, they aim at organizing a disciplined working class, with revolutionary consciousness, drawing it nearer the party, with its best elements joining the party in hundreds enabling the class as a whole to play its historic role in the revolutionary struggle”<sup>11</sup>.

It was the south Indian railway strike in 1928 that created enthusiasm and organizational consciousness among the workers in Malabar<sup>12</sup>. The Socialists in Congress took the initiative in organizing workers employed in different sectors. Before 1934, there were only five to six workers unions which consisted of nearly 1500 workers in Kozhikode. In 1935 it increased to 16<sup>13</sup>. From 1935 onwards militant trade unions were formed in and around Kozhikode. The tile factory workers and spinning mill workers were the first sections to be organised and it was followed by soap workers union, the press workers union, and the cart load workers union, and the umbrella workers union etc.<sup>14</sup> In May 1935, an All Kerala Workers Conference was organised in Kozhikode and an All Kerala Workers Union was formed with P.Krishna

---

<sup>11</sup> CPIM Review on Trade Union Front, 2002 in Zacaria, T. V. *Interface between Environmental and Trade Union Movements in Kerala*, unpublished phd Thesis, University of Mysore, 2012

<sup>12</sup> P.K. Gopalakrishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Charithram*, The State Institute of Languages, Thiruvananthapuram, 1974. p.564

<sup>13</sup> Andalath, *Keralahile Thozhilali Vargathinte Piravi*, Chinthra Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1984. p. 106

<sup>14</sup> K. GopalanKutty, *Radical Movements in Twentieth Century* . p.551

Pillai as the secretary<sup>15</sup>. In Thalasseri area initiative to organize the Spinning workers was taken by P.Krishnapillai and C.H.Kanaran and the formation meeting of the union was held near Thiruvangattu temple on 28 January 1938 with Krishna pillai as president<sup>16</sup>. In the course of time different unions like the Weaving Workers Union, Beedi-Cigar Workers Union and Rickshaw Workers Union etc. began to get formed.

When the trade unions opened their offices about 75 percent of workers joined in the unions. The leaders started to visit the work places in the morning and evening times and read out newspapers to the workers. The Communists ensured the presence of party literature in their work places<sup>17</sup>. Through this the workers began to develop class consciousness and they thought that they would not win their demands without organizational strength. The organisation of the workers under the red flag created an aura of strikes against the injustice and inhuman treatments of their class oppressors through out Malabar.

### **Teachers' Movement**

The teachers of the aided schools played an important role in the growth of the Communist movement in Malabar. Though there were efforts at unionisation among the primary school teachers during the time of CDM, the teachers movement gained ground only after the formation of the KCSP and along with the movements of the workers and the peasants<sup>18</sup>. Their regular union activities began in 1934 and in that year an Aided School Teachers' Union was formed in Kallyasseri. This was followed by teachers' meeting in

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.551.

<sup>16</sup> G.D. Nair, *C.H.Kanaran Jeevithavum Samaravum*, Progress Publication, Calicut, 2015. p.42

<sup>17</sup> T.K.Hamsa, *op. cit.*, p.31

<sup>18</sup> K. GopalanKutty, *op.cit.*, p.561

Karivalloor. Units of Teachers Union were formed in Kottayam, Kurubranad, Valluvanad Taluks and it culminated in the formation of an all Malabar committee at Thalassery in February 1935 in which an adhoc committee with T.C Narayanan Nambiar as president was formed. By December 1935, unionisation had developed well and a Conference of the Malabar Aided School Teachers Union was convened at Kozhikode<sup>19</sup>.

The village teachers became the backbone of the library movement and literary campaign and frequently the chief organisers of political and mass activities in the villages<sup>20</sup>. By the late 1930s, the leftists had also won over large numbers of teachers in Malabar's widespread system of vernacular schools. They not only organized themselves but organized youths and students. A. K. Gopalan himself had been a teacher in such a school. The left wing controlled the teachers union and it claimed 4,000-5,000 members<sup>21</sup>. It was these teachers who later became the leaders of the Communist movement in the country sides of Malabar. Many of the teachers were the organisers of the peasant movements and initiators of the peasant struggles in Malabar. Some of them resigned from their jobs and became full-time political workers.

Unionisation of the teachers helped them raise their voice of protest against illegal practices being existed in the aided sector. The Union raised its demands through the resolutions passed in its annual sessions held at different places. Many of the teachers were office bearers of the congress and socialist committees and many of them later joined Communist party after its official ban was lifted. The teachers union members were in the forefront of the struggle against imperialism. The teachers union also extended support to the

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p.562

<sup>20</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac, *op.cit.*, p.64

<sup>21</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op.cit.*,p.92

struggles of the other sections of the society like workers and the peasants<sup>22</sup>. Along with the peasants and workers, the teachers holding red flag in their hands, participated in the struggles, courted arrest and encountered bullets.

### **Organization of the Students**

The students were drawn to the national movement and later to the socialist and communist movement through the student's organisations. Students were mobilised by the congress and socialist activists during 1936-37. It was in June 1937, that the unit of the Kerala Students Federation was formed at Kozhikode. Following this branches of the students federation were formed and launched protests against the government and school authorities. Resolutions demanding the freedom to form unions and organise meetings and condemning the attitude of the authorities in threatening union activities were passed. A resolution condemning the Madras Government Gazette which forbade students from joining political parties led to heated debates but was passed unanimously<sup>23</sup>.

Students organizations were formed not only in Malabar but also in the princely states of Cochin and Travancore. In Malabar students federation were led by leaders like Imbichi Bava and Kallottu Krishnan. The CSP members asked the students organization to work with the illiterate rural masses and tried to arouse them a consciousness. Based on this the Palakkad session of the students union adopted resolution related to Anti-illiteracy programme<sup>24</sup>. In 1939, the Students Federation members undertook the touring of many villages to educate the peasantry. Some of the units of the federation had its own offices and conducted readings rooms. At the third

---

<sup>22</sup> Vallathol Kumara Menon, *Adhyapaka Prasthanam Uthara Keralathil*, in K. GopalanKutty, *op.cit.*, p.564.

<sup>23</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1939 in K. GopalanKutty, *op.cit.*, p.567

<sup>24</sup> Vineeth R. *International Communism and Communist Movement in Kerala -1919 to 1964*, unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of History, University of Calicut. p.201

Kerala Students' Federation Conference held at Kozhikode, the members were asked to start gymnasia and encourage sports, conduct matches and tournaments to foster discipline and team spirit among the students, to organise study groups and organise debates on topics relating to history, science, cinema and photography, to work for the eradication of illiteracy and to stage exhibitions and sports for the same and to organise girls separately by conducting music and knitting competitions for them<sup>25</sup>.

### **Youth Wings**

In the mobilisation of the youths socialists played an important role. The *Abhinava Bharata Yuvajana Sangham* (hereafter ABYS) started in 1935 under the initiative of A.V.Kunhambu was the most active youth organisation in north Malabar. By 1938, the Yuvajana Sangham had branches in 8 villages in Chirakkal. The members did constructive works like repairing roads, cleaning wells and canals and also cleaning the houses of the poor<sup>26</sup>. Relief committees were organised by the sangham during workers's strikes and night classes were conducted for illiterate peasants. They were also given political education. Efforts were made to develop the oratorical skill among the youth<sup>27</sup>. Notably, the ABYS workers had played active role in many social issues. Boundary, property and family issues were settled with the intervention of the Sangham. Many who later emerged as prominent socialists and communists were in the beginning Yuvak Sangham activists.

Similar organisations were formed throughout Malabar to organise the youths. One was the *Punnol Yuvajana Sangham* which was formed by C.H.Kanaramin in line with ABYS<sup>28</sup>. This organisation also earned reputation

---

<sup>25</sup> *Prabhatam*, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1939 in K. GopalanKutty, *op.cit.*, p.568

<sup>26</sup> M.N. Kurup, *Kunhambuvinte Katha*, D.C.Books Kottayam, 1982. pp.117-134

<sup>27</sup> K. GopalanKutty, *op.cit.*, p.569

<sup>28</sup> G.D. Nair, *op. cit.*,p.36

of the people through its works. In places like Kathiroom committees of unemployed were formed and new hymns were also composed. The programme was to get the masses acquainted with the declared aim of the congress, implement the decisions of the congress and to stress the revolutionary aspect of those decisions and to orient congress activities according to this programme.

### **Bala Sangham**

The leaders of the Socialist movement took initiative in organizing children through their *vayanasala* activities. They had raised their voice of protest against the denial of education to children on the ground of caste. Special *pallikoodams* or elementary schools were opened as part of *vayanasala* movement and children were imparted education. *Vayanasalas* served as a platform for different types of activities of all sorts of people who used to assemble there in the evenings. *Harshan Vayanasala* at Kallyassery in Kannur took initiative in forming an organisation of children on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1936 which was named *Adhyayana Samajam*<sup>29</sup>. Training in delivering speech, essay presentation and poem reciting were imparted to children at the centre.

In 1938 a meeting of the *Adhyayana Samajam* with E.K.Nayanar as president decided to spread the children's movement with the name *Dhesheeya Bala Sanghadana* across the *taluk*<sup>30</sup>. When *Dhesheeya Bala Sanghadana* otherwise called *Bala Sangham* (hereafter BS) was formed, P.K.Kunhanandhan Nair served as its secretary<sup>31</sup>. Local organisations which were functioning without a central direction in Chirakkal were thus brought under a unified organisation<sup>32</sup>. Membership was open to boys between the

---

<sup>29</sup> M.N. Kurup's article in P.K. Baiju(ed), *Nayanar: Oru Ormapusthakam*, p.24

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> He was popularly called Berlin Kunhanandhan Nair

<sup>32</sup> K. GopalanKutty, *op.cit.*, p.569



ages of 8 and 18. Shortly after the formation, Chirakkal, Kottayam and Kasargod became the centres of the movement. It was reported that there were 8 Bala Sangham units which worked in Malabar during this period which included those of Kasargod, Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kuraumbranadu, Kozhikode, Eranadu, Valluvanadu and Ponnanni<sup>33</sup>.

Thus, simultaneous with the development of the peasant movement, BS too registered a remarkable growth. Krishna pillai asked party workers to form BS units in their localities incorporating children. From 1942 onwards it began to be active. Under the direct supervision of the party, children's squads were formed and conducted door to door visit campaign. A notable event was the procession of the children at Chirakkal in April 1943<sup>34</sup>. During the time of party working underground especially during 1940-42, services of children were used as part of *Tech* system<sup>35</sup>. Children were used to hand over messages to the leaders working underground<sup>36</sup>. Berlin Kunhanandhan Nair who was the secretary of Chirakkal *Taluk Bala Sangham* informed the death sentence of K.P.R Gopalan to one Govindhan and directed him to bring children to take out a procession against it. Govindhan organised children including his nephew Sankaran. Thus, a children's procession was organised from Kambil to Naraath<sup>37</sup>.

Apart from this, children's services were effectively used in different capacities. At the time of Aaron Mill strike at Pappinisseri, BS workers organised fund collection. When Aron mill strike in Kannur was going on BS

---

<sup>33</sup> T.P.Ramakrishnan(ed.), *Kozhikode Jilla Communist Party Charitram*, Second Part. p.53

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Tech system was implemented to share communications among the Communists working underground.

<sup>36</sup> P. Jayarajan, *Kannur Jilla Communist Party Charithram*, Vol-2, Pattiam Gopalan Smaraka Patana Gaveshana Kendram, Kannur, 2013. p.235

<sup>37</sup> K.Balakrishnan, *Chadayan Poraliyum Theraliyum*, p.24-25

children under Chadayan Govindhan conducted a door to door visit to collect produces for helping the striking workers. Jack fruit, coconut, rice etc. thus, were collected and taken to the Aaron mill<sup>38</sup>. On an occasion, during the time of the fund collection drive, children happened to get a squirrel and it was handed over to the committee of striking workers. The committee managed to collect a fair amount for it through the auction<sup>39</sup>. Similarly children collected eggs from houses and given to party fund. It was also auctioned off<sup>40</sup>. It is noteworthy that many of the BS workers later became leaders and organisers of peasants' and workers' organizations and active cadres of the Communist party.

### **Women's Organisations**

Women who were denied their rights were not silenced as earlier. They began to have the backing of an organisation and through *Mahila Samajams* they themselves were organised to a certain extent. Mahila Samajams began to be formed in 1937 and they were active in Kozhikode, Kottayam, Chirakkal, and Kasargod taluks. In Chirakkal, and Kasargod, *Mahila Samajams* were organised under the auspices of the KS and were composed of peasants and lower middle class women. The samajams made women politically conscious<sup>41</sup>.

The formations of *Mahila Samajams* helped to question the traditional authorities and irrational practices in many places. Study classes and training in learning and writing were held under the auspices of *vayanasalas*. Women started to play leading role in organizing party programmes and activities. Volunteer camps were organized to make women aware of political affairs.

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p.26

<sup>39</sup> P. Jayarajan , *op. cit.*, p.236

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*p.237

<sup>41</sup> K. GopalanKutty, *op.cit.*, p.570

One such was Malabar Area Volunteer Camp organised by the Communists which was held at S.J.M *Vayanasala*; Kunjakkamma played important role in it<sup>42</sup>. Women played a significant role in a number of distress relief activities and land struggles. *Pullariyal* strike in different parts of Kasargod which was for the restoration of the right to cut grass for making the roof of the hutments of the poor and *Kalamkettu Samaram* which was organized in protest against police atrocities held at Kandakkai on 22-01-1947 deserve special mention<sup>43</sup>.

Women activists who joined the Communist Party were from all religious groups and communities. In all the periods when the party was underground, or in the long years when the party was banned, communist women played a heroic role in defending the party. Many duties were assigned to the active women workers like protecting of leaders during their underground, passing of secret message to a particular person or destinations, providing shelter and food to the underground leaders, watching the movements of outsiders in the area etc. Such responsibilities had been carried out very successfully by the women cadres. They succeeded in raising and instilling discipline even among the children while the leaders hiding their house. They also worked within the All India Women's Conference which was formed in 1929. It is the Communist women in the decade of the forties who were at the forefront in the campaign for Hindu Law reform<sup>44</sup>.

Like BS workers, they also played a significant role in the *Tech* system by helping their male counterparts in the party. During the times of underground activities, leaders had taken asylum not only in the *chettakudils* (meanest huts) of the poor but also in the *illams* of Namboothiris. At these

---

<sup>42</sup> K. Balakrishnan, *op cit.*, p.17

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Brinda Karat, *100 Year of Formation Booklet*, C.P.I.M Publication, 2019. p.36

times Communist women, as per the decision of the Party, used to keep food in a special pot while making at home which was earmarked for the leaders working underground. Woman squad collected such food from each of these house and they were taken to the absconding leaders.<sup>45</sup>

### **Arts Club**

In the later half of the thirties Malabar witnessed a cultural awakening and national movement embraced every aspect of life of the people<sup>46</sup>. At the onset of the formation of the party in Malabar, the art forms had become an important medium for the propagation of communist ideas. Songs were played and plays were staged along with party programmes with a view to woo the people to the party. Selected members were given training in art forms at special camps organized under the party itself which were occasionally held at different places.

The theatre movement developed as one of the key factors behind the social change. Plays were one of the boosting factors for the growth of class consciousness among the peasants and labourers. K. Damodaran's plays encouraged the peasant movement in Malabar<sup>47</sup>. In 1937-38 period, it is said, there was no one in Malabar who had not heard of *Pattabakki*. Damodaran's writings were enough to instill class consciousness among the people and it is in this sense that AKG called him as the first *Ezhuthachan* of the party<sup>48</sup>.

In southern part of Malabar, plays and songs instigated the peasantry. Among them the most popular play was "*Injju Nalla Oru Manisanakan*

---

<sup>45</sup> M.K. Manoharan, *Dhaivathinte Snanagruham in Communist Party, Pinarayi-Parapram Sammelanam, Varshikaghosham-2005* souvenir, p.43

<sup>46</sup> M. Thomas Isaac, *The National Movement and the Communist Party in Kerala*, Social Scientist, Vol. 14, No. 8/9, Aug. - Sep., 1986, p.64

<sup>47</sup> E.K.Nayanar, *My Struggles, An Autobiography*, p.27

<sup>48</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *Athmakatha*, First Part, Prabhath Book House, Ernakulam. pp.149-150

*nokku*” and the notable speciality of the drama was that, a Muslim woman appeared on the stage for the first time<sup>49</sup>. In 1946 a play named *Usha Nirudham* was staged in which a song was sung which was full of sarcasm against Kallyattu *janmi*<sup>50</sup>. In south Malabar the play “*Ithu Bhoomiyanu*” of K.T.Muhammad created a great stir in the conservative sections of Eranad and Valluvanad taluks<sup>51</sup>. Consequent to the play, *fatwas* were issued on the dramas and dramatists. *Jedhakkal* of PonkunnamVarkey, *Thottilla* of Thakazhi, *Vellapokkam* of Kuttanadu Ramakrishna Pillai etc. were other plays during this period<sup>52</sup>.

The first party congress which was held in Bombay in 1943 was a platform for the manifestation of different art and folk forms from different places. It was at this congress that a central-cultural forum was formed called Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA).<sup>53</sup> The party congress was also marked by popular arts festival. *Velakkali* and *Nadan Pattukal* were the items performed by those from Kerala. It was during this time that the artists from Kerala came into contact with the IPTA and progressive writers association<sup>54</sup>.

The formation of IPTA had its repercussions in Kerala as well: cultural programmes gathered momentum along with the programmes of the

---

<sup>49</sup> T.K. Hamza, *Njan Engane Communistayi*, Chintha Publication, Thirunanandapuram, 2011. p,31

<sup>50</sup> P.Jayarajan(ed), *op. cit.*, p.249

<sup>51</sup> K.M. Raghavan Nambiar, *K.T. Muhammad*, in Panmana Ramachandran Nair (Ed) *Nataka Padanangal* (Mal), P.K Parameswaran Nair Memorial Trust , Thiruvanandapuram,p.p-144-152)

<sup>52</sup> K.N.Ganesh et. al. (ed.) *Keralathile Communist PartyudeCharithram1940-1952*, second part, Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, p.172. These plays including *Prathima* were banned by the princely state of Travancore.

<sup>53</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam Ulbhavavum Valarchayum* , Chintha, Thirunanandapuram, 2008 p.104

<sup>54</sup> K.N.Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.116

communist party and in 1950 KPAC ( Kerala Peoples Arts Club) was formed. It was formed for spreading ideological awareness and messages of social emancipation. Its first drama *Ente Makananu Shari* was staged and in 1952 *Ningalenne Communistakki* got its birth<sup>55</sup>. As part of the fascist aggression, the Communists organised 'anti-Jap melas' and utilized all the cultural forms like Kathakali, Koothu, Kootiyattam, Theyyattam, drama etc. for it.

A number of *kalasamithees* or cultural troupes or were set up with a dedicated group of volunteers under the party supervision. Many of the clubs and troupes were formed with the initiative of the *vayanasalas*. MPAC (Mokeri People's Arts Club) was formed with V.P.Balakrishnan as secretary and K.G.Nambiar as president under the auspices of the party but it accommodated all the people irrespective of party colour<sup>56</sup>. Under the club, plays were staged; *Makkale Ningal Nallavaraanu* written by V.P.Balakrishnan was the first play staged. As some of the plays were staged for the party, opponents made attempts to disrupt the programmes<sup>57</sup>. At Vatakara, *Munnani Kalsamithi* was formed by the initiative of comrade Aboobakker Kallingal and others and special camps were organised and training in different art forms including play was given. It directed a play which was performed on nearly 100 stages including Kannur as part of party conferences<sup>58</sup>.

At Alathur a *kalasamithi* was started by one T. Damu who was an artist excelled in music and dance. Children to aged persons were members of the *kalasamithi* and many plays were staged under its supervision. Once a

---

<sup>55</sup> Shibu Muthattu, *Idathupaksha Nirmithiyude Nadaka Padangal* in *Sakhavu C.P.Balan Vaidhyar Smaranika*, Kannur,2013, p.83

<sup>56</sup> K.G. Nambiar, *Ormakurippukal*, Image Publishers, Kozhikode, 2013, p.47

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.48-49

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Aboobakker Kallingal at Kottakadavu, Vatakara on 06-11-2021. The play was directed by Aboobakker himself.

play mocking the *janmi* system written by R.Krishnan and directed by T.Damu himself was staged<sup>59</sup>. Following the stiff opposition from the elites, the play was later put under ban. Similarly, at Onchiyam near Vatakara Koroth Kandy ChathuVaidhyar, who composed *Thacholi Pattukal*, had formed a collective of artists and under his supervision training was imparted in different cultural programmes<sup>60</sup>. The troupe played an important part in organising anti-Jap programmes during the second world war period held at Vatakara.

*Kalasarmitis* which were formed throughout Malabar were instrumental in inculcating class consciousness and in arousing enthusiasm among the peasantry. At Macchil in Kannur, a play named *Visakkunna Karinkali* was staged under *Kambil Nava Kerala Kalavedhi*. The play which portrayed the life of the people in distress was inaugurated by Vayalar Rama Varma and the characters of the play were workers themselves in and around Kambil.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, the play named *Puthiyavar* was staged by *Payam Desheeya Kalasarmiti* in Kannur on the occasion of Sivarathri festival<sup>62</sup>. *Aikya Keala Kalasarmiti* which was formed by M.K.Panokkotti at Panikkotti near Vatakara was another significant arts club under which different cultural programmes were organised<sup>63</sup>.

Plays were also organized as part of fund mobilization. As per the party decision Red Aid Fund was planned in the post war period to be mobilized for conducting cases for those involved in Karivellur case. Staging

---

<sup>59</sup> K.N.Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.67

<sup>60</sup> P.P. Shaju, *Padanilangalil Poruthi Veenavar*, Chintha, Thiruvanthapuram, 2012. p.96

<sup>61</sup> *Deshabhimani Daily*, 10-12-1955. An amount of Rs. 50, balance after meeting the expenditure of the play, was contributed to the 4<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Fund.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 26-02-1955. Characters of the play donated one rupees from their remuneration to the party fund.

<sup>63</sup> M.K Panikkotty, *Amruthasmaranakal*, Poorna Publication, Calicut, 2005. p.p.66-68

the play *Anaadha* by *Kannapuram Kalasamithi* on 22-03-1947 is to be seen in this context<sup>64</sup>. It was as part of *Deshabhimani* fund collection that P.M.Nani, a teacher and one of the early women leaders of KS came forward to stage a skit<sup>65</sup>.

The arts forms were effective weapon for the ideological propagation of the party which resulted in inviting the attention of the authorities and tightening control over them. With the authorities began to give their eyes and ears to them, these programmes were brought under the strict surveillance of the police. At many places police disrupted the skits and characters were manhandled. In 1946, during the play *Usha Nirudham* which was full of sarcasm against Kallyattu *janmi* was under way *Janmi* goons attacked the actors of the drama<sup>66</sup>. Similarly, in 1946 when an attempt was made to stage the play *Mochanam*, police came and disrupted the programme and drove the people away<sup>67</sup>.

The arts clubs, through dramas, road shows etc., formed under the auspices of the party played a significant role in popularising communism in Kerala. The plays produced in 1930s and 1940s emphasised the need for reforming the society and they had a strong ideology that stood in favour of gender equality. Some of the plays like *Ningalenne Communistakki* (You Made Me a Communist) which was widely performed throughout Kerala became path-breaking in the social history of Kerala. And, some created a great stir among the orthodoxy shaking its foundation which indicates the indebt capacity and influence of theatre movement.

---

<sup>64</sup> *Cheruthazham- Charithravaum Samskaravum*, Souvenir, Cheruthazham Grama Panchayath, 2010. P.107

<sup>65</sup> P.Jayarajan, *Kannur Jilla Communist Party Charithram*, Vol-2, Pattiam Gopalan Smaraka Patana Gaveshana Kendram, Kannur, 2013.p.p.224-225

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p.249

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p.245



## Print Media

The Communists, while working as Socialists within KPCC, had recognised the potential of newspapers in the political sphere as *Mathrubhumi* in Kozhikode was used by the right wing congress. With the left wing gathering momentum in Malabar, the contest between the left and the right within the KPCC got strengthened that forced the former to think of using media to achieve their goals. Within months after the formation of CSP a new Malayalam weekly started publication known as *Prabhatam* as a weekly<sup>68</sup>. It was the first left newspaper in Kerala that was brought out in January 1935 from Shornur. *Prabhatam* contained sketches of Lenin's life, eulogies about the Soviet Union, and attacks on the British government. Although its print run probably never exceeded 1,000 copies, it was widely used throughout the district in connection with a program of study classes. The newspaper lasted for a short period; it stopped publishing in August 1935 when the Madras Government demanded a Rs. 2,000 security<sup>69</sup>.

In 1938, the printing of *Prabhatham* resumed in Kozhikode but its permission was revoked after the start of Second World War. When *Prabhatham* ceased to exist in October 1939, the party was not in a position to publish a paper of its own for a period of one year. In November 1940, a press was set up at and a notice condemning the police atrocities consequent to 16 September 1939 incidents was published<sup>70</sup>. With Chirakkal as centre, the party also had started a publication known as *Communist* for party cadres<sup>71</sup>. During the time when *Prabhatham* was banned Moyyarath

---

<sup>68</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *op. cit.*, pp.377-78

<sup>69</sup> Robin Jeffry, *op. cit.*, p.90. Its license was suspended following refusal to furnish security to government consequent on the publication of a poem on Bhagat Sing's martyrdom.

<sup>70</sup> The day was observed as protest day by the left wing.

<sup>71</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.169

Sankaran with the help of P.C.Raghavan Nair and Imbichootti published some leaflets like *Thozhilali Vargapatha*, *Kadapuzhakiya Samraajyathwam*, *Dhinajpoorile Krishikkaar* etc. from a hide out in Makkada village near Kozhikode<sup>72</sup>.

It was only after the lifting of the ban on the Party in 1942 that publications were started by the Party. On 6 September 1942 *Deshabhimani* was started as a monthly publication<sup>73</sup>. It opposed Quit India movement and supported the "anti-fascist" war being waged by Britain and the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, *Deshabhimani* troubled British and princely authorities. Within a month, the district magistrate of Malabar was keen to get the paper to post a bond, which it would forfeit if it went too far in attacking the British or the *maharajas* of Cochin or Travancore<sup>74</sup>. The government took a good-behavior bond of 1,000 rupees from the paper in April 1943, but the Communists replied with a request to turn the weekly into a daily, which was denied<sup>75</sup>.

When the second world war came to an abrupt end, *Desabhimani* got permission to become a daily in 1946<sup>76</sup>. But the state surveillance on the party and its feeder organizations got tightened with the developments of peasant insurgencies. The district magistrate wrote that "the political situation in

---

<sup>72</sup> Moyarath Sankaran, *Athmakatha*, sahithyaprarvathaka co-operative society Ltd. Kottayam 2021, p. 231

<sup>73</sup> It was published as a weekly in 1944 and in 1946 it was converted into a daily.

<sup>74</sup> Report from A. R. MacEwen, District Magistrate, Malabar, to the chief secretary, Madras government, October 20, 1942, in Madras Public (Press), no. 251, January 23, 1943 in Robin Jeffrey's *Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers, and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800–2009*, The Journal of Asian Studies Vol. 68, No. 2 (May) 2009. p.476

<sup>75</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.169. As per the communist party version, what had made authorities impose a fine of 1000 was the publication of an editorial titled "*ThookkumarathinteVili*" *ThookkumarathinteVili* (The call of the gallows). in the context of the hanging of kayyur comrades.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

Malabar, where the Communists were strong, has considerably deteriorated due to the open declaration of faith in violence preached by the paper”<sup>77</sup>. The Madras government headed by T. Prakasam, declared the original bond forfeited and demanded a new bond of 4,000 rupees. Desabhimani protested but paid at once<sup>78</sup>.

The contest between the government and party on deposits and fund-raising went on throughout 1947 and 1948 and in April 1948 following Calcutta thesis declaration, Desabhimani was banned by the Madras government; it remained banned until 1951<sup>79</sup>. For the restoration of the party organ, some of the veteran congress leaders of Malabar had issued statements and helped the CPI in shaping the public opinion<sup>80</sup>. During the period from 1948 to 1951 party continued publishing in different names—*Republic, Kerala News, Viswa Keralam, Navalokam, Janayugam and Navajeevan*. These publications helped the party carry on its campaign for the progress of the society. Following the ban on the party got lifted in 1951 the ban on *Deshabhimani* was also lifted, and it tremendously helped party’s growth.

It was of great necessity for a party like CPI to maintain a newspaper at any cost for its sustainability. When the party mouthpiece *Deshabhimani* was in trouble due to the judicial interference the entire party machinery including the class and mass organisations swung into action to defend it. The importance given to fund raising and the quick response from the rank and file underline the reach and potency of party mouth piece. Despite suppressive measures adopted by the government and malignant campaigns

---

<sup>77</sup> Report of R. P. Kapur, District Magistrate, to the Chief Secretary, April 24, 1946, in Madras Public (General), no. 692, March 4, 1947 in Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, P.477

<sup>78</sup> Report of H. K. Mathews, Subcollector in charge, to the Chief Secretary, December 19, 1946, in Madras Public (General), no. 692, March 4, 1947 in Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> Government Order no. 873, April 10, 1948, in Madras Public (General), no. 873, April 10, 1948 in Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, p.478

<sup>80</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala*, p.52.

against the party unleashed by the opponents, party managed to survive and it was only through its print media. *Deshabhimani*'s circulation never exceeded 8,000 copies in the 1940s, though Malabar District had a population of 4 million<sup>81</sup>. Nevertheless, it reached a much larger number of people in every nook and cranny of Malabar. Usually news in the paper were written in red ink and pasted on walls. It was the party workers in the respective localities who took *Desabhimani* to the common folk in villages. They used to read out it to the public at places like *beedi* companies, tea and toddy shops, ayurveda shops, reading rooms and wherever people used to throng. It was also reported that *Desabhimani* was read out by the Communist teachers to their students<sup>82</sup>. The party messages, ideas and programmes were taken, thus, to the grass root through the downward filtration. It enabled the formulation and discussion of social and political issues and the mobilization of significant numbers of people around such issues.

### **Features of Party Organisation**

It can rightly be observed that the attitude of the Party towards the basic socio- economic and socio-political problems, both in domestic and international spheres, is to a large extent, if not solely, determined by the lines indicated by international communism<sup>83</sup>. In India also the changing phases of the Communist attitude towards different problems have been partly determined by the interplay of factors involving various forces in world politics. At several crucial moments Party leaders did not hesitate to seek opinions of Soviet leaders on Indian politics. It was the ardent admiration that the Kerala communists always had for the Soviet Union that enabled them

---

<sup>81</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, p.478

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Taufiq Ahmad Nizami, *Marxism and the Communist Party of India*, p.110

to tide over the confusion created by the new tactics adopted by the CPI during the second phase of the War.

Party discipline is the ability of a parliamentary group of a political party to get its members support the policies of their party leadership. The cadre system differentiated the Communist party from other mainstream political organizations that helped it to maintain a systematic machinery within a disciplinary framework. On account of this, utmost care and vigilance was strictly maintained while giving membership to new comers. New members were admitted to the party on individual application and through party cells on the recommendation of two members. Party councils at all levels also had the power to admit new members to the party. The general body meeting of the party cell decided on the question of admission and, if the applicant was admitted to the party, he or she was to be regarded as candidate member for a period of six months commencing from the date of such admission<sup>84</sup>.

The party unit admitting candidate members arranged for their elementary education on the programme, constitution and the policies of the party and observed their development through providing their functioning as members of a unit. By the end of the period of candidature, the party branch or unit concerned discussed whether the candidate member was qualified to be admitted to full membership<sup>85</sup>. If a candidate member is found unfit, the branch or unit may cancel his or her candidate membership. The higher unit may, on scrutiny of the report, alter or modify any such decision after consultation with the branch or unit which has submitted the report.

---

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Aboobakker Kallingal at his residence in Kottakadavu, Vatakara on 06-11-2021.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

Party members placed the interests of the people and the party above personal interests and cultivated comradely relations towards one another and constantly developed a fraternal spirit within the party. Each member regularly participated in the activity of the party units and faithfully carried out the policies, decisions and the directives of the party. They had devotedly served the masses and consistently strengthened their bonds with them, to learn from the masses and report their opinions and demands to the party, to work in a mass organisation under the guidance of the party.

In its efforts to have a genuinely active membership, the party asked everyone in its ranks to commit their energy and time to the party, to the extent possible under given circumstances, and to always do their best in its service. Full time party workers were the backbone of the organization and party's everyday activities were carried out through them<sup>86</sup>. There were three basic requirements, as prescribed by the party that a full time member as leaders has to abide by; severing the tie with family, abandoning the private property and leading the life of bachelor<sup>87</sup>. The decisions taken by some leaders to forgo their property and by some others to sell their property and give its amount to party have to be viewed in this context. The delay in getting married by many of the party leaders in the 1940s was also the result of this type of requirement of the party<sup>88</sup>.

The noble quality of each party member was to practice criticism and self-criticism with a view to helping each other and improving individual and collective work. Every party member has the right to express their opinions and make proposals, comments, and complaints at any time directly to the

---

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Bhaskara Panikkar at his residence in Vatakara on 05-05-2021

<sup>87</sup> K.N.Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.52

<sup>88</sup> K.A.Keraleeyan and his colleagues formed an organization called Bachelors Association. This was for dedicating to full time political activities. They thought that marriage would hinder their political activities.

party units. Each and all policies and programmes and political and organizational issues were put to discussions in the party forums. Not even central committee or politbureau members were exempted from criticism which was held even in the lower units of the party. All the heated discussions and criticism were within the organizational framework of the party. For instance, the People's War policy adopted in 1941 placed party in a state of ideological confusion with some cadres coming out in open against it. Similar was the case of Calcutta Thesis of 1948 and thus, the party cell meetings were platforms of serious and hot discussions and arguments on the party policies. The revered and popular leaders had to encounter questions from the ordinary workers.

Similarly, the highest duty of every member was to defend the party against class enemies. Anyone who forgot this and publicly attacked the party were treated as enemy of the party. Members were not supposed to criticize the leadership or policies outside the party forums. In case such criticism against party policies and programmes was made by any member he or she was liable to be disciplinary action. Serious violation of discipline may warrant his or her suspension or expulsion from the party.

The democratic centralism was an important characteristic of the Party organization and it is a synthesis, a fusion of centralism and proletarian democracy. In creating a party of a new type V.I.Lenin had creatively developed and rendered concrete ideas on a proletarian party set down by Marx and Engels, and first of all their idea of democratic centralism<sup>89</sup>. In elaborating the ideological and organisational principles of a revolutionary party Marx and Engels saw its primary historic mission in organising the working class, ensuring indissoluble proletarian unity in class battles and in

---

<sup>89</sup> Pyotr Rodionov, *What Is Democratic Centralism?*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1988, Translated from the Russian by Nikolai Lenov, P.9

the struggle for the transformation of society on new, communist principles, the profound and comprehensive analysis of the revolutionary practice had led them to conclude that this great and noble mission could be accomplished by the party of the working class only if that party relied in its activities on the principle of democratic centralism<sup>90</sup>.

Centralization in the Communist Party does not mean formal, mechanical centralization, but the centralization of Communist activity, i.e., the creation of a leadership that is strong and effective and at the same time flexible. Formal or mechanical centralization would mean the centralization of power in the hands of the Party bureaucracy, allowing it to dominate the other members of the Party or the revolutionary proletarian masses which are outside the Party. Instead, democratically elected committees in working-class districts and regions should guide the work of the organization in those localities, suggesting a high degree of relative autonomy within the organization. This is projected as a way of providing political leadership in a manner ensuring that close contact is maintained between it and the broad masses of party members in the various locales. The party emphasizes the need for active participation of all members in the organization to ensure that its members are really active, must demand that they give all their time and energy to Party work.

The training of the Communist cadres was very important part in creating discipline and organizational capacity among them. It was the facility used while staying in the congress organization to indoctrinate and impart filtered information to the cadres that played a pivotal role in the mass conversion of the congress socialists in 1939 to Communists<sup>91</sup>. Cadres or the

---

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* p.6

<sup>91</sup> All the 90 participants in the meeting were unanimous in converting the entire socialist group in to communist party.



intermediate leadership played a very important role in a political organization. Information flow from top leadership is brought down to the rank and file through the medium of the intermediate leadership or cadres. Top leadership was quite aware of the importance of the training of cadres and so they worked tirelessly in this field. Several training camps had been organized by the communists under the auspices of the KPCC. During the works as congressmen many cadres had experiences in organizing and taking study classes; Hindi classes and classes on Gandhian ideas were regularly conducted and notably, socialism and USSR had been given special time in their classes<sup>92</sup>. These classes were, in reality, centers for disseminations of socialist-communist ideology. Similar was the case of training centers organized by the socialists and persons thus trained at these centers acted as teachers to teach village level activists later.

After the party formation in 1939 a centralized form was given to the training and study classes. State level trainings were organised for the selected volunteers and what was done there was physical and mental learning<sup>93</sup>. Hundreds of volunteers selected from all over the state participated in such camps and thus, a well trained volunteer corps was kept ready within disciplinary framework of the party. Those who got trained at these centres conducted classes and imparted training at the district, *farkka* and villages levels. Party saw in every member and every revolutionary worker the future soldier in his historic role in the battle at the moment of revolution. Thus, systematic training and learning throughout the state became a new type of political activity and it was the peculiarity of the communist party alone.

---

<sup>92</sup> Primary school teachers played an important part in organising such classes. Large majority of the local level leaders of the communist party were elementary school teachers.

<sup>93</sup> Several such camps had been organised; a one month long learning and training camp at MankadaPallipuram was on these lines. Koliyodan Narayanan Master was one volunteer and his batch was given training by one V.Kunhi Kannan who got trained at Mankada. *Karivellur Struggle 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir*, Kannur, 2006, p.175

It was this trained cadres who implemented party policies and programmes at the local level. With this organizational capacity, party started organizing strikes and distress relief works and all the actions were carried out in an organized manner. The systematic and disciplined style of functioning of the party, their critical approach, demand for change, exciting call for the creation of a new world order etc. attracted many to Communism<sup>94</sup>. In fact such an organizational structure made the party different from other political organizations and enabled it to successfully carry out political programmes. It was due to this frame work of discipline that Communist Party in Kerala became a major political force which had been influencing all spheres of life in the state since its origin in 1939.

### **Underground Party Units**

After the Calcutta Conference of the party in 1933, the British government decided to crack down and declared the Communist Party illegal in July 1934<sup>95</sup>. The CPI thus remained organizationally weak and constrained to operate clandestinely until the party was legalized in 1942. After the party formation in 1939 at Pinarayi almost all the leaders were in absconding on account of the ban. During this time, party managed to carryout underground party units especially after the protest day on September 15, 1940. After the protest day<sup>96</sup>, hundreds of communists were working underground<sup>97</sup>. Underground party units were started functioning from January 1940 onwards with Chirakkal as its headquarters. Its chief functions must

---

<sup>94</sup> T.A. Mohamed, *Leftist Movements and the Mappila Muslims*, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol. 71 (2010-2011), pp. 722-731. The author says that Many Mappilas got attracted to the party because of this peculiar aspect of the party.

<sup>95</sup> Brinda Karat, *100 Year of Formation Booklet*, C.P.I.M Publication 2019. p.20

<sup>96</sup> The protest was against the government decision to make India an ally of the second world war on the side of the allied powers without consulting Indians.

<sup>97</sup> After protest day, P.Krishna Pillai and E.M.S.Namboothirippad has gone underground according to the directions of the Party. A.K.Gopalan had on the advice of the Party shifted his work to Tamilnadu as there were summons pending against him.

have been receiving and distributing Party pamphlets, form Party cells and provide shelters for those who went underground. Its use became essential after September 15, 1940. These secret offices were called *Pathala Lokam* Office (PLO). There were 11 divisions in the Kerala Communist Committee at Mangalore, Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kurumbranad, Kozhikode, Eranad, Valluvanad, Palakkad, Ponnani, Trissur and Travancore. Each division office was known as PLO.1, PL0.2 ...etc<sup>98</sup>.

The tech system was an essential part of the party machinery during the underground activities. It was very much difficult for the leaders to contact and pass on letters and messages under the strict and rigid police surveillance in Malabar. The party workers, who were engaged in handing over letters were called as *Techs* and there was an organized and wide network of techs like spider net in each *taluks*. This was the secret postal system of the party which consisted of one chief tech and other techs who worked under him<sup>99</sup>. The *Techs* used to meet at tea shops, barber shops, houses etc. The letters collected from such centers would have passed through two or three members before reaching them at the final destinations. The person carrying the letter is not likely to have a comprehensive knowledge of it and hence, the police system was not able to trace and bust the network, if any *Tech* trapped in the police net. While working underground, the leaders were known to others in pet names and necessary precautions were taken to shift locations in case the police caught the smell. Special care was shown to destroy all the documents in their hands related with party underground spots and activities before leaving one location in a bid to get away from the police. Due to this vigilance and concern, the rank and file of the party remained in underground for long without giving any hint to the police.

---

<sup>98</sup> Priya P, *The Question of Nationalism and Internationalism: A Page from the History of Communist Movement in Kerala*, p.460

<sup>99</sup> K.N.Ganesh, *op cit.*, p.55

## Commune Life

Communes were an important milestone in the history of Communist party which inculcated discipline and other required qualities among the cadres. With the formation of the party it was felt necessary to have a coordination of the party cells and for this a Commune was started at a rented house in Calicut<sup>100</sup>. The difference between the leaders and the ordinary workers was not existed and everyone worked together, ate together and slept together. The lessons of the life of fraternity, simplicity and adventure were learnt by the Commune members from the big leaders like Sundarayya, Ranadive and Kalppana Dutta who had been part of the Bombay Commune which was set up in 1942.

Simplicity, equality and hard work were the hallmarks of the life at Communes. Inmates at the Communes who belonged to both lower and upper castes lived together. Usually they were served with porridge and sometimes, with rice. Even married couples have lived at the Communes and some conditions had been listed for their stay. The room allotted for the couples were narrow single room and the bachelors usually slept either on the floor or *varanda* of the building. P.Krishna Pillai, E.M.S.Namboothirippad, A.V.Kunhabu, T.C.Narayanan Nambiar, M.S.Devadas, I.C.P.Namboothiri, Thankamma Krishna Pillai, Priya Dutta, Chenal Lakshmikutty Amma, K.Devayani were the members of the Kozhikode commune. P.Krishna Pillai, E.M.S.Namboothirippad, A.V.Kunhabu, T.C.Narayanan Nambiar, I.C.P.Namboothiri, K.P.G, C.J.Thomas, O.M.P. Namboothirippad stayed in

---

<sup>100</sup> During 1942-43 period there was a commune in a two storied building near the present day KSRTC bus stand in Kozhikode. P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.363

the Commune with family. Student union workers like P.Bhaskaran<sup>101</sup> and Chandran were also there<sup>102</sup>.

Each member in the Commune was given administrative charge of the Commune for a period of one month. They had to get up early in the morning every day and after physical exercise, had their tea and after bath gruel at 8 a.m. In the Sundays, the members as batches conducted door-to-door visits and sold party literatures. During the time of financial difficulties, they visited wedding houses with or without invitation and used to sing songs and thereby received contributions.

Similar Communes were prevalent in other parts of Malabar. At Perinthalmanna, Valluvanadu *taluk* committee of the party rented a house and opened an office in which many of the taluk committee members including women resided. Some of the members sarcastically said that limited quantity (*kammi*) of meal (*oon*) was served to the inmates and hence the place was called *kammi-oon* or Commune. Rice porridge, tapioca and black tea were commonly served in the Commune. K.C.Gopalanunni, Kunjunni Karthavu, A.K.Shekhar, E.P.Gopalan, P.V.Kunjunni Nair, Kongassery Krishnan, Govindan Nambiar, were some of the inmates in the commune<sup>103</sup>. It is said that it was the commune life that helped to bring discipline among the inmates<sup>104</sup>.

### **Requirements for Cadres**

Besides commitment to Communist ideas, membership in the Communist party normally involved formal registration, perhaps initially as a

---

<sup>101</sup> He was a famous Malayalam poet in the later period

<sup>102</sup> K.Devayani, *op. cit.*, p.41

<sup>103</sup> Cherukad, *Jeevithappatha*, p.425

<sup>104</sup> K. Devayani, *op. cit.*, p.41

candidate and later as a full member; regular payment of fixed dues; a subscription to the party newspaper; and so on. The most important thing, however, was the participation of every member in daily party work. Besides, a party worker is expected to work and act to promote the betterment of the community. Chairman Mao Zedong elaborates, “At no time and in no circumstances should a Communist place his personal interests first; he should subordinate to the interests of the nation and the masses. Hence selfishness, slacking, corruption, seeking the limelight are most contemptible, while working with all one’s energy, whole hearted devotion to public duty, and quiet hard work will command respect.”<sup>105</sup> Hence, communists are expected to work diligently and thoughtfully in order to ensure he or she provides the most benefit to society. As *Hindusthan Times* daily remarked, Communists in the early days of independence were known more for the motto “simple living and high thinking”<sup>106</sup>. They lived and died for it. Some of the youths from comparatively sound families had sacrificed a part of their property for the party<sup>107</sup>.

Most importantly, Communists are expected to surrender their own personal interests and beliefs when they came in conflict with that of the party ideology. Party insisted on its members especially leaders to maintain communist principles and ideals both in their personal as well as public life. Nevertheless, some had managed to keep on religious beliefs in their personal life. Wearing religious symbols in the form of amulets, necklaces, rings etc. and appearing in public functions by some leaders, caused criticism from the ordinary workers. The case of religious beliefs was left to the

---

<sup>105</sup> Liu Shaoqi’s speech given at Yanan in 1939 in William Theodore de Bary et al. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. 2. New York: *Columbia University Press*, 1960. Liu Shaoqi was a major theoretician of the Chinese Communist Party who later served as China’s head of state after Mao Zedong retired from that position in 1959.

<sup>106</sup> *Hindusthan Times*, 02-11-2009

<sup>107</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *op. cit.*, p97

discretion of the individual party members though the party continued to insist on atheism for communists<sup>108</sup>. When, at a party meeting in Pulamanthol, a worker asked Cherukad Govinda Pisharady about him carrying a ring on which the image of *Mookambika* goddess was depicted, the latter's reply was that "I believe in *Mookambika* and more than that in Marxism; if my party demanded me to adopt only one of the two beliefs, I would not hesitate to reject my belief in god"<sup>109</sup>. He was ready to discard his belief in god if party insisted on it; but the party did not interfere in the personal life of the Communists. Notably, as a revolutionary party CPI maintained that the lives of the party members should be in accordance with the communist ideals and principles.

The ideal Communist is the first to worry and the last to enjoy himself. Communists, in this regard, must become selfless in providing for society. When one's individual interests contradict those of the public, the individual is expected to yield<sup>110</sup>. Most importantly, this means that individuals cannot refuse a work assignment due to personal reasons. However, this does not mean that the Party is blind to one's abilities or strengths. "Naturally, in assigning work to members, the Party organization and the responsible Party comrade should, as far as possible, take their individual inclination and aptitude into consideration, develop their strong points and stimulate their zeal to go forward." Hence, work ethic and motivation, regardless of profession, comes from one's duty to better benefit the communal community without question or hesitation<sup>111</sup>. The Communists tried their level best to keep these values through their life. When Parvathi Teacher, wife of

---

<sup>108</sup> Interview with K.Gopalan Nambiar at his residence in Thillankeri on 28-09-2021

<sup>109</sup> Mundur Krishnan Kutty's article in P.V.K. Panayal, (ed), *Cherukad Oru Ormappusthakam*, Neelambari, Calicut, 2012. pp.26-28

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Krishnan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

<sup>111</sup> Liu Shaoqi's speech, *op. cit.*

C.H.Kanaran expressed her desire to renovate their home by replacing thatched roof with tile roof, the latter turned down her request by saying that there were a number of hapless and helpless people around even without having a thatched hut and hence, there was no necessity for that<sup>112</sup>.

All members were obliged to attend the party meetings regularly. But that is not adequate. Such meetings need to be properly prepared by the work of smaller groups or of assigned comrades. The same applied to preparations to make effective use of broad assemblies of workers, demonstrations, and workers' mass actions. Only small groups can carefully assess and intensively carry out the varied tasks flowing from such activity. Without such ongoing detailed work by the entire membership, functioning through a great many small working groups, even the most energetic efforts to take part in proletarian struggle will lead only to vain, feeble attempts to gain influence.

The members in the party were to be model communists. They should at first, complete their own personal works before getting engaged in public issues. Only such persons can lead a model and decent life before the public. Maintenance of such qualities was an unwritten law for the communists<sup>113</sup>. There was an incident held at Madikkai court in 1947 where police arrested 9 comrades including K.R.Kunhikannan on the charge of destroying *paranki* plants of Madikkai second village Ugrani<sup>114</sup>. The case was settled by the court in favour of the Communists. When the comrades were coming out of the court one Kunhappa, the record clerk at the court, demanded one rupees each from the acquitted persons as bribe. When they sought the reason for the amount, the clerk maintained that this was the tradition being followed by everyone in the court that charging cash from the acquitted. But the comrades

---

<sup>112</sup> G.D. Nair. *C.H.Kanaran Jeevithavum Samaravum*, pp.63-64

<sup>113</sup> Cherukad, *op. cit.*, p.426

<sup>114</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 31-05-1947



did not heed to the demand for bribe being held under the nose tip of the magistrate<sup>115</sup>.

It was the direction of the party to the functionaries to mingle with the masses and get involved in the popular issues with a view to gain their trust. The deeds and words of the functionaries were moulded according to the ideals and principles of the party. All the party programmes and activities were organized with the purpose of getting mingled with the people and thus created good rapport with them<sup>116</sup>. The experience of Subedar Kunhambu was one of the several instances. At times when AKG was coming back home by train, some army men used to invite him to their compartment and have friendly talks with him. Kunhambu and his family were Congress party sympathizers but due to this contact with AKG, they became Communists<sup>117</sup>.

The organization of workers' and peasants' union was the result of a long process of the personal contacts of the Communists with the class members. Formation of the workers' and peasants' organizations in Malabar owed itself to the tireless efforts of the leaders. In Calicut A.K.Gopalan and P. Krishna Pillai used to stand outside the gate when workers came, out of the factory. They approached workers with a smile and talked to them<sup>118</sup>. Even then few could be persuaded to attend a meeting. When a meeting of workers was convened only a handful of people turned up. But they continued their efforts and slowly attendance of these meetings increased, and within a month a union was formed in which about 75% of the workers joined. Similarly, P. Krishna Pillai had made good contacts with the students in Calicut, and used to conduct study classes for them. As a result of this, the Calicut Student's

---

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Krishnan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

<sup>117</sup> K. Balakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.54

<sup>118</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *In the Cause of the People*, p.61

Union, which was the only students' organization at Calicut, at that time, decided to merge it with the All India Student's Federation controlled by the Communists<sup>119</sup>.

The party has been able to make inroads in many localities with the character and behaviour of leaders. They were familiar with the people residing in every nook and cranny of the villages and also with their problems in which they interfered and settled. There was one Kunhikannan, a beedi worker, who was deputed by the party to organize party activities in Pulamanthol in Malappuram<sup>120</sup>. He was a leader having enough leadership capacity and efficiency so that he could make strong relationship with the people in the lower strata of society especially peasants. He accurately knew even the boundaries of each cultivating fields and also the details of the lands in the village rather than the knowledge possessed by the village officials. Every issue was settled in his presence; he sincerely and dedicatedly worked for peasants to solve their problems after studying their issues thoroughly<sup>121</sup>. Hence people had due respect to him. He played an important role in providing a strong base to the party in Pulamanthol.

Likewise, Sakhavu Cherotta Raman, popularly called as Ramettan, was an unquestioned leader of the people in Machoor Mala near Thillankeri. His presence was ensured in all get together held in the locality. His Machoor house was also a well known for party programmes<sup>122</sup>. In Kurumbranadu, M.K.Kelu owned a personality beyond politics. He was respected by people irrespective of party flag. Kelu used to come to an *ayurveda* shop at

---

<sup>119</sup> T.A. Mohamed, *Leftist Movements and the Mappila Muslims*, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol. 71 (2010-2011), p.725

<sup>120</sup> Cherukad, *op. cit.*, p.426

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Pazhuzzi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika* , Kuthuparambap. 2010-11, p.119

Pazhankavu owned by T.Bhaskaran and talk to the latter about the welfare of the people. After the closure of the shop they went to visit houses of the distressed and bereaved families in the locality<sup>123</sup>. The dealings of E. K. Nayanar with the people were definitely a model to many contemporary politicians. With an uncanny knack to speak to the people in their own rustic language spiced with earthy humour and sarcasm, Nayanar endeared himself to even his political opponents<sup>124</sup>. The presence of the Communists was ensured in almost all the social and cultural events whoever organized as their presence was felt necessary for the organisers<sup>125</sup>.

### **Party and Society**

By the time of the formation in 1939, the party leaders had managed to have a well established machinery through their functioning as socialists which enabled it to easily implement party policies and programmes. The first phase of the second world war transformed the loose and open organisational structure of the CSP into a Communist party of 'steel discipline'.<sup>126</sup> With this organizational capacity, party started to get into the common people taking up their issues in everyday life and organizing strikes. The party managed to develop a band of disciplined cadres whose lives were exclusively dedicated to the cause of the party. Communist volunteers were given systematic training and classes on party ideology and programmes and in this way committed and duty bound cadres were moulded to cater to the needs of the party.

It was the duty of the Communists to take part in all elemental working-class struggles and movements and lead the workers and peasants in

---

<sup>123</sup> Keluettan Smaranika, *Keluettan Padana Gaveshana Kendram*, Kozhikode, 2017, p.10

<sup>124</sup> *The Times of India*, 19-05-2004, visit <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Krishnan, at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

<sup>126</sup> Thomas Isaac, *op. cit.*, p.71.

every battle with the exploiters. They closely studied specific issues of people's lives and strove to develop their consciousness of solidarity, and thereby aroused their awareness of the common interests. In fact, such an organizational structure made the party different from other political organizations and enabled it to successfully carry out political programmes.

The party committees carried out systematic preparatory work required for organizing strikes and chalked out measures to rally forces effectively on the appointed day and have them meet punctually. Special care was taken to determine the nature of the slogans, the prospects for intensifying the action, and the time to break off the strike. Well-trained and energetic functionaries were needed to form the backbone of these strikes from its outset to encounter any contingency. These functionaries maintained effective contact with each other and supplied throughout with the requisite instructions. Such a mobile political and organizational leadership managed to strengthen the unity of the proletarians by infusing in them confidence and mental capacity and supplying them necessary life amenities. They also succeeded in creating an impression that they could move beyond their capacities if rallied together under them and in creating good personal relations with the targeted group.

The connections that the party has acquired through the work of its cells and working groups were effectively used to attract the unorganised to the fold of the party. Special working groups carefully prepared programmes like holding meetings, conducting study classes and cultural programmes. As it was not possible to hold initial meetings of different sections of people under a revolutionary party, suitable communists under the banner of KS or the like were sent to take the lead as speakers and organizers in their respective platforms. It was through the class organizations that people were taken to the fold of the party.

In Malabar party's main thrust was in the agrarian sector and peasants were motivated by the political ideology of revolutionary upsurge. It was through the KS activities that party made inroads at the grass root level. Party cadres made direct contact with peasant families by visiting their houses and dining with them and they were keen to maintain such relations intact. Each party programme was cautiously designed and launched with the objective of establishing good rapport with them.

In 1940s on the sidelines of the KS conference in Malabar, a programme of gathering *pidiyari* (small quantity of rice) from each house was planned to meet its expenditure. The programme was done in the weekends and members in each batch visited houses in their localities. Notably, the upper caste *Namboothiris* were present in these batches and women members were also seen among the volunteers. For instance, Paakkathillathu Vasudhevan Namboothiri along with Cheerngottullathu Narayanan Namboothiri, N.K.Naru Unnithiri and others collected rice from each house and even the houses of the untouchables were visited by them unmindful of the age old practice of untouchability<sup>127</sup>. This programme helped members to have close contact with the peasant families. Notably, Garudamangalam Chittu Nambuthiri gave his *illam* and its land for communist activities. It was at this place that a state level camp of women for a period of one month was conducted<sup>128</sup>. Such conspicuous efforts on the part of the elite party workers had profound impact on the subaltern groups which eventually helped win the social and political support of them.

The peasant-worker cooperation during the time of strikes marked a new chapter in the history of communist movement in Malabar. The strikes were thoroughly planned taking into account the concerns, of the different

---

<sup>127</sup> *Karivellur Struggle 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir*, Kannur, 2006, p.206

<sup>128</sup> *Cheruthazham- Charithravaum Samskaravum*, *op cit.* p.105

dimensions of the strikes, shared by the strikers. The issues faced by the respective classes were thoroughly studied and mode of struggles were carefully planned by the party leaders. It was a difficult task to keep the entire striking peasants or workers together always under one umbrella. The issue of strikes getting prolonged and its ramifications on family lives were to be effectively addressed. Speakers deputed by the party itself were sent to address the issues and apprehensions of the striking workers and their families. Special care was taken to ensure the co-operation of fraternal class organizations in case the strikers left in poverty due to the strike.

The solidarity shown by other class organizations with the strikers was the noteworthy aspect of the struggles under the red flag. The higher rung leaders always had an eye on the course of the strikes and their impact on the striking families. *Samara Sahaya* committees were formed under efficient leaders to take care of the strikers and their families. These committees ensured that the strikers were not suffering under any circumstances and all the essentials required for the strikers were supplied with. The committee members conducted door to door visits and collected required amount of items for striking counterparts which included not only cash but also groceries and vegetables. At the time when the committee members collecting these items they never forgot to establish contact and renew acquaintance with the people.

When the Aaron Cotton Mill workers union in Kannur decided to go on strike in 1940s demanding rise in wages, the workers were worried of their future. One worker asked E.K. Nayanar, secretary of Aaron Cotton Mill workers union, “what would be the fate of the workers if the strike continued indefinitely”.Nayanar brought this issue to the notice of A.K.Gopalan and Krishna Pillai and the latter suggested to make peasants help the striking

factory employees<sup>129</sup>. Keeping this idea in mind, leaders visited the neighbouring villages and discussed the matter with peasants' unions. The peasants, thus, came forward to arrange food to the striking workers. They organized a systematic programme and collected required amount of food materials from the villages. The workers got more enthusiasm from this support and encouragement given by their fellow workers. Even *Bala Sangham* workers also had organised fund collection to help the striking workers<sup>130</sup>.

While the Koothali strike was getting under way at Perambra, *samara sahaya samithis* under KS were formed at different places including Vatakara and Koylandi taluks and agricultural produces were collected and taken to the volunteer camp at Perambra. At Vatakara a *jatha* from Maniyoor carrying coconut and vegetables under T.K.Narayanan was taken out to the *samara kendram*<sup>131</sup>. At Eravattur near Perambra the committee members conducted door-to-door visits and gathered paddy, coconuts, tender coconuts, banana bunches, jack fruit, mango, papaya, etc. and handed them over to the committee office after reaching in procession<sup>132</sup>. Likewise, from Nohad a procession of the Communist party carrying paddy, coconuts, banana bunches, tapioca etc. was taken out in solidarity with the Koothali struggle. The essential commodities, carried by the processionists, were handed over to the committee office<sup>133</sup>. Similarly three party workers from Vengalam

---

<sup>129</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *My Struggles*, p.23

<sup>130</sup> P.Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.236

<sup>131</sup> K.Gopalan Master, *Maattathinte Nalvazhikal*, Secular Study Centre, Pathiyarakkara, Vatakara, 2017.p.47

<sup>132</sup> *Deshabhimani Daily*, 04-02-1955

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* 20-02-1955

brought to the *satyagraha* camp on foot rice, egg, tapioca among other essentials<sup>134</sup>.

Similar was the case of a strike at Calicut port in 1955 where workers were on strike opposing the loading of goods of one Nagchi company to the ships. Food grains and vegetables like rice, coconuts, plantain bunches, papaya, pumpkin, cucumber, tapioca etc. were collected by party workers from different parts of Malabar and they were taken to the office of the *samara sahaya* committee at Calicut port<sup>135</sup>.

The *Aanamark* Beedi Company strike in Ponnanni deserves special mention in this context. In October 1939, workers started strike in front of the company against the closure of the company during the *Ramzan* month<sup>136</sup>. When the strike continued for long and workers got in trouble C.Kannan and some others from Kannur set off to Ponnanni to stage cultural programmes with a view of collecting money for helping the striking workers' families. The troupe under the leadership of Vayalveetil Krishnan comprised of members like V.N.Mukundan, K.N.Abdulkhadar, Kariyan Sukumaran among others. The first programme of the troupe was staged at A.V.School in Ponnani and it included the play *Rakthapanam* of K.Damodaran<sup>137</sup>. The amount raised through these programmes were handed over to the committee of striking workers.

With this mode of struggle gaining considerable attention in the public sphere, class organizations started extending assistances whatever they could to the striking counterparts. Everywhere in Malabar, KS and factory workers' unions co-operated with each other. The flow of the processions in solidarity

---

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* 09-02-1955

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 10-02-1955

<sup>136</sup> G.D. Nair, *C.Kannan*, Chintha, 2016, Tiruvanandapuram. . pp.32-33

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*



with the ongoing strikes taken out by respective class organizations became a common sight. Assurances both in kind and cash were taken to the strikers along with the processions. This marked a new chapter in the peasant-worker relationship<sup>138</sup>.

### **Party Fund**

The party devised its own ways to meet the expenses incurred on the programmes and day-to-day businesses. Besides membership fees and levies, the party received donations from individuals and institutions through personal contacts of the members. However, the financial constraints of the party were chiefly met through the fund drive it launched intermittently. During such times directions were issued by higher level committees to the ordinary workers to raise funds through public collection drive.

As part of the *Deshabhimani* circulation, all party units were directed to have a separate literature fund and party workers were asked to carry with them party books and other literature when they ventured out for party programmes. Each unit had a sale target which has to meet each day. Directions were issued that the centres of public gatherings, meetings, festivals and also markets be utilized for the sale of party literature<sup>139</sup>. It was the party decision that each comrade while going out for any party programme had to carry party literatures in hand and each has to ensure the number of books he could sell<sup>140</sup>. For instance, during the time of cholera eradication programme at Yaakkara in Palakkad party men had taken along with them, apart from tools and equipments, books for sale<sup>141</sup>.

---

<sup>138</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.23

<sup>139</sup> P. Krishna pillai, *Sale of Literature*, Party Organizer , 1946, November 1 in Andalal (ed) *Sakhakkale Munnottu*, Thiruvananthapuram , 1978. pp.407-412

<sup>140</sup> Andalal. *Sakhakalemunnottu*, Vol.1. p. 413

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Abdurahiman Kutty at his residency in Ponnani on 28-05-2022

Party launched vigorous campaigns for fund collection especially at times when party mouthpiece *Deshabhimani* got in crisis and at times of elections and other emergencies also. The state or national leadership launched programmes of fund collection drive and each district, *taluk*, *farkka* and cell committees were allotted a particular quota to be raised. In 1945, party launched a fund collection drive and each member was asked to contribute five rupee to fill the Malabar quota of ten thousand. Accordingly, each party member was committed to work among the people to make them donate at their own level to meet the quota requirement. No one had shown any negligence in carrying out their assigned works. Special squads were formed with the purpose of fund collection and workers and peasants were approached and thus, received fund in cash and in kind.

A unique feature of the collection drive was the donation made by many poor families of their lone possessions such as calves and lambs. Land and gold ornaments were other items contributed to the party fund. There were emotional contexts of donations made by party workers as well as sympathisers on behalf of the martyrs and the dearest ones. One of the tearful incidents was the contribution made by P.V.Achuthan, a party member who donated his deceased daughter's ornaments which included golden ear rings, one silver waist chain, two anklets and a white talisman<sup>142</sup>. A thrilling contribution for the Communist party workers all over the country was made by the father of Madathil Appu, who was an accused in the Kayyur revolt and hanged by the police. At the time when Appu was hanged, his golden stud was taken and later sold by the government and its price was sent to his father Madathil Ambadi Atthithiriyar who later added the amount to the party fund<sup>143</sup>.

---

<sup>142</sup> *Desabhimani*, 28-10-1945 in *Andalat op. cit.*, p.642

<sup>143</sup> *Desabhimani*, 03-06-1945 in *Sakhakale Munnottu*, p.636

A remarkable contribution was made by an old peasant widow in north Malabar. In the year 1948 a frail woman, named Palora Mata from Peravur in Kannur in her 70s, at a fund-raising function organised by the mouthpiece of the party, *Desabhimani*, donated her lone property of calf to the party fund<sup>144</sup>. This grand donation has been referred by party general secretary P.C.Joshi at Central Committee meeting in September 1942<sup>145</sup>. Similar contributions reported from all over Malabar; in 1955 a Muslim woman gave away her heifer to the party fund as donation<sup>146</sup>. An eight year old girl student at Kottappalli in Kurumbranadu taluk contributed her golden ring to the party fund<sup>147</sup>.

An awesome and surprising fund collection was made by P.Krishna Pillai at Naaratthu in Kannur. When he visited Naaratthu in 1946 as part of party programme and started speech, some people started throwing stones at him. He ignored the stone pelting and after they stopped stone pelting, Pillai directed party workers to collect the stones thrown at him. Thus, comrades collected stones and Pillai sold them through an auction in public at the spot. The amount collected in this way was given to party fund.<sup>148</sup>

One comrade Puthiya Veettil Gopalan nair from Amarambalam *desom* in Ernad taluk donated 25 acres of land in his possession to Malabar Kisan sangh<sup>149</sup>. There were members who donated their funds from hospital beds. Comrade P.Madhavan Nair, Kozhikode *Taluk Kisan Sangh* secretary, who was under treatment in TB Sanatorium in Perunthura, sent one rupee out of

---

<sup>144</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.169

<sup>145</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad, *op. cit.*, p.97

<sup>146</sup> *Desabhimani*, 18-02-1955

<sup>147</sup> *Desabhimani*, 24-02-1955

<sup>148</sup> K.Balakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.63

<sup>149</sup> *Desabhimani*, 08-10-1953

five he received for his treatment and he also agreed to the party that the remaining amount would be donated next time<sup>150</sup>.

The friendly relationship maintained by the party workers and leaders helped bring a good amount of donation to party fund. In many places people made contributions transcending political barriers. One A.V.Chakappu at Purangu, on the eve of his wedding, donated Rs.5 to the party fund<sup>151</sup>. He said that “I am a poor but not a communist. I have witnessed to the atrocities of MSP in Malabar, which was the most cruel than that of the Japanese force. It was the Communist party which was helping the people who were subjected to these atrocities and hence I donate this amount to the One Lakh and Fifty Thousand Rupees Fund of the Party”.<sup>152</sup> Even the members from affluent families had no hesitation in making huge contributions to the party fund. When A.K.Gopalan, in 1952, came to Perinthatta as a part of the campaign to raise fund for the purpose of repaying the debt incurred on the election in 1952, Chenan Govindan Nair, at the request of Gopalan, donated thousand rupees to the party fund<sup>153</sup>. Idavalathu Kunhiraman Nair, another rich person in the area donated his heifer to party fund<sup>154</sup>.

The biggest challenge before the party was to defend and maintain its mouthpiece *Deshabhimani* at any cost. Despite suppressive measures, the party managed to survive through its print media. Several times *Deshabhimani* was directed to pay fines on account of some inflammatory writings. During these times of trouble party organized different programmes for raising the required amount of fine which were collected in no time. Many artists, writers and other prominent citizens participated in the fund

---

<sup>150</sup> *Desabhimani*, 11-03-1945 in Andalat, *op. cit.*, p.622

<sup>151</sup> *Desabhimani*, 16-05-1947

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.180

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

campaign either by making personal contributions or by joining the volunteer squads. The capacity to raise funds, which so frustrated the authorities, testified to the paper's, and the Communist Party's, influence<sup>155</sup>. *Deshabhimanimelas* or fairs were conducted and on the sidelines of them, arts festivals were held with the purpose of fund mobilization. For instance, the fair at Madikkai village in August 1947 was one of them in which the rich and the poor alike participated<sup>156</sup>. The fairs then became a big annual event. There was not a single village where such fairs were not held. Cultural programmes and speeches were held on the sidelines of them<sup>157</sup>.

At a time when the tussle between the government and *Desabhimani* went on throughout 1947-48, the contest of deposits and fund-raising also continued. The deposit of 4,000 rupees was forfeited after an inflammatory writing, and in July 1947, a bond of 10,000 rupees was demanded. It, too, was paid at once. It was at this context that the district magistrate wrote. "The Communist Party can collect any security amount without difficulty,"<sup>158</sup> 'When Rs 4,000 was demanded in 1947 December last, the amount collected was about Rs 10,000 and so the net result was a gain to the Communist Party funds.' Circulation was then estimated between 7,000 and 8,000 copies<sup>159</sup>.

Social and political gatherings including the wedding ceremonies were sometimes turned out to be platforms for party's fund collection. A number of newly wedded couples made contributions to the party fund at their wedding venues themselves. At Kayanna, at a wedding ceremony of Kumaran, son of Parayan Kandathil Kunhan Pillai and Kamalakshi, daughter of Vazhamalayil

---

<sup>155</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, p.478

<sup>156</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.90

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*p.91

<sup>158</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, p.477

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

Narayanan an amount of Rs. 1 was donated to the 4<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Fund<sup>160</sup>. Similar amount was also paid to the party fund as donation at the time of the wedding of K.C.DamodharanVaidhyar and Devi at a registrar office in Kozhikode. It was two rupees that was given as the contribution to the Party Congress Fund at the wedding ceremony of Aanoor Kandi Narayanan and Narayani at Koodali in Mattannur<sup>161</sup>. At Vattura, T.Kunhiraman and M Susheela, a couple, donated two rupees to the Party fund<sup>162</sup>. Likewise, an amount of four rupee was handed over to the Uralunkal Party Committee in Vatakara on the auspicious marriage occasion of Punnery Andy and Sarada<sup>163</sup>. The donation of three rupees to the party fund on the eve of the wedding of T.S Balan and N.V.Karthyayani was one of the several instances during the same period<sup>164</sup>.

Cultural programmes on the sidelines of the marriages were held with the primary objective of spreading party ideas and messages among the people and fund collection was also made on such occasions. Cultural squads which were formed under aegis of the party were invited to wedding houses by local party men and programmes were staged. The squad comprising of party workers like Devayani, wife of CPI leader A.V.Kunhambu, used to be invited to conduct programmes at wedding houses. They, after wishing the couples, made speeches on the occasion in which political matters also intruded. At the end of the programme including

---

<sup>160</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 10-12-1955

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* 10-12-1955

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* 26-02-1955

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* 23-12-1955

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.* 20-02-1955

songs, they received money which was required to fill the quota allotted to them by the party<sup>165</sup>.

In Kurumbranadu areas including Onchiyam such cultural troupes used to stage programmes and receive money from invited guests and relatives at wedding houses<sup>166</sup>. While some songs were folk in nature, some were full of oppositions against existing social system. Songs were also composed in praise of martyrs by partymen themselves. The songs of M.Kelappan at Panikkotti popularly called M.K.Panikkotti were sung on different occasions including wedding. The songs in praise of martyrs of Onchiyam firing composed by T.P.Kanaran was one which dominated in and around Kurumbranadu<sup>167</sup>.

The Communists made use of the temple festivals for organizing book fairs by setting up stalls. The works of eminent communist thinkers and writers were available at these book stalls. The bookstall opened as part of the festival of Sri Sundareswara Temple at Thalappu in Kannur from 24 to 30 March 1953 under the supervision of *Prabhath* Book House was one of them<sup>168</sup>. At the time of the festival of Kadavath Chokannamma Kotta at Koyyom, a fund collection was held and women and children who were returning from the temple, made contributions to the party fund<sup>169</sup>. As part of the Kambrath festival in Cheruvannu, a book sale was organised by the literary activists and similar fairs were organised at Kottakulangara in Vatakara and Nidumpoyil in Keezhariyoor and the work *Communism Enth*,

---

<sup>165</sup> K.Devayani , *Chorayum Kanneerum Nananja Vazhikal*, (Autobiography) , Samatha publishers, Thrissur, 2010. p.42. She is the wife of A.V.Kunhambu, prominent leader of communist party in Malabar.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with T.K.Kumaran at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>168</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 09-04-1953

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, 23-02-1955

*Enthinu, Engine* authored by comrade Damodharan was the most favoured book purchased by the people<sup>170</sup>.

Party units used to conduct *lelakuri* or auction chitty and one part of the profit derived from the conduct of the *lelakuri* went to the party fund. At Udhinoor in Kanhangadu, as part of the auction held at the shop of Udhinoor Keeyathal K.Koman Panicker an amount of five rupees was donated to the party fund<sup>171</sup>. Auction chitties were widely prevalent during this period and it was a relief to the people in economic distress. As the auctions were held under the party units people had no apprehension to join them eventhough one part of the profit went to party fund.

The income and expenditure of party units were accurately recorded and proper registers were maintained to keep the details. Each responsible member had to carry a receipt book signed by the party secretary and receipt was to be given for each contribution. Such contributions should have to be entered in a diary and its details were reported in committee meetings<sup>172</sup>. Whenever party cell or *farkka* meetings were held one of the agenda discussed in the meetings was the fund collection details. Hence, the party workers and units showed utmost care in accurately recording the fund collection.

The way the fund collection campaign was organised also had certain significant features. Apart from fund collection, the campaign carried party messages and its values and ideas to every household and places of social activity such as shops, marketplaces, factories and educational institutions. The fund collection campaign, thus, was transformed into a mass mobilisation exercise in which volunteer squads and people, drawn from all walks of life, participated. Most of the money collected came in small donations made by

---

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* 26-02-1955

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> K.N.Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.66



workers, peasants, agricultural labourers, middle class employees, women, students and youths. The spontaneous and unprecedented flow of donations in cash and kind to the party fund would never surprise those who know the growth of the party in Malabar. The selfless contributions and sacrifices of many communists for the cause of the people have left their imprints on the minds of the people in general and the party cadres in particular.

In fact, it was the well-oiled machinery of the Communist Party in Malabar that differentiated it from other political parties. It possessed a dedicated and well trained band of red volunteers. The study classes and training camps organised under the red flag was instrumental in inculcating required values and qualities among the Communists. Each movement of and even the word uttered by the communists were moulded intune with the party needs and objectives. The leaders, especially from elite classes, were breaking those spatial practices that had defined traditional caste and class hierarchies. They were able to make good relation with people from divergent backgrounds through different programmes. Their dealings with the common folk was instrumental in the success of the fund drive programmes launched by the party for its mouth piece. It was the energy, enthusiasm and dedication shown by the Communists that helped the Party win the confidence of the people to a great extent.

## **Chapter III**

### **Communists and Health Care Activities**

As mentioned in the last chapter the CPI programmes and policies were put into operation through a band of volunteers whose life was dedicated to the cause of the party. In Malabar, red volunteers came in the forefront to deal with the adverse situation created by famine and epidemics during the Second World War period when the colonial state machinery was not properly working out to redress the grievances of the people. This chapter deals with the distress relief activities of the communist volunteers during the times of epidemics with special reference to cholera and small pox in the 1940s.

Basic healthcare is the fundamental right for one's social existence and it is the responsibility of the state to provide the highest attainable standard of health to its people irrespective of race, religion, political beliefs, economic and social condition. It's the duty of the government to provide basic facility to the society. The European society was able to ward off many types of diseases whether it was an epidemic or a pandemic by introducing systematic public works and health services. When cholera started to wreak havoc on human lives in different parts of the world, the governments concerned, giving too much importance to the issue, introduced effective steps to curb the menace<sup>1</sup>. Effective intervention of the government was necessary to ensure healthy life to the people.

It can unambiguously be said that there is a close connection between famine and different types of epidemics. Famine is severe and prolonged

---

<sup>1</sup> For more details see M.Mirsky, *How Plague, Small Pox and Cholera were Stamped Out in the USSR*, Soviet Nadu Granthasala, Madrass, 1975.

hunger in a substantial proportion of the population of a region, resulting in widespread and acute malnutrition and death by starvation and disease. Many famines are precipitated by natural causes and the most common human cause of famine is warfare. Famines have existed throughout time all over the world but the frequency and location of the famines have shifted with the times. Widespread scarcity of food leads to malnutrition which affects the immune system, further weakening the body to resist the conditions, which in turn results in death because of infections. Famines generally coincided with epidemics and unnatural mortalities. In times of famines, contagious diseases like cholera, malaria, plague, small pox etc. flared up and took away large number of lives.

It was Rudolf Virchow, a German philosopher, who put forward the community-centred thinking about diseases. Virchow was an advocate for government involvement in public health and social medicine and his work helped bring more scientific rigor to medicine. Friedrich Engels is the forerunner of the class-based studies on public health. His '*Condition of the Working Class in England*' published as early as 1845 looks into, somewhat in detail, the conditions under which the English working-class lived in the era of industrial revolution and presents what the workers themselves have become under the given circumstances, what sort of people they are, what their physical, mental, and moral status. That, a class which lives under the conditions already sketched and is so ill-provided with the most necessary means of subsistence, cannot be healthy and can reach no advanced age, is evident<sup>2</sup>.

It can obviously be said that the mortality caused by epidemics was the highest during the times of famines. In British India, cholera and famine

---

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England*, Panther Edition, 1969, pp.84-105.

occurred together and devastated many parts of the country. The resurgence in cholera associated with the Bengal famine of 1943-44 appears to support this line of argument<sup>3</sup>. Amartya Sen sees epidemics as an integral part of famine and observes that all epidemics had not appeared together but in different phases of the famine. To quote Professor Sen, “Malaria and fevers were the biggest killers in the pre-famine days, followed at quite some distance by dysentery, diarrhoea and enteric groups of fevers, cholera, and small pox in that order.”<sup>4</sup> Showing the availability of food in the market, Sen, in “*Poverty and Famines: an Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*”, indicates the lowest purchasing power of the poor in Bengal due to inflation which made food inaccessible to them. And, this situation made people especially the poor susceptible to epidemics.

In the case of Malabar, a semi-famine condition was prevailing since the time of cyclone in 1938<sup>5</sup>. This was exacerbated with the evil effects of the second world war like hoarding and inflation especially after the entry of Japan into the war. Thus, the causes of 1943 famine in Malabar were discernible since January 1942, when the availability of Burmese rice was stopped<sup>6</sup>. The price of rice at the time of the commencement of the war in 1939 was just Rs.3.93 and in 1943 it rose to Rs.8.23 and it was Rs.9.82 in 1944<sup>7</sup>. The actual food-intake of the relatively poor was so low that they suffered from calorie insufficiency and still more from a deficient intake of some nutrients, specifically protein and several sorts of vitamins and minerals

---

<sup>3</sup> David Arnold, *Cholera and Colonialism in British India, Past & Present*, Nov., 1986, No. 113, Oxford University Press. p.149

<sup>4</sup> M. Raghavan, *State Failure and Human Miseries*, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2016. p.183

<sup>5</sup> Review Report of Director of Public Health on Cholera Epidemic in Calicut municipality dated 22-07-1943.

<sup>6</sup> For more details see M. Raghavan's *op.cit.*, pp.108-111

<sup>7</sup> A Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala District Gazetteers, Cannanore*, Kerala Gazetteers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1972

that resulted in ‘a hidden hunger’ and a state of general physical weakness, impairing people’s immunity to resist diseases<sup>8</sup>.

The medical facilities in Malabar were comparatively poor and was inadequate to cater to the needs of the people. Even the *taluk* hospitals were not well equipped so as to encounter the deadly disease. In the interior parts there are no medical facilities and not even roads. “The position in Malabar was that, instead of expanding and developing the health services, the state government seems to deprive the people of whatever meagre facilities are there in rural areas. This is being done at a time when catastrophes, natural as well as man-made, are virtually uprooting the people and when human beings perish uncared for and unaided.

The major victims of the epidemics are almost from among the poor working-class people and the poor peasants. The Indian Express reports: “they cannot afford to pay for medicine and medical attendance even if they are available; and, in the torrential rains of the season, their ill-thatched house was wet and dripping from the floor to the roof. And so, in their damp and squalid surroundings, the starving peasant or labourer easily succumbed to the infection”<sup>9</sup>. Even the official reports could not hide the reality; “in view of the big population, of nearly 50 lakhs, the comparative lack of medical facilities, the isolated character of many of the interior villages, the economic stagnation leading to greater poverty and malnutrition and especially the recurring need for quick treatment in the lean months of the south west monsoon, when the people have less food and are subject to illness owing to torrential rains”<sup>10</sup>. The situation in Malabar, that people were dying like cattle without getting proper attention and care of the government, is also reflected in a letter sent

---

<sup>8</sup> M. Raghavan. *op. cit.*, p.184

<sup>9</sup> *The Indian Express*, Madras edition, 26-07-1943

<sup>10</sup> Letter from R.Prasad, I.C.S, Collector of Madras to the Secretary, Board of Revenue, Madras, dated 27-08-1953

to the Union Health Minister Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur by A.K. Gopalan, Member of Parliament<sup>11</sup>. While the landlords and black marketers continued to hoard hoping for still higher prices, wholesome and adequate food was altogether out of the reach of the poor who remained utterly without any power of resistance.

Besides, blind beliefs centred around epidemics complicated the matter much more. Thus, thousands lost their lives in the social war waged by the epidemics in the 1940s. It was during the monsoon season of 1943 that Malabar experienced onslaughts of cholera and subsequent years especially in 1944-45 witnessed to small pox which also wreaked havoc on human lives in Malabar. These epidemics continued their ferocity in the 1950s with cases of sporadic infections throughout Malabar<sup>12</sup>.

Table-1<sup>13</sup>:

Epidemics and mortalities in Malabar from 1941 to 1945

Year	Cholera	Small pox	Total
1941	1	326	327
1942	82	57	139
1943	28432	418	28850
1944	107	898	1005
1945	6	1226	1232

Source: Census Hand Book: Malabar District, (Government Press, Madras;1953)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Letter from A.K. Gopalan ,M.P. to Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Union Minister of Health, dated 03-08-1953

<sup>12</sup> K.P. Gopalan, MLA,Q.No.354, Legislative Assembly Secretariat-17-02-1953 and Letter from Director of Public Health, Madras to Secretary to Govt. Health Dept. Madras-07-03-1953. Several sporadic cases were reported in different health ranges in Malabar. Out of 64 cholera deaths reported in Madras state 33 were in Malabar as per *Desabhimani*, 01-02-1955

<sup>13</sup> Details of other epidemic diseases are not included.

<sup>14</sup> M. Raghavan, *op. cit.*, p.197

Cholera and small pox in 1940s in Malabar brought Communist volunteers to the forefront of the distress relief activities. As epidemics began its ravages, no one dared to come out of their houses and a great fear had taken hold of the people. Heart-rending stories of persons dying in the open, and whole families being exterminated have become quite common. It was an unusual time when there was no certainty of life for anyone. A large number of communist volunteers responded swiftly to emergencies when infection was reported and worked even in areas that health officials and other organisations hesitated to approach. Launching Kerala People's Relief Fund and *Sadhu Rogi Samrakshana Fund* the entire party machinery was diverted to meet the emergencies<sup>15</sup>. Their works managed to restore hope and normalcy to the poor and the marginalised. The interventions of the communist volunteers during the time of cholera and small pox have specially been described below as they awarded a space to the communists in the hearts of the people.

### **Cholera**

Many early sources record the presence of an illness that may well have been cholera before the modern period. In the history of cholera, cases of a more severe kind had occurred; and, multiplying in the course of years, became noted as spasmodic cholera, which chiefly prevailed in Asia and Europe, and, though more rarely, in unusually hot seasons, in northern countries. Physicians of the classical world like Hippocrates and Galen have referred to such a disease and various European authors considered it one of the gravest epidemic diseases in ancient history. Occasionally, either the bilious or spasmodic cholera became epidemic, in some particular season or country, committed more or less extensive ravages, and then disappeared again.

---

<sup>15</sup> Andalat (ed.), *Sakhakkale Munnottu*, p.617

References of *Vishuchika*, in *ayurvedic* traditions of India, is now considered to mean a cholera-like disease. From the sixteenth century onwards, cholera has been discussed in connection with Indian subcontinent. When Vasco da Gama landed on the south western or Malabar coast of India in 1498, as described by Gaspar Correa, an officer of Vasco da Gama in 1503, about 20,000 men of Calicut died of "a disease which struck them sudden-like in the belly, so that some of them died in 8 hours".<sup>16</sup> Cholera was endemic in India from antiquity and West Bengal had its reputation as the home of cholera. Intermittently it resurfaced in many centuries, although confined to localities. But a new strain seems to have appeared in 1817 that gradually moved out of the country and overwhelmed the world. The statistical data on deaths among the general population are unclear and from the scattered records, it is estimated that around 1-2 million died in this cholera outbreak in the subcontinent. What distinguished the 1817 cholera outbreak from all records of preceding ones was its rapid spread to places as far away as Japan in the east and the borders of the Russian empire in the west<sup>17</sup>.

The life of the pandemic affected families was said to be despondent and heart wrenching. There were taboos around cholera in places which were victims of the ravages of the pandemic. Cholera related discriminations were widely prevalent in the pandemic hit areas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The infected families were subjected to isolation and were discriminated against. In some settlements there was no one to carry the corpses to the graveyard and corpses were found lying on the ground unattended by the kith and kin<sup>18</sup>. People from the infected families were not able even come out of their houses for fetching water or food due to fear of and stiff opposition from the

---

<sup>16</sup> Rita R. Colwell, *Global Climate and Infectious Disease: The Cholera Paradigm*, Science, New Series, Vol. 274, No. 5295 (Dec. 20, 1996), pp. 2025-2031.

<sup>17</sup> Chinmay Tumble, *The Age of Pandemics 1817-1920*, Harper Collins, Noida, 1920. p.33

<sup>18</sup> Interview with T.V.Abdurahman Kutty at his residence in Ponnani on 28-05-2022



neighbours. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar recounted an incident that occurred in 1943 and was reminiscent of the attacks on witches during the early nineteenth century: it was reported from Nasik on 1<sup>st</sup> September that the Hindus of a village attacked an untouchable family; tied the hands and feet of an elderly woman, placed her on a pile of wood which was subsequently set on fire. All this because they thought she was the cause of the cholera in the village<sup>19</sup>.

The Malabar district was a classic case of night-soil lying scattered everywhere, facilitating the attack of cholera and many other infectious diseases<sup>20</sup>. During 1911-20, the death tolls from cholera in the Western Ghats region including Malabar were estimated at 6.7 per cent of the total deaths from major epidemic diseases whereas it went up to 14.2 per cent during the famine of 1918-19. Similarly, during 1941-50, the death tolls estimated at 8.7 per cent of the total deaths by all epidemics shot up to 41.7 per cent of the total in the 1943 famine<sup>21</sup>.Of them, it was cholera in 1943 which was virulent in all forms and took a heavy toll of human lives in Malabar. It had been reported that nearly 40000 people succumbed to cholera<sup>22</sup>.

As cholera began to spread, Malabar witnessed very bizarre experiences. A great fear has taken hold of the people. Heart-rending stories of persons dying in the open, and whole families being exterminated have become quite common. It is embarrassing to hear that a human body of half eaten by dogs was buried by some volunteers. Another shocking incident was the removal of a feeding baby from a dead mother's breast. Similarly, while the DMRT volunteers visited an affected house they found only women

---

<sup>19</sup> Chinmay Tumble. *op.cit*, pp.40-41

<sup>20</sup> M. Raghavan, *op. cit.*, p.193

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p.198

<sup>22</sup> P.Krishna Pillai, *Adimathathinethire*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, p.219. Mathrubhumi reports that more than 30,000 died in the pandemic. *Mathrubhumi*, 10-10-1943

there. On enquiry they learnt that the men had gone upstairs two days ago when they started vomiting and did not come down even for food. The women did not go up to look after them due to fear. The volunteers who went upstairs found all the three men lying dead and a young boy lying unconscious<sup>23</sup>. At Panikotti in Kurumbranadu, foxes took out the buried body of a lady and was partially eaten up by them<sup>24</sup>.

At a time when effective modern medicine was not available for the epidemics, people mainly depended on the *naattuvaidyam* or ayurveda medicines. Despite vaccination and other government measures, people turned a blind eye to them and approached traditional medical practitioners. Traditional medicines and tablets prescribed by *ayurveda* physicians for all stomach diseases were usually taken by the patients. During the time of pandemic, an *ayurvedic* medicine known as *Villwadigulika* which was commonly prescribed by *ayurveda* practitioners for stomach diseases was given to patients. When there was shortage of the medicine in the market, great help was provided by the physician P.S. Varrier of Kottakal Aryavaidya Sala<sup>25</sup>.

At a time when the deadly pandemic spelt disaster on the human lives in Malabar, a large section of the population was in peril due to the poverty and famine. The communist party was already in the field to stop the black market and hoarding of essential commodities. When the pandemic started to claim the human lives in large number, the entire party machinery was geared to meet the new challenge. The state leadership gave call for its workers and class and mass organisations to launch distress relief activities in the

---

<sup>23</sup> V. Jyothirmani, *The Servants of India Society in Kerala*, Malabar Institute for Research and Development, Vatakara, 2015. p.166

<sup>24</sup> M.K. Panikkotty, *Amruthasmaranakal*, (Autobiography) Poorna Publication, Calicut, 2005. p.30

<sup>25</sup> V. Jyothirmani, *op. cit.*, p.165

pandemic torn areas. The party supremo Krishna Pillai along with his wife and a band of dedicated party volunteers got engaged in the distress relief works. Krishna Pillai wanted *Grama Seva Sangh* to join hands with communists for distress relief works<sup>26</sup>. Throughout Kerala, volunteer corps were formed in association with class and mass organisations. In Alapuzha, Karshaka Thozhilali Union was in frontline of the cholera eradication programme. The organisation composed songs of the epidemic to make people aware of the disease. The songs were composed in a way to educate people to do things to ward off the disease. A large number of women participated in the relief works by collecting food and clothes which were supplied to the patients and their families<sup>27</sup>. Besides, the *beedi*-cigar workers, tile workers and teachers served as the volunteers to take care of the pestilence victims.

Kerala People's Relief Fund was an initiative started by the state unit of the party keeping in mind the distress relief works. It was the belief of the party leadership in the efficiency and capability of the party cell units that made it launch a systematic programme of fund raising. The state leadership gave directions to local level workers to approach people in their localities who were financially sound enough to contribute a fixed amount each month to the fund which was meant for the people in distress. They were also instructed to send  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the fund, after expending  $\frac{3}{4}$  for the distress relief works in the locality, to the Kerala Peoples Relief Committee<sup>28</sup>. Accordingly, party volunteers visited places in and out of the state to raise the fund. Moyarath Sankaran who was residing at Chittariparambu near

---

<sup>26</sup> K.N. Panikkar, *Kadathanadinte Sahithya Paramaryam*, D.C.Books, Kottayam. 2015, p.87

<sup>27</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Keralathile Communist Partyude Charithram 1940-1952*, II part, Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 2020. p,90.

<sup>28</sup> Report of P. Krishna Pillai in *Desabhimani*, 04-03-1945

Koothuparamba, was in the forefront of such programmes. He had been in Kolar gold fields and collected funds from Mysore state on behalf of the Kerala Peoples Relief Committee just as having done other relief works in times of flood and famine on the west coast<sup>29</sup>.

It was during the time of distresses in Malabar that the relief committees under the aegis of CPI were formed; one was formed under Moyarath Sankaran and T.S.Thirumunpu in north Malabar. The leaflet prepared by them in English, titled 'Call of Kerala', shows the importance and relevance of the distress relief works during this time<sup>30</sup>. Visiting many places in Kerala, Bangalore and Mysore Moyarath himself had given leadership to the fund collection for the distress relief works. Besides fund collection, party activists came forward to take care of the patients and console the affected families.

As the epidemic spread great panic, people were not able even to come out of their houses to help their relatives and neighbours. The people were very much scared of the virus getting infected. If the human body was infected with such viruses there was no other way at that time other than death. The affected were isolated and no one came forward to take care of them. The government interference was also ineffective and consequently a large number of people succumbed to the diseases. It was in such a situation that communist volunteers came forward to take care of the affected families. Setting aside all the personal and family matters, a large number of party workers, without minding voices of protest from their families themselves, joined the volunteer corps that was formed at the behest of the Party state unit

---

<sup>29</sup> Reply letter from Moyarath Sankaran Nambiar on communist activities to a Memorandum No:52 /47-5 dated 08-02-1947 from Government of Madras through the Superintendent, Central Jail, Vellore in Kaviyoor Rajagopalan, *Moyarath Sankaran*. Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2012. p.107

<sup>30</sup> Moyarath Sankaran, *Athmakatha*, Sahithya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2021

to encounter the pandemic. The volunteers were directed to get vaccinated first as precautionary measure and involved in the treatment of patients and in the eradication of the disease<sup>31</sup>. Activities, ranging from queuing up in front of the shops to take care of the individuals and families who were affected by the epidemics like Cholera in 1943, were organised and party units and mass organisations were well prepared for these activities under the party leadership<sup>32</sup>.

The big challenge encountered by the Communist volunteers who got engaged in distress relief was the blind beliefs centred around cholera. In certain localities people believed that the cholera was a divine punishment for which there was no medicine. In north Malabar the disease was also called *Nadappu Deenam* or fast spreading disease. In south Malabar it was locally known as *Thaalthatti* or blow on the head<sup>33</sup>. People were of the belief that *chekuthan* or devil was responsible for the infection of cholera.<sup>34</sup> Extending help to the infected persons was believed to go against the god's will and invite god's wrath. The fear being cursed by god in the minds of people was so strong and deep that no one was ready to approach the victims and their families. At Pulamanthol near Malappuram, when a group of Communist volunteers including prominent writer Cherukad (Govinda Pisharady) made an attempt to visit an infected isolated island which was mainly occupied by the *harijans*, some people tried to dissuade them from visiting the area on account of such belief. The volunteers were advised that it would be disastrous to visit and treat the infected at the island as the disease was caused

---

<sup>31</sup> Interview with C. Bhaskaran at his residence in Mattannur on 21-09-2021.

<sup>32</sup> E.M.S. Namboothirippad, *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam Ulbhavavum Valarchayum* . p.104

<sup>33</sup> P. Parameswaran , *Ha Nayanar* , Vettom, V.1, Tanur, 1984, in Jyothirmani , *op. cit.*, p.167

<sup>34</sup> M.K. Panikkotti, *op. cit.*, p.28

by *Thalemathatti Chekuthan* or devil<sup>35</sup>. In Kurumbranadu area, rituals were conducted and amulets were distributed to the victims and their families to ward away the disease. Kattumaadam Namboothiri was known for such practices in the area against which communist volunteers who got engaged in cholera relief activities had to raise their voice of protest<sup>36</sup>.

The party entered in the field of distress relief by joining hands with the officials of the health department. The Madras government had imposed the responsibility to keep the sewages and streets clean on the lower level staff in local administration but without fund the employees failed to discharge their duty<sup>37</sup>. The Cholera Inspection Report which was prepared by W.V Perumal, A.D.P.H.(B) against the backdrop of the cholera outbreak, also has clearly pointed out at the great shortage of the health officials<sup>38</sup>.

By the time the party got formed in 1939, it had a strong and efficient machinery, largely thanks to the platform of CSP, to put any decision into action. The party managed to maintain a band of well disciplined and trained cadres who were indoctrinated with Marxist ideology and they were all set to get engaged in any programme or works at any time assigned by the Party leadership. It was the firm belief that the Party higher rungs had in the competence and capacity of the cadres, that made the leadership launch a daring task at this crucial moment of pandemic. The Party cells, basic units of the party, at the village level throughout the pandemic hit zones were set in tune with the direction of the state unit. The volunteers got vaccinated to get immunity and thus, after receiving training in the disease treatment,

---

<sup>35</sup> Cherukad, *Jeevithappatha* (Autobiography), p.428

<sup>36</sup> K. Gopalan Master, *Maattathinte Nalvazhikal*. p.35

<sup>37</sup> M. Raghavan. *op. cit.*, p.183.

<sup>38</sup> Cholera Inspection Report of W.V Perumal, A.D.P.H.(B) Dated-28-06-1943

launched distress relief works<sup>39</sup>. In some of the epidemic zones, where party did not have cells, the individual party workers in association with social service organisations like DMRT actively participated in the relief works. They managed to provide aid to restore hope and normalcy in the social life of the poor and marginalised.

In communities that are not prepared to handle the pestilence, the people were left to the fate of the god. The Communist mission, in addition to creating awareness among the people of the pandemic, helped supply them emergency supplies like food, water, and medicine which were provided by the health department. The greatest work that the Communists have done was to bury the dead ones at a time no one dared to do it due to fear. It was very risky for the volunteers to treat the patients or burying the dead without any type of precautions or safety equipments. For fear of infection the volunteers did not even take food during day times<sup>40</sup>.

It was in the monsoon season of 1943 that Malabarexperienced onslaughts of cholera when the pandemic was virulent in all forms and took a heavy toll of human lives in a short span of time. Since November 1942, cholera was prevalent in some portions of the southern part of the district. At this time, the infection was nowhere severe except in a few spots where the incidence was rather severe as also somewhat widespread. In January and February 1943, the disease was confined to the Palaghat and Alathur ranges<sup>41</sup>. Later it spread fast covering a large area including the interior. Following the infection the Palaghat municipal commissioner ordered the closure of hotels and restaurants in the neighbourhood of Sultanpet Bazar<sup>42</sup>.

---

<sup>39</sup> K.V. Kunhiraman, *Evarkkum Priyapetta Keluettan*, p.53

<sup>40</sup> Interview with C.Bhaskaran at his residence in Mattannur on 21-09-2021

<sup>41</sup> Cholera Inspection Report of W.V Perumal, *op. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> *The Hindu*, 28-06-1943

In Palakkadu and Alathur ranges cholera relief activities were carried out by the party cells in a systematic manner. Yaakkara was one of the most affected area in Palakkad where the distress relief activities were carried out even by the Communists hailing from the places like Ponnani. At the behest of the Krishna Pillai, squads had been formed at Ponnani for relief works and volunteers were sent to work there. C.E.Kunjumon from Ponnani was one of the volunteers in such a squad. The volunteers rendered commendable service after walking kilometres on foot from Ponnani to different parts of Palakkad. The squads, who got engaged in the burials of the dead, did not have adequate tools even to carry the corpses. They had carried along with them only a spade and a wood board piece which was not adequate even to lay the dead. It was with the help of these tools that volunteers discharged their duties. In some places where death toll was very high, pushing carts were used to carry the corpses<sup>43</sup>. It was at the risk of being infected that volunteers came forward to render their services. Kanhirathingal Moidheen in Vazhakkadu near Malappuram was one of the members of the volunteer squads for cholera works<sup>44</sup>.

In the relief works, the name of Thankamma, wife of Krishna Pillai, deserves special mention. She had actively engaged in all types of works as an aide of the party supremo. She along with others prepared food for the volunteers who were engaged in relief works. The necessary items required for the volunteers for relief works including *beedi* during the time of the relief works were packed up by a group comprising of Thankamma and others and they were handed over to the volunteers.

---

<sup>43</sup> Interview with T.V. Abdurahman Kutty at his residence in Ponnani on 28-05-2022

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Kanhirathingal Moidheen at his residence in Vazhakkadu, Malappuram, 27-12-2020



Valluvanadu and Eranadu regions were other places where cholera spelt disaster. It was in March 1943 that the epidemic spread to Ponnani range and by the last week of April the disease came down, to increase again in the month of May when Chowghat range was infected. In June the disease continued in Ponnani and Chowghat ranges with stray cases in Tirur, Palaghat and Calicut ranges<sup>45</sup>. About the last week of June there was a sharp rise in Tirur and Calicut ranges. Notably, the infection was mainly spread by the movements of the beggars from one part of the town to another and out of about 250 patients admitted into the Infectious Diseases Hospital at Calicut, 170 or more were beggars<sup>46</sup>.

As the pandemic began its ravages persons dying in the open, and entire families being exterminated have been quite common<sup>47</sup>. It was a sight to behold, carrying the corpses of people who had seen each other in the morning, until noon or evening<sup>48</sup>. It was an unusual time when there was no certainty to life for anyone. Sometimes it was friends who talked in the tea shop in the morning, died in the evening. Thus, the pandemic in Malabar with all its might, took away the dearest and nearest ones from the lives forever<sup>49</sup>.

Distress relief works in the area were first launched under the leadership of Krishna Pillai. It was for the cholera containment works that Krishna Pillai landed in Ponnani for the first time. The inspiring leadership of Krishna Pillai looking after the patients by organising volunteer corps was intact a feat in those days. Under his supervision, at a time the pandemic spreading fast, volunteer corps were formed and with the help of these selfless and dedicated volunteers he chalked out programmes to bridle the

---

<sup>45</sup> Cholera Inspection Report by W.V Perumal, *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> *The Hindu*, 27-07-1943

<sup>47</sup> Interview with T.V. Abdurahman Kutty at his residence in Ponnani on 28-05-2022

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

pandemic. As per the programme designed, the volunteers were divided into many squads and they were sent to the affected areas for distress works. Each squad comprising four to five members was assigned the task to work in areas other than their own. The volunteers, thus, after walking on foot kilometres, rendered their services by supplying required medicines and creating awareness about the pandemic among the people<sup>50</sup>. Some of the party workers were in absconding but got engaged in the distress relief works. One P.V.Kutty from New Mahe in north Malabar who was absconding following the police search, had participated in the cholera relief activities in Ponnani<sup>51</sup>.

Hut roof making was one of the works undertaken by the party workers during this time. It was the need of the hour to ensure a secure roof for the huts of the poor especially in the rainy season. Most of the houses in those days were mud plastered thatched huts. The houses of the downtrodden were entirely *chettakudils* (dilapidated huts). The roofs of these houses were unstable and leaked when it rained. The condition of these thatched huts had been reported by *The Indian Express* daily<sup>52</sup>. When dreaded cholera began to take the precious lives of priceless *chettakudils* during the south-west monsoon season, even a secure space was not available to lay the body of the deceased. During the time of the relief works the party volunteers had taken special care in making roofs of huts of downtrodden with coconut leaves. It was felt necessary for them to give better treatment to the poor under secure roofs amidst heavy downpour during monsoon.

In the cholera relief activities the name of Communist leader Imbichi Bava deserves special mention. He was a leading figure in the distress relief works of the party in Tirur region especially in Mangalam area. Imbichi who

---

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> P.Jayarajan (ed.) *Kannur Jilla Communist Party Charithram*. II part, p.107

<sup>52</sup> *The Indian Express*, Madras edition, 26-07-1943

was aged 26, was in jail when cholera was virulently spreading and claiming human lives in large numbers. Mangalam Nadu which was the place of great Malayalam poet Vallathol Narayana Menon, witnessed to the dancing death of the pandemic and it is said that at least 900 died in the pandemic in Mangalam area alone. The relief works like taking care of the victims and burying the dead were done by a volunteer squad under the leadership of Imbichi Bava who got just released from jail in 1943<sup>53</sup>.

By the time the village got rescued from the clutches of the disease after a long distress relief works, 90 children were left as orphans and their protection and rehabilitation became a big challenge. It was at this time that Imbichi came to the rescue of them and thus, children were sent to the orphanages of Kozhikode and Ponnani. Fathima, Amina and Mariya Kutty were some of the children who survived the cholera and were sent to the orphanage at Ponnani. Later, the marriage of Mariya Kutty was officiated with Imbichi Bava as a parent and it was a tearful event in the latter's life<sup>54</sup>. It was Imbichi Bava who awarded the victims, orphaned by the pandemic and admitted in the Ponnani orphanage, a new lease of life.

At Pulamanthol in Malappuram, the cholera distress relief works were done under the leadership of one Kunhikannan who was a *beedi* worker and leader of the party. When cholera began spreading across the district, Pulamanthol could not remain safe. At Pulamanthol, there was a settlement which was inhabited mostly by *Cherumakkal*<sup>55</sup>. The area, of which three by fourth was surrounded by waters, was an isolated settlement and the authorities were not concerned of the human lives residing there. When the cholera infection and the condition of the people came to the notice of the

---

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mariya Kutty at her residence in Ponnani, 27-04-2019

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> One of the untouchable communities.

party workers, Kunhikannan along with other communists came to the rescue of the *Cherumakkals*<sup>56</sup>. He arranged some party workers to alert the health officials of the situation and a team of five party men including Kunhikannan and Cherukad set out to the pandemic hit settlement.

It was amidst heavy rain that the Communists landed in the settlement and what they could see there was unhygienic surroundings in the settlement. Human stools were found scattered around and a dead body was lying near a hut besides which an aged woman was sitting silent.<sup>57</sup> The huts which were all soaked in the incessant rain were in a condition to be collapsed at any time. On seeing them, the woman started lamenting the death of her dearest which was followed by the cries from other huts. The helpless and hapless inhabitants started to come out of their huts. One of the inhabitants intimated them of the death of five persons and also of dead bodies lying unburied. The volunteers saw a tired boy at a hut who was vomiting yellow water. On seeing this, Kunhikannan took ginger, honey and *Villuadhi* tablets from his bag and instructed his mother to administer the medicine<sup>58</sup>. He directed volunteers to bring tools to dig pits for the burial of the dead and thus, amidst heavy rain the party volunteers managed to dig pits and the dead bodies were taken to the pits. When the dead bodies began to be carried by the volunteers, the *Cherumakkal* who were so far silent and inactive, started to help the volunteers.

The health workers were not aware of the cholera outbreak in the settlement and it was only after the news of the arrival of the party workers at the place got spread that health inspector and assistants reached the island.<sup>59</sup> After an arduous job amidst heavy rain the party workers managed to bury

---

<sup>56</sup> Cherukadu, *Jeevithappatha*, p.428

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p.429

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

the dead bodies of all the five and by that time the health workers reached and started administering vaccination to the people. Besides, the party workers entered all the huts in the area for cleaning. With the available materials they swept all the contaminants inside the huts and thoroughly washed and disinfected using a solution of water and fin oil which was brought by the health workers. Before leaving the place Kunhikannan gave the inhabitants necessary instructions to contain the disease. After leaving the settlement, the volunteers went to collect money and clothes from the nearby localities and distributed them among the inhabitants<sup>60</sup>. Meanwhile one of the inhabitants addressed Kunhikannan as *thambran* (lord) and said “you were the real *thambran*”<sup>61</sup>.

In Calicut region, the disease had its onset on 23-05-1943 in ward no.16 (circle IV) through importation of infection from Ponnani *taluk* and spread gradually to other wards<sup>62</sup>. About the last week of June there was a sharp rise in Calicut, Tirur ranges following the severe infection in the Calicut municipal town<sup>63</sup>. Consequent to the severe infection, Mr.A.R.MacEwen, the collector, issued a notification on 17 July 1943 declaring the Calicut taluk (out side the Calicut municipal limits) as cholera infected areas under section 76 of the Madras Public Health Act<sup>64</sup>. The Director of Public Health, in his report sent to the Madras government reported that the present epidemic in the Calicut city was the most severe ever experienced in Calicut. The previous severe epidemic was in 1919 when 721 deaths were recorded<sup>65</sup>.

---

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Director of Public Health, Madras to Secretary to Govt, Education and Public Health Dept. Madras, 25-06-1943

<sup>63</sup> Cholera Inspection Report by W.V. Perumal, *op. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> *The Hindu*, 20-07-1943

<sup>65</sup> Review Report on Cholera Epidemic in Calicut Municipality by Director of Public Health, 22-07-1943.

In the country side the infection is spreading apace. The manifestation is in its most virulent form. The collapse of the patient is immediate and the infection spreads so rapidly that sometimes the whole family is wiped out<sup>66</sup>. As elsewhere party volunteer corps were organised at the behest of the state leadership and launched distress relief works. The relief operation launched by the Kaayalam cell of the party in Calicut was exemplary. Kolattil Raghavan Nair, a member of Kaayalam cell of the party, was one of the members in the volunteer group formed in Kaayalam where following the epidemic, around ten persons succumbed to death. When the pandemic spreading fast creating panic among the people Raghavan Nair along with K.M.Alikoya, Kunhothi, Kolattil Madhavan master and Methal Valappil Pareekutty and others conducted door to door visits to take care of the patients<sup>67</sup>. Prior to the relief works, they had taken a white tablet as preventive medicines supplied by the health department. Distributing preventive medicines among the people they made people aware of personal hygiene and also the need to keep their surroundings clean as precautionary measures to contain the disease<sup>68</sup>. Apart from cleaning the premises of the houses in the infected areas in association with local people, they launched cleaning drives in towns and other public places, the volunteers extended their help to the local people in cleaning the premises of their houses.

Noteworthy service in the field of cholera eradication was rendered by the communist volunteers in Kurumbranad region where cholera eradication drive was carried out under the leadership of M.K.Kelu and M.Kumaran master. Comrades like Mallissery Kunhikannan, P.Krishnan Panicker, V.V.Ramadevan, T.V.Govindan, M.K.Kunhiraman, P.K.Kannan, Kakkuzhiyil

---

<sup>66</sup> *The Indian Express*, 27-07-1943

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Kolattil Raghavan Nair at his residence in Peruvayal, Calicut on 10-03-2020

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

Kunhiraman, K.Appu, T.V.Achyuthan and M.Govindan were in the forefront of the distress relief works<sup>69</sup>. Dr. Mallar, Dr. P.P.Kelan and Chandhu Vaidhyar also extended their level assistances to the volunteers<sup>70</sup>. The communist volunteers in *khaki* trousers and red badges went to each and every house to take care of the victims of the diseases<sup>71</sup>. *Pidiyari* was collected and it was taken to the houses of the victims<sup>72</sup>. They directed family members to drink only boiled water and not to eat stale and rotten food. The necessity to keep their surroundings neat and clean was also specially advised to the people.

The volunteer corps were blessed with the presence of physicians like Dr.P.P.Kelan and Dr. Mallar and Chandhu Vaidhyar. Classes were taken by Mallar to create awareness of the disease and treatment among the party workers<sup>73</sup>. At Kottaparambu in Vatakara, a play, on the sidelines of a party meeting, was staged against the backdrop of the cholera, to create awareness among the people of the epidemic. Aava T.Kunhirama Kurup and M.Kumaran were the characters of the play<sup>74</sup>.

At Angadi Thazha near Vatakara town the eradication drive organised by Hassan Kutty and others<sup>75</sup>. They were in the forefront of distributing Tablets along with health workers. At Memunda in Kurumbranadu Karshaka Sangham activists actively engaged in the relief activities<sup>76</sup>. Apart from the cleaning drive and awareness campaign, workers got engaged in burying the

---

<sup>69</sup> K.V. Kunhiraman, *Evarkkum Priyapetta Keluettan*. p.52

<sup>70</sup> K.N. Panikkar(ed.), *Pradesham, Rashtram, Lokam- Kadathanadinte Sahithya Paramparyam*, p.86

<sup>71</sup> Unpublished memoirs of M. Kumaran Master

<sup>72</sup> K.V. Kunhiraman, *op. cit.* p.52

<sup>73</sup> K.N. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p.86

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Aboobakker Kallingal at his residence in Vatakara on 06-11-2021.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with K.Kunhiraman at his residence in Memunda on 08-03-2021

dead bodies. When one Maatha was died of cholera, the burial was carried out by the party workers<sup>77</sup>. U.Kunhiraman was another leader who served as a volunteer during the time of cholera in Vatakara area<sup>78</sup>.

When cholera was spreading fast Communist volunteers like O.Gopala Kurup in Pathiyarakkara near Vatakara was active in preparing and distributing a particular *kashayam* or a medicinal solution to each and every house in his locality<sup>79</sup>. Kottittayil Kannan from Pathiyarakkara was another party worker who also actively engaged as a volunteer in treating patients and burying the dead<sup>80</sup>. At Onchiyam, where cholera was reported even in the post-war period and party volunteers actively participated in the awareness campaign and undertook cleaning drive at many places<sup>81</sup>. Even the opponent congress party workers could not trivialise the services rendered by the communists<sup>82</sup>. Some of the communist volunteers had sacrificed their lives during this noble service; Mallissery Kunhikannan was one such a volunteer<sup>83</sup>.

An important hurdle in the distress relief activities of the volunteers was the blind beliefs centered around the disease. Sorcerers and necromancers were actively engaged with their own practices in the name of curing the disease; rituals were conducted and *rakshas* or amulets, on which *manthras* were chanted, were distributed to the faithful. The ignorant and illiterate depended mostly on such irrational and unscientific practices to get away

---

<sup>77</sup> Interview with T.V.Balakrishnan Nambiar at his residence in Memunda 08-02-2020

<sup>78</sup> M. Kelappan, *Aparihaaryamaaya Nashtam* in P.K.Sujith (ed), *Samara Mukhangalil Priyasakhakkal*. p.114.

<sup>79</sup> K. Gopalan Master, *Maattathinte Nalvazhikal*, p.125

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127

<sup>81</sup> Interview with V.P. Balan at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

<sup>82</sup> Interview with M.K. Krishnan at his residence in Memunda on 08-04-2021

<sup>83</sup> K.V. Kunhiraman, *op. cit.* p.52



from the pandemic. In Kurumbranadu area Kattumaadam Namboothiri was very much known for such practices. The communist volunteer groups who got involved in the distress relief activities had raised their voice of protest against the Kattumadam for misleading the people<sup>84</sup>.

The volunteers have done whatever they could to discourage people from adopting unscientific and irrational methods for disease cure and advised people to approach hospitals and cooperate with health workers<sup>85</sup>. Similarly cholera related misunderstandings were another problem faced by the volunteers. The main risk factor for cholera is dehydration and hence the lone remedy was to drink plenty of water. But, it was common among the people advising the infected not to take in much water. This was advised at a time the latter required to drink enough water. It was a misunderstanding among the ignorant people that drinking too much water would increase the chance of diarrhoea<sup>86</sup>. Wiping of such misconceptions from the minds of the people was the primary focus of the volunteers.

Kannur *taluk* could not remain safe from the fury of the pandemic. As per the letter of the Municipal Health Officer, Cannanore the first case of cholera in the Cannanore town reported on 05-07-1943<sup>87</sup>. One of the municipal scavengers got the attack first. His stools were examined at the King Institute and declared positive for cholera. The patient's mother also got infected soon after, and both of them were isolated in the municipal small pox shed, treated and cured. No more case occurred among their contacts or among the rest of the scavengers<sup>88</sup>. But the disease spread a pace as elsewhere

---

<sup>84</sup> K. Gopalan Master, *op. cit.*, p.35

<sup>85</sup> Interview with T.K.Kumaran at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Janaki.M at her residence in Vatakara on 12-05-2018

<sup>87</sup> Report of the Municipal Health Officer, Cannanore to the Commissioner, Cannanore Municipality, 07-12-1943

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

in Malabar. The source of infection could not definitely be traced but it must have been from handling of the excreta of some carriers from the district who stayed here. An epidemic of dysentery that swept the town about the time complicated matters to some extent and was responsible for a good deal of panic which required careful handling<sup>89</sup>.

It was during the time of distresses in Malabar that the Relief Committee was formed under Moyarath Sankaran and T.S.Thirumunpu. The leaflet prepared by them in English titled 'Call of Kerala' shows the importance and relevance of the distress relief works during this time<sup>90</sup>. As part of the fund collection for the distress relief works, he visited many places in and out of Kerala including Bangalore and Mysore. People's committees were formed in every village for the treatment and rehabilitation of patients and campaigns were also conducted to create awareness of the disease among the people<sup>91</sup>. Even after the pandemic Moyarath carried forward his works to save the people from distress. In the first quarter of 1945 he visited Mysore, Alsoore, Kox Town, Malleswaram, Bangalore etc. and approached many persons and institutions with fund request. On 10 March 1945, as part of the Kerala People's Relief Committee he convened a press meet and representatives of *Desabhimani*, *Thayanadu*, *Janavani*, Daily News, The Hindu, Indian Express, Times Of India, *Jayanadu*, *Al Thalaam* etc. were invited to the meet. A notice of the Call of Kerala was prepared by him and its 500 copies were given to one N.Karunakaran for distribution. At many public speeches he spoke of the need to raise fund for relief works. He

---

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Moyarath Sankaran, *op. cit.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

reported the progress of the relief works and fund collection to T.S.Thirumunpu and also Krishna Pillai .<sup>92</sup>

Leaders like Azheekodan Raghavan and others came forward to take care of the victims in Kannur town areas. It was under the leadership of Azheekodan Raghavan that the volunteer squad carried out cholera eradication drive in Kannur<sup>93</sup>. They had witnessed very bizarre experiences during the time of their door to door visits. One such an instance was at a street on the north side of the Kannur Taluk Office, where a mother and her children resided at a small house. When the squad reached the house, they saw mother and her child lying in the vomit on the floor. There was no one to clean and even to give them a drop of water. Azheekodan Raghavan, the squad leader, without any hesitation cleaned the house after washing the vomit on the floor. They were given hot water to drink and later doctor came to take care of them<sup>94</sup>.

Another significant name with regard to the distress relief activities under red flag in north Malabar is of K.Koran master from Kuttamath in Cheruvathoor who was seventh accused in the Kayyur case but was exonerated by the court due to lack of evidence. After jail release he got involved in cholera eradication programme. Eastern regions of Kannur like Cheemeni, Andol, North Puliyanloor were his centre of activities<sup>95</sup>.The name of Pariyarath Kunhikrishnan Nair who was the secretary of the Ayathra Vayal party cell, is another name to be written bold in the cholera eradication

---

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> K. Pyar's article in Praveen Lal (ed)-*Azheekodan Raghavan Oru Ormappusthakam*. p.42

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> M.P. Narayanan Nambiar, *Kayyur Samarathinte Kaanaapuram* in *Kayyur Rakthasakshi Smaranika*, p.57

programme held under red flag<sup>96</sup>. The commendable service was rendered under the aegis of S.J.M Vayanasala at Kandakkai in Chirakkal taluk which was set up by KS workers. When cholera was spreading fast, the workers of the Vayanasala got engaged in wiping out misconceptions with regard to cholera.<sup>97</sup>

In New Mahe near Thalassery, following the onslaught of the pandemic in the area, Cholera Relief Committee was formed at a meeting held at Edannur Vinjanavardhini Vayanasala on 27 July 1943. The meeting which was mostly attended by Communist volunteers, selected K.M.Gopi, a Communist party worker at Edannur as the volunteer captain of the relief committee. Kuniyil Krishnan and K.V.Damodaran Vaidyar who were secretaries of Vayanasala were other members of the committee. The committee was at the forefront of extending all possible assistance to the patients and people in distress owing to the epidemic. Delivery of necessary medicines, treatment of patients, burial of dead bodies, organising cleaning drive, accompanying health workers for vaccination, etc. were done by these volunteers<sup>98</sup>. At Kariyad and Peringalam near Panoor communists like Punathil Chathu, M.K.Gurikkal, Naduparampath Krishnan who were also KS members worked among the people to contain the pandemic.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, the epidemic eradication works in 1943 is one of the milestones in the history of Thalasseri *BeediThozhilali* Union<sup>100</sup>.

At Thillankeri in Kannur pandemic did not show any leniency and hence casualties were reported. The name of C.Anandhan in the distress

---

<sup>96</sup> Karivellur Murali, et.al., *Karivellur Struggle 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir*, p.202

<sup>97</sup> *Kandakkai, Platinum Jubilee Smaranika*, Sakhavu Krishna Pillai Smaraka Vayanasala, p.47

<sup>98</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.107

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Kodoor Balan at his residence in Kariyadu on 29-11-21

<sup>100</sup> P. Vijayan, *Rakthalipikail Ezhuthapetta Veeragaathakal* in *Spark Souvenir*, p.104

relief works in Thillankeri deserves special mention. He had maintained good relation with people and became a part and parcel of their life. When cholera began to ravage disaster on the human lives he along with his brothers like C.Kunhiraman and C.Gopalan and other workers came to the rescue of the people. They visited houses of the victims of cholera and made arrangements to bring *vaidyars* for treatment<sup>101</sup>. As elsewhere, volunteers were also at the forefront of the burial of the dead. In all the cases, be it cholera or small pox or any other disease, volunteers used to call one Appaperuvannan who was a leading *vaidyan* in the locality.<sup>102</sup>

At Anthur Panchayat of Thalipparambu, the names of four women in the cholera distress relief works remain intact. They are Karichiriyedathi, C.Pandal M.K. Narayani, and P. Madhavi who were members of the KS and participated in all the peasant struggles in Kannur. At the time of Cholera which was reported later in 1946, the women's group organised under these four women went house to house service and also helped Panchayat health workers<sup>103</sup>. In Mattannur area party leaders like V.Anandhan Mash, and K.K Balakrishnan Nambiar had given leadership to organise distress relief works<sup>104</sup>. Similarly M.K.Kunhikrishnan Nambiar and comrade Kallorath Madhavan were other party volunteers who got involved in distress relief works at the behest of the party when cholera broke out in 1943<sup>105</sup>. At Karivellur, KS workers like K.Krishnan Master, P.Kunhiraman, Koliyadan Narayanan Master, Kookkottu Ibrahim, K.P.Kunhi Kannan and others took initiative in distress relief works<sup>106</sup>.

---

<sup>101</sup> Interview with C. Balan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with K.Gopalan Nambiar at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021.

<sup>103</sup> KRPCDS report of T.K.Anandi. visit <http://www.cds.ac.in>

<sup>104</sup> Interview with C.Bhaskaran at his residence in Mattanur on 21-09-2021

<sup>105</sup> T.V.K. Kurup's article in *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika*, p.70

<sup>106</sup> P. Jayarajan., *op cit.* p.107

## Small Pox

Smallpox had been a problematic infectious disease of mankind for thousands of years and was prevalent among many ancient societies. It is believed that small-pox affected human existence in north-eastern Africa 12 000 years ago<sup>107</sup>. The earliest evidence of small pox comes from marks preserved on the body of the mummy of the ancient Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses V; the mummified head of the Egyptian Pharaoh, who died about 1160 B.C. of an acute infection, shows lesions that appeared to be those of smallpox. It probably spread from Africa to India by means of Egyptian merchants in the last millennium BC. Old Chinese and Sanskrit texts contain several references to this killer disease. Historians and physicians have sometimes referred smallpox as 'Indian Plague', which suggests that the disease might be widely prevalent in India in the earlier times<sup>108</sup>.

Small pox is contagious and generally transmitted by contact with infected people. It is caused by a virus that spreads from a person's droplets discharged from the mouth or the nose. It can also be spread by having contact with infected clothing or bedding and in rare cases, through the air. Smallpox made no distinctions. It affected all ages and socio-economic classes and took a heavy toll of human life. If someone did not die from the infection, he or she did get lasting immunity against it. That is why an old saying in India, common in the nineteenth century, was that children were not counted as permanent members of the family until they had encountered small pox once and survived<sup>109</sup>.

---

<sup>107</sup> Guharoy, et al., *Smallpox, Clinical Features, Prevention and Management*, Annals of Pharmacotherapy, 2004 March, Volume 38. p.440

<sup>108</sup> Chandrakant Lahariya, *A Brief History Of Vaccines & Vaccination in India*, pp.491–511.

<sup>109</sup> David Arnold, 'Diseases of the Modern Period in South Asia', in Kenneth Kiple (ed.), *Cambridge History of Human Disease*, Cambridge University Press, 1993. p.420

In India smallpox was believed to be the wrath of the goddess, which is especially likely to occur should rituals in her honour be neglected. It is traditionally regarded as the manifestation of the goddess *Shitala*, which means "the cool one," and in southern India her name is *Mariamamma*. And hence, it was not treated as a medical problem or a bodily disorder, and traditional cult priests played a leading role in making diagnoses and prescribing remedies, mostly based on medicinal plants. More often than not, their expertise in treating some diseases with medicinal plants is overshadowed by the rituals of the exercise.

Malabar district in Madras presidency had long been the principal endemic focus of smallpox. William Logan in his *Malabar Manual* has mentioned about the prevalence of Small-pox in the district where the disease was widely distributed in both urban and rural settings. During the short period from 1941 to 1945 the number of total deaths in Malabar on account of small pox was 2925<sup>110</sup>. During the peak time of the war the vaccination coverage had gone down all over the country and in 1944-1945, the highest numbers of smallpox cases in the last two decades were reported<sup>111</sup>. In the post-war period, from year to year, the areas of highest incidence shifted from regions to regions in an apparently indiscriminate manner till it was totally wiped out in 1970s.

It was a time when human life did not have even the price of livestock, and diseases made man completely helpless. The appearance of the infected, especially with blisters filled with fluid all over the body, was frightening and terrorising. The neighbours hesitated even to go out of their houses when the infection was reported in their neighbourhood. Moreover, no one came forward to bury the dead body of the infected due to fear of

---

<sup>110</sup> 1951 Census Hand Book : Malabar District ( Govt. Press, Madras, 1953) .

<sup>111</sup> Chandrakant Lahariya *op cit.*, pp.491-511.

infection<sup>112</sup>. Contact with infected was avoided to the maximum and many families abandoned the infected, their most dearest, thus, the fate of the patient was left to the god. There were instances of infected persons being wrapped up in coconut leaf mat and abandoned mercilessly on the way side. The families, in reality, were not capable to withstand the appalling sight of the patients and hence, desired sudden death of the latter. Besides patients being abandoned on the way side, there were cases of patients buried alive as there was no chance for them to come back to normal life<sup>113</sup>.

It was at a time when people got scared to approach the infected and their families and even to venture out of houses that Communist volunteers came forward to take care of the victims. The experience of treating the cholera stricken patients in 1943 was an asset to the volunteers in undertaking another challenge. When the epidemics started to take heavy toll of human lives, party supremo, Krishna Pillai, through party mouth piece *Deshabhimani*, reminded party workers of the duty of communists and gave a call to get engaged in distress relief works<sup>114</sup>. He exhorted party workers to get actively engaged in conducting programmes like launching campaigns among the people stressing the necessity of vaccination as best preventive measure and to report cases of small pox in each and every locality to the nearest health centres and also to *Desabhimani*. If the health officials showed any negligence in launching vaccination drive etc. party workers were

---

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Govindan.K at at his residence in Chorode on 21-04-2019

<sup>113</sup> There was an incident narrated by Murali Thummarukudi. The infected Parukutty was being taken from a quarantine place to the burial pit as she was believed to have died. But she murmured that she had not died yet. Though the *Karanavar* insisted on burying her, the worker was not ready for that. The insistence of the *Karanavar* was on the ground that her death was sure even if she was taken back to the hut. Visit <https://archives.mathrubhumi.com>

<sup>114</sup> P. Krishnapillai's article in *Deshabhimani*, 04-03-1945 in *Andalat, Sakhakale Munnottu*, Vol.1, Chintha, 1978, Trivandrum, p.504



directed to report the matter to the district health officer<sup>115</sup>. Pillai directed volunteers that “once the infection was reported, party workers should prompt relatives of the infected to shift the patient and give separate treatment... if family members were not able to do this, the party workers should do the needful by finding out separate place to be shifted and by deploying volunteers to give proper treatment, food and other necessities to the patients”<sup>116</sup>.

Notable work of the Communists was to remove misconceptions regarding to the disease and its spread which created much panic among the people. In certain places it was widely believed that the disease spread through the raw rice distributed through ration shops<sup>117</sup>. Due to this fear people inhibited to go to ration shops and get their essentials which further exacerbated their miseries in the poverty stricken period. This type of misconceptions had the same pace as that of the epidemic spread. The party supremo was well informed that even the party workers were not far behind in spreading misconceptions of the epidemic. Hence, he strongly condemned the tendency of spreading such rumours of the disease by the party workers themselves and directed party branches to launch programmes to ward off such wrong beliefs from the minds of the people<sup>118</sup>.

The call of the party to take up distress relief activities had its repercussions at the grass root level. The small pox eradication and distress relief of the party which was started in 1940s lasted for more than two decades. During the period from 1941 to 1945 the number of total deaths in Malabar on account of small pox was 2925 and as many as 2047 people

---

<sup>115</sup> Letter written by P. Krishna Pillai in *Deshabhimani*, 11-02-1945 in Andalal *op. cit.*, p.617

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

succumbed to the disease during 1945-46 alone<sup>119</sup>. It was during this peak time of the epidemic that Communist volunteers launched distress relief activities which lasted till the final extinction of the epidemic in Kerala. Volunteer corps and relief committees were formed throughout the state. Cases of infection and formation of clusters were identified and reported to the officials stressing the necessity to carry out vaccination drives<sup>120</sup>. Funds were collected through receipt books and *hoondipetti* and the money was used for purchasing tablets and ration items and also to meet the expenses for burying the dead<sup>121</sup>. It was an *ayurvedic* tablet known as *suvarnasringadhi* that was widely distributed among the infected by the volunteers.

When the pestilence was spreading rapidly in the 1944-45 period, Communist volunteers initiated measures to check the containment in association with primary level health officials. Quarantine was the effective means to check the spread of the epidemic and for that, cooperation on the part of the people was necessary. The smallpox victim can transmit the disease only from the time his rash appears until the scales drop off - a period of about four weeks. So, if the patient is isolated during the crucial period, the chain can be broken<sup>122</sup>. There was not much medical awareness of the disease to be followed during the time of infection and therefore, the necessity to conduct quarantine awareness campaign was specially stressed among the works of Communist volunteers. Conducting door-to-door visits, they identified the infected houses and advised family members about does and no-

---

<sup>119</sup> 1951 Census Hand Book , *op. cit.*

<sup>120</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 30-10-1953.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* 08-04-1945.

<sup>122</sup> Chinmay Tumble, *The Age of Pandemics*, p.16

does during the time of infection and also precautions to be taken while approaching the infected<sup>123</sup>.

The big challenge encountered by the Communist volunteers who got engaged in the small pox eradication drive was the blind beliefs centred around the disease. In Kerala small pox is associated with Kodungallur Bhagavathy<sup>124</sup>. In earlier days when small pox used to claim countless lives, Kodungalloor Bhagavati was the only recourse for hundreds of people who used to conduct annual pilgrimage to the temple<sup>125</sup>. The goddess, known as *Vasurimala Thampuratti* is believed to have the power to ward off all types of skin diseases including small pox, chicken pox, measles, herpes etc. Hence, people have not shown interest to take vaccination or medication and instead, they invited *komarams* to cure the disease<sup>126</sup>. At Panikotti in Kurumbranadu when one Baskaran Nambiar was infected, he was treated by a traditional cult priest; *komaram* came and performed rituals at former's house but Baskaran succumbed to the disease.<sup>127</sup>

What was witnessed during the campaign of the volunteers was regular fulfilment of spiritual obligations by the families to the goddess which was the most common traditional prophylaxis for the disease. Religious ceremonies were periodically performed in goddess' honour at temples dedicated to her. Notably, simultaneous with the spread of the disease, offerings to the god also marked a substantial increase in the Bhagavathi temples. Kunjamaman, uncle of Cherukkad from Pulamanthol, has made

---

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Baskara Panikkar at his residence in Vatakara on 05-05-2021

<sup>124</sup> At present, on the left side of the temple, on the outer courtyard a small idol of *Vasuri Mala* goddess can be seen. *Vasuri* is a Malayalam word which means small pox and *mala* stands for garland. The idol here wears a garland made of small pox pustules.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with O.P. Mani at her residence in Chemmarathur on 02-01-2019

<sup>126</sup> *Komarams* are believed to have been blessed by Kodungalloor Bhagavati

<sup>127</sup> M.K. Panikkotti, *Amruthasmarana*, (Autobiography), p.32

*nercha* (offering) to *Thirumandham Kunnilamma* when he got infected<sup>128</sup>. This type of offerings was very common when infection was reported in the family or neighbourhood. *Guruthi* was also suggested to be performed to satisfy the goddess to keep the disease at bay. Amulets on which *mantras* were chanted by traditional sorcerers, were also given to the people as preventive measure.<sup>129</sup>

Since the disease was believed to have caused by the wrath of the goddess, many people, as mentioned before, were averse to the vaccination drive launched by the health department<sup>130</sup>. Another reason to get away from vaccination programme was that there were allegations levelled against the local level administration which continued with compulsory vaccination with the help of unqualified vaccinators. There were severe criticisms in the local administration councils against the unqualified vaccinators who, in the name of vaccination “were making scratches six inches long on children’s arms” so that “the cries of these infants were a most horrible sight”<sup>131</sup>. It was common that children running away when the health workers came to villages for vaccination<sup>132</sup>. As the people turned a blind eye to the vaccination programme, it became a responsibility of the party volunteers to make them vaccinate through awareness programmes.

It was an arduous task for the Communists to direct the people who were plunged into blind belief and irrational practices to the right path of modern science. Hence, it was through the door-to-door visits of each and every house in the villages coming under each party cells that the volunteers managed to carry out the campaign against irrational practices followed

---

<sup>128</sup> Cherukad, *Jeevithappatha* (Autobiography), p.326

<sup>129</sup> Interview with T.V.Balakrishnan Nambiar at his residence in Memunda on 08-02-2020

<sup>130</sup> Interview with M. Narayani at her residence in Panikotti on 12-05-2018

<sup>131</sup> M. Raghavan, *op. cit.* p.209

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Krishnan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

during the time of epidemic. Different types of programmes including skits were staged to make aware of the people of the need to abide by the directives of health department. In north Malabar, KS workers engaged in spreading awareness of vaccination as preventive step against small pox and they also propagated that recovery from the disease was possible if the tablets were taken at the early stage as soon as the fever was felt or symptoms were manifested<sup>133</sup>.

Remarkable aspect of the traditional system of treatment was the role played by *Mooppans* or *Thandans* in north Malabar. It was believed that *mooppans* were blessed by Kodungallur Bhagavathy and they would not get infected<sup>134</sup>. When *Mooppans* came to treat the infected, at the invitation of the family, the latter used to vacate houses. At the time of vacating houses, the entire belongings of the family were left to the will of *mooppans*. It was believed that taking personal belongings with them would invite wrath of the goddess<sup>135</sup>. *Mooppan* usually prescribed some items required for their treatment which included silk cloth, cock and oil that was used for *pantham katthikkal* or lighting the torch with fire as part of the treatment<sup>136</sup>. The families had to pay huge amount required by the *mooppans*.

*Mooppans* used to make a particular type of *kashayam* out of some medicinal herbs to be served to the patients which was the only medicine given to the patients and it was not sure whether it was effective to cure the disease<sup>137</sup>. Many patients, including all the members in a family, died while in

---

<sup>133</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 23-02-1945

<sup>134</sup> It was also believed that drinking alcohol would prevent the infection and on account of this belief the *Mooppans* came to attend patients, in inebriated condition.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with O.P. Mani at her residence in Chemmarathur on 02-01-2019

<sup>136</sup> K.G. Nambiar, *Ormakurippukal*, (Autobiography). p.47

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Naduvathur Chonandiyil Deviamma at her residence in Koyilandy on 28-12-2022.

their treatment and some, anyhow, managed to come back to normal life. Apart from the treatment, it was also the duty of the *Mooppans* to bury the bodies of the dead<sup>138</sup>. The party leadership was well aware of the exploitation of the blind beliefs pertained to the disease and what was necessary to save the people from the terrible epidemic was to put an end to the irrational practices of treatment. At Iritty and surrounding places in north Malabar, Communist volunteers like Kalyani and others had driven away the *Mooppans* who were engaged in the treatment and the patients were taken care of by the volunteers themselves<sup>139</sup>.

One of the huge problems of this time was the dearth of men to bury the dead body of the infected due to fear of infection. It was reported that many families had waited for hours for the arrival of the *mooppans* to bury the corpses<sup>140</sup>. It was said that the burial of the dead was done with utmost care; in certain cases the body was buried along with the cot itself on which the patient lay during the time of infection<sup>141</sup>. The members of the volunteer corps which were formed under the tutelage of the Communist party came forward to bury the dead. Coconut leaf mat and plantain leaf were used to wrap the body and it was moved into the pit using ropes in a way to avoid contact with the dead<sup>142</sup>.

The party, in the backdrop of the outbreak of the epidemic, formed medical squads comprising of dedicated and duty bound party workers. In

---

<sup>138</sup> Special care was taken to avoid contact with the body; the dead bodies were wrapped in a mat made of coconut leaves and moved into the burial pit using ropes. The dead bodies were buried only at mid nights taking the panic and fear of the people into consideration.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with K.K.Shylaja Teacher, former health minister of Kerala at her residence in Mattannur on 21-09-2021. Kalyani is her grandmother.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Nani at her residence in Muttungal, Vatakara on 07-04-2021

<sup>141</sup> Interview with T.V.Abdurahman at his residence in Ponnani on 28-05-2022

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Krishnan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

each area the squad members, who had taken special care in interacting with the infected persons, adopted measures to break the transmission of the virus. They conducted campaigns at the village level creating awareness of the deadly disease and of precautionary measures to be taken in the context of interacting with infected persons. The squad members, unmindful of adverse remarks, walked kilometres sweating in the scorching heat by ascending and descending the hill regions and working among the infected people without minding the consequences of the infection<sup>143</sup>. The funds for organising such programmes were raised from the local people and voluntary organisations. The accurate account details of the fund collections and their expenditures were reported in the party and KS meetings and were also reported to *Deshabhimani*.

Kerala People's Relief Committee works in Kannur were remarkable where arrangements were made for opening medicine distribution centres at different neighbouring regions like Azheekodu, Kakkad, Valapattanam, Pallikkunnu, Puthiya Theru, Chowwa etc. with Kannur as its centre<sup>144</sup>. Appeals were also issued to the public to extend assistance to open more such centres. The committee exhorted the people to launch small pox prevention activities and get engaged in distress relief works. William Snellux, organizer of the committee in Kannur made elaborate arrangements to distribute the *suvarnasringadhi* tablets for the patients<sup>145</sup>. At Kannur town and surrounding areas, funds were collected by the Red volunteers from the local people and they were utilised for purchasing *suvarnasringadhi* and also *homeo* tablets and also for the treatment of the infected. Its fund was also

---

<sup>143</sup> Interview with C. Bhaskaran at his residence in Mattannur on 21-09-2021

<sup>144</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 24-02-1945

<sup>145</sup> William Snellux's report in *Deshabhimani*, 31-04-1945

used for supplying ration items for the helpless families of the patients and also to meet the cost for the burial of the dead<sup>146</sup>.

At Olayambalam Bazaar, *beedi* workers had actively engaged in the distress relief. The works rendered by the members of the Great Dharbar Beedi Branch have been a model to others. Workers like K.P.Govindan, Kannan Nair, U.Kunhiraman under the leadership of comrade M.C.Kunhikannan were on the run across the breadth and length of the village to take care of the patients. Attired in trouser and baniyan, these volunteers at the work place, even after stopping their *beedi* work, rushed everywhere in the village and hence their noble services were relief for the villagers<sup>147</sup>.

The Pallikunnu branch of the party in Kannur, in association with Chirakkal *Naithu Thozhilali* Union of Pallikunnu division committee and Ganesh Factory Committee which was affiliated to Kannur *Beedi Thozhilali* Committee, got engaged in relief activities in Pallikkunnu region. In a period from February 24 to March 31,1945 *suvarnasringadhi* tablets from Vasu Vaidyar were distributed to 242 persons who showed symptoms of small pox and 98 percent of the patients had reported to have been saved from the deadly disease<sup>148</sup>. Apart from this, ration grains and cloths were taken to the houses of the infected. With the help of the locals, dead bodies of the victims were buried as well. As result of these relief works, the volunteers could bridle the deadly disease to a large extent in the locality and the fear of the people had been subsided considerably. The relief committee managed to collect around Rs.97 through receipt books and *hoondipetti* collection which

---

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> K.P.B. Pinarayi, *Rashtra Sevanam-Oru Communist Mathruka in Communist Party, Pinarayi-Parapram Sammelanam, Varshikaghosham Souvenir*, 2005, p.15

<sup>148</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 08-04-1945



were spent for purchasing tablets and ration items and also for burying dead bodies<sup>149</sup>. The works of the committee have greatly been applauded.

In Azheekkodu, Kakkad and Kannur town the small pox eradication programmes were significantly carried out by Kakkad unit of the Distress Committee specially led by its treasurer and president<sup>150</sup>. Some of the active volunteers like Azheekkodan Raghavan who was the town secretary of Communist Party unit in 1946 and also secretary of *Beedi* Workers Union of Kannur and Vayalil Krishnan had to face several medical problems while getting engaged in eradication and relief works. Many of the volunteers were away from their homes for several weeks taking care of the victims of the deadly disease and providing medical help to them. The medical squads formed under the Party had direct contact with health authorities and therefore essential services from the medical authorities were ensured. These squads worked in areas like Nuchiyattu, Kannur and Parikkulam conducted door to door visits of the infected persons<sup>151</sup>.

Nuchiyattu region, where Muslims were dominant, witnessed to the massive attack of the small pox and many succumbed to the disease. The Communist volunteer squad formed under the leadership of P.K.R.Varrier visited the locality and found that there was none among the Muslims without having infected who came to see the leader<sup>152</sup>. The squad also found that they were also under-nourished and not able to do any work and hence their families were in distress. The squad visited their houses and distributed medicines. After analysing the panic situation prevailing in the region, the squad felt the necessity of vaccination to bridle the further spread of the

---

<sup>149</sup> Report of Chenoli Koran in *Deshabhimani*, 08-04-1945

<sup>150</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 21-04-1945

<sup>151</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 19-05-1945

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

disease. P.K.R.Varrier , thus, wrote to Sri.V.R. Nayanar requesting him to send a vaccinator to the area and subsequently, vaccination was done there<sup>153</sup>. In Kuttikol and Koovodu regions, disease was widely prevalent and party was in the front row of the distress relief works. Parakkal Ummer, Cherichal Raman and Vallikkol Kunhambu gave leadership to the works<sup>154</sup>. When small pox was reported at Peruvaampa in Kannur Communists like V.V.Kannan Vaidyar took lead to organise eradication programme<sup>155</sup>.

In different parts of Malabar, the party workers joined hands with the DMRT workers led by V.R Nayanar who has given all possible assistance to communist volunteers to alleviate the distress of the people. At a time when a team of medical students from Madras Medical College came to take care of the infected people in 1945, it was provided with all possible assistance by the party workers. Their visits and programmes were decided by Kerala People's Relief Committee and V.R. Nayanar. The medical team which arrived on 26-04-1945 extended medical help to the pestilence victims by travelling different parts of Malabar especially Eranadu, Vallikunnu and Chirakkal for over six weeks<sup>156</sup>. The members of the medical team were always accompanied by the Communist volunteers by assisting them in different ways which included identification of the infected houses<sup>157</sup>.

Pulamanthol near Malappuram is another locality where Communists launched small pox eradication drive. Amidst growing number of small pox patients, Kunhamaman, who was the younger uncle of Malayalam writer Cherukad, also got infected. When he got infected, he made offerings to

---

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> P.Jayarajan , *op. cit.*, p.107

<sup>155</sup> Interview with K.B.Balakrishnan at his residence in Peruvaampa, Kannur, on 29-11-2021

<sup>156</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 27-04-1945

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

*Thirumandham Kunnilamma*, the chief goddess in the locality, for the recovery. On hearing the news, comrade Pallam who was very active in party activities and others including Cherukadu visited Kunhamaman's house to take care of him. Pallam administered a medicine to Kunhamaman and swept his room with a broom. And, after a solution of water was sprayed on the floor, he mopped the room as well<sup>158</sup>. In the subsequent days, Cherukad and Pallam used to visit Kunhamaman and take care of him and within a period of three weeks Kunhamaman got recuperated from the small pox infection.

Remarkable works were done by the Communist volunteers in Kurumbranadu area. The *Vasoori Duritha Nivarana Committee*, which was formed by the party, at Vatakara had a cell consisting of 20 volunteers, including one R.K Kannan Vaidyar, an *ayurveda* physician; the volunteers were duty bound round the clock<sup>159</sup>. It was the duty of the volunteers to report the outbreak of the disease within the purview of their activities to the health officers concerned and also to *Deshabhimani*<sup>160</sup>. The volunteers who were always in vigil, consistently visited the houses of the affected people and took care of the patients by supplying tablets. Those who were in the initial stage of the disease had speedy recovery while three or four weeks were taken for the recovery of 45 patients who were reported to be in the acute stage of the disease. Thus, in 1945, the strenuous works rendered by them for about two months helped in the recovery of around 300 patients<sup>161</sup>.

Apart from the distribution of tablets and other things, the burial of the dead was also done by the volunteers themselves. The local people were scared of the infection and hence utmost care was taken to ensure the burial.

---

<sup>158</sup> Cherukad, *op. cit.*, p.326

<sup>159</sup> Report of M.K. Kelu in *Deshabhimani*, 25-07-1945

<sup>160</sup> P.P. Shaju, *Padanilangalil Poruthi Veenavar*, p.91

<sup>161</sup> Report of M.K.Kelu, *op. cit.*

Usually the corpses were buried at night times as people were scared of the burial at day times as it would cause to infection as per their belief. Hence, the fear in the minds of the people were allayed by convincing them that the burial of the dead in day time in no way cause the spread of the disease. Fund for the relief works was collected from the local people and out of the fund received from Kerala People's Relief Committee, 100 rupees was utilised for the purpose<sup>162</sup>.

The name of one Hassan Kutty from Angadi Thazha in Vatakara deserves special mention in the history of the distress relief works of the Communist party. As in the case of cholera relief activities he was also dedicated to the small pox eradication also. He was the secretary of the Vatakara unit of Kerala Toddy Tapping Workers Union when the small pox spread fast in 1945. He was diligent and assiduous and his presence was felt in almost every nook and corner. In some places where he was very active, it was reported that people waited for his arrival for the treatment of the infected at their houses. Hassan Kutty was not either an allopathic doctor or traditional *vaidyar*, yet people used to come in search of him due to their trust in him.

Onchiyam near Vatakara was an area where distress relief activities started by the communist volunteers were unparalleled. Volunteer corps were formed in every nook and corner of the village to contain the epidemic. All the Party units and class and mass organisations including *Bala Sangham* units were transformed into distress relief committees. Mandoty Kannan, who was one of the leading figures and highly influential in the region was in the forefront of coordinating all the activities. The volunteers corps were blessed with the presence of doctors like Dr. Raghavan and Dr. P.P. Balakrishnan<sup>163</sup>.

---

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> P.P. Shaju, *op. cit.*, p.95

These volunteer organisations conducted door to door visits in the epidemic hit regions and took care of the patients.

One of the focus of the volunteers was on the renovation of the thatched huts of the poor who exposed to the virus<sup>164</sup>. Large majority of them were living in the *chettakudil* or meanest huts that too was in dilapidated condition<sup>165</sup>. The roofs of the houses were made of coconut leaf mats and many of them were likely to be leaked when it rained which left the inmates in distress. The outbreak of the pestilence in the area added much miseries to the lives of these people. The communist volunteers, who were working tirelessly to alleviate the distress of the infected families in the area, felt the necessity to have a strong and secure huts for the pestilence affected families. The volunteers, thus, managed to make roofs over these huts with the coconut leaf mats. It was only after ensuring safe and secure accommodation for them that volunteers started taking their treatment<sup>166</sup>.

At Nellachery area near Onchiyam V.Kanna Kurup, Koompil Andy, Madathil Kunnummal Sankaran, Puliya Kandi Kunhiraman, Malol Kizhakkayil Kanaran, V.P.Narayanan Adiyodi, Balakurup Ayattu Kandy, Ayattu Choyi Master, V.P.Pokkinan, Kaniyante Vida Kannan, Kavuthi Kunhiraman, Raman Nambiar, K.K.Krishnan, K.K. Choyi, Vannarath Chathu, K.Karunan, Padinhare Purayil Kesavan were active in works ensuring relief to the small pox victims<sup>167</sup>. The distress relief activities at Mukkali near Onchiyam was carried out by comrades like P.C.Narayana Kurup, P.Chathu, K.P Kunhirama Kurup and Chandan Vaidhyar<sup>168</sup>. Similarly in the northern part of the village small pox was virulent and volunteers like Ellath Kannan,

---

<sup>164</sup> Interview with T.K. Kumaran at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> P.P. Shaju, *op. cit.*, p.93

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

Vannarath Kunhiraman, C.K.Chathu, Kunhiparampath Kelappan, Kulangara Kannan, T.P.Kanaran, Poyil Kanaran, Kunkan Nair, Chathan Kandy Kunhikannan, Palolikandy Narayana Kurup, Karayi Thazhakuni Pokkan, Chathu and others were at forefront of epidemic preventive activities launched by the party<sup>169</sup>.

The volunteers approached the infected families with required medicines and food. The medicine given to the patients was prepared by *nattu vaidyans* and definitely, it was divine in the eyes of the infected. A particular type of *kashayam* was prepared under the supervision of Koroth Kandy Chathu Vaidyar, Chekkutty Vaidyar, Kuttiyil Meethal Sankaran Nambiar, Kelu Vaidyar and Komappan Vaidyar. The medicine to be mixed in water was to be taken two times a day and the food prescribed for the patients was gruel without salt and tender coconut and orange<sup>170</sup>. The volunteers in Onchiyam, while in their door-to-door visits, happened to witness a shocking incident; an infected woman who was abandoned by her relatives, creeping to kitchen and trying to drink filthy water. The timely intervention and treatment of the volunteers helped her come back to the normal life. In this way a number of infected people were given a new lease of life by the dedicated works of the volunteers<sup>171</sup>.

The big challenge faced by the volunteers during the pestilence preventive activities was the burial of the corpses. People were afraid of approaching the dead body and hence, they remained unburied for days. After the death was confirmed, usually, the body was wrapped up in a palm leaf mat and kept it inside a corner of the house till anyone came for burying it<sup>172</sup>.

---

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* p.92

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*p.94

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Nani at her residence in Muttungal on 07-04-2021

Recognising the reality, Communist volunteers came forward to bury the dead. One such an incident was reported from Kunnumakkara near Onchiyam where a woman was died of small pox and there was no one to bury the body. On the fourth day, on hearing the news, a band of Communist volunteers under Mandoti Kannan came to the spot and performed the burial<sup>173</sup>.

Similarly, the courage shown by two teenagers in burying the body of a woman died of small pox at Onchiyam deserves special mention. Comrades like T.K.Kumaran and Vannarath Kanna Kurup dared to bury the dead body of one Pokki who had been abandoned by her sons after she got exposed to small pox. It was while a procession of *Bala Sangham* was taking out that Kumaran and Kanna Kurup, came to know the delay in the burial of the body. At a time when there was no one to bury the body, they came forward and without having a second thought over the consequences of the contact with the infected body they swung into action<sup>174</sup>. As there was not a single tool like spade for cutting the dig at the house, they approached neighbours for them but none was ready to cooperate with them. Anyhow, they managed to bring tools and pit was dug in the compound of the house. Then came the next problem; in the absence of long cloth, it was found difficult to carry the infected body to the burial pit. Nevertheless, the determined comrades took off their own *lunkies* and wrapped up the corpse with them. The body was taken to the pit and the burial was done successfully. Subsequent to the incident, the duo had to go on quarantine at a shop as their families opposed their stay at their own homes. While in quarantine, Korothe Kandy Chathu Vaidyar along with some others visited them and administered a solution of

---

<sup>173</sup> P.P.Shaju, *op. cit.*, p. 149

<sup>174</sup> Interview with T.K. Kumaran at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

*kashayam*. They stayed on the shop for days and abide by the instructions given by the Vaidyar<sup>175</sup>.

In the interior regions of Kozhikode, especially in the eastern parts, party activities were in nascent stage. Some of the cells in the area actually consisted of only one or two members and therefore, leaders from neighbouring areas had to conduct party activities. Each leader was allotted particular area where they organised party programmes including distress relief works. At Balusseri near Quilandy relief activities were coordinated under the leadership of U.Kunhiraman who was a Vatakara based leader. In the 1950s small pox cases had been reported from many localities in Balussery. Party workers who were very limited in number, under U.Kunhiraman visited the houses of the infected as part of the eradication programme and took care of the patients<sup>176</sup>.

In Mokeri area, a volunteer corps, with O.V.Govindhan Nair as captain and K.P.Kunhiraman, P.Kelappan Nair, K.T.Kanaran, V.P.Balakrishnan, Ellil Pokkan, Valiyaparampath Krishnan Nair as volunteers, was formed<sup>177</sup>. They conducted campaign against irrational treatment of *mooppans*. During the time of campaign *komarams* frightened the volunteers saying that “you are playing against *vasooriyamma*....the entire land would be perished by throwing small pox seeds”<sup>178</sup>. Volunteers also got engaged in works including burying the bodies of victims in places like Nadapuram, and surrounding areas<sup>179</sup>.

---

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> Interview with A.K. Gopalan at his residence in Poonoor near Balusseri on 20-2-2021

<sup>177</sup> K.G. Nambiar, *op. cit.*, p.46

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* p.47



Besides cholera and small pox different type of pestilences including chicken pox and malaria were reported across Malabar in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During these times also Party volunteers took care of patients. The works of Communists during the time of chicken pox in and around Mattannur were commendable<sup>180</sup>. Likewise, the name of Nellikka Kunhikannan in Pazhassi deserves special mention in the distress relief works of the Party<sup>181</sup>. At Onchiyam near Vatakara, a man was infected with malaria and all the efforts to save the life of the man went in vain. It was at this time that volunteers, informed Koroth Kandy Chathu Vaidyar of the matter. After examining the patient, Vaidyar asked volunteers to bring medicines including breast milk to cure the disease<sup>182</sup>. Thus, the timely intervention of the volunteers awarded a new life to the man<sup>183</sup>.

It can be noted that the illiterate people could not digest communism and its basic components like class war and economic determinism and therefore, the Communists organised political activities with communism in one hand and distress relief works on the other. The volunteers rendered their service without receiving any fee or monetary benefit. These types of works were a solace to the people who bore the brunt of famine and epidemics. Kerala People's Relief Fund and other relief funds were designed to cater to the needs of the hour. During the time of door-to-door visits, the Communists took special care to establish good relation with the people whom they treated. The service rendered by the Communists was an asset to the health department where as the party reaped its rich benefit by expanding its popular base. The works of the Communists during the times of epidemics awarded a unique distress relief tradition to the Party in Kerala.

---

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Kareeth Narayanan Nairat his residence in Mattannur on 15-03-2021

<sup>181</sup> *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika* 2010-11, op. cit. p.97

<sup>182</sup> P.P. Shaju. *op. cit.* p.96

<sup>183</sup> The family of the patient embraced communist party after the successful treatment.

## Chapter IV

### Land Struggles and Communist Intervention

The peasant movements and agrarian struggles were part of the mainstream of the Communist movement. As far as the Communist party in Malabar is concerned the organization of the peasantry was a difficult task on account of the fear complex of the peasants against their landlords. It was through the KS that Communists managed to mobilise the peasantry. The war time crisis created a lot of hardship for the poor peasants whose issues were taken up first by the Socialists and later by the Communists. With the KS gathering momentum several protest and resistance movements were launched under the red flag. This chapter discusses such movements in Malabar.

The agrarian society of Kerala had consolidated by the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Agrarian settlements became the basis for the establishment of various chiefdoms or *Swarupams*. A hierarchy of land rights developed with the landlords at the top, layers of tenants or *Kudiyans* under them, and at the bottom of the ladder, the large mass of agrestic bondmen called *Adiyar*, who did substantial part of the labour on land. Relations among the labourers, tenants and landlords were streamlined by a very rigid caste hierarchy and very strong customs of loyalty and allegiance, designed to keep the Namboothiri Brahmins and the *Naduvazhis* at the top.

Before the Mysorean conquest Brahmins were the actual lords of the whole soil, except some small parts appropriate to the support of religious ceremonies, and called *devasthanas* and other portions called *cherikkal*, which are appropriate for supporting the families of the Rajas. All the

remainder, was the *janmam* or property of the Namboothiri Brahmins<sup>1</sup>. The holder of the *janmam* land is called *janmi*. During the pre-British period, the *janmi* was not merely a rent receiving landlord but the head of a social system based on feudal relationship which regulated not only the economic but social, political and cultural life. Apart from the role of a landlord he acted as a *Naduvazhi* or *Desavazhi*.

*Kanam* was the second type of land ownership below *janmam*. The *janmi* assigned *kanam* right to other people, most probably the upper caste Nairs, Nambiarsetc. The *janmis* who were in possession of land, let their land out for cultivation to *Kanakkars* who, in turn, transferred it to the *Verumpattkkars*. *Kanakkars* were invariably from upper caste and the majority *Kanakkars* belonged either to the middle or upper caste. The lower castes like *Pulayas*, *Parayas* and *Cherumas* were relegated to the status of an agrestic or semi- agrestic slave and they constituted the labour force, on which the agrarian economy of Kerala survived. They had to lead a very miserable life with the caste oppression, slavery and surplus extraction subjecting them oppressed in multiple ways.<sup>2</sup>

One of the chief consequences of British rule in Malabar was a sharp intensification of feudal exploitation of the Indian peasantry. After 1792, with the Sreerangapattanam treaty, the British interpreted the *janmam* rights as equivalent to absolute ownership rights and gave the landlords legal sanction to extract a large share of the produce through forcible expropriation from the peasantry. The recognition of *janmam* as an absolute property right in land led the Commissioners to declare *Kanam* as a mortgage and *Verumpattam* as a

---

<sup>1</sup> Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, Vol.II, Delhi, 1988. p. 360.

<sup>2</sup> P.K. Balakrishnan. *Jati Vyavasthayum Kerala charithravum*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 1997, pp. 348- 51

tenant-at-will<sup>3</sup>. The traditional upper castes of Malabar were accommodated in the bureaucracy as it was more economic and diplomatic. Thus, as was rightly observed by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, “the authority of the British was superimposed over the traditional power structure of Malabar i.e. '*Jathi*', '*Janmi*', *Naduvazhi* domination”<sup>4</sup>.

Chirakkal Raja, Kottayam Raja, Kadathanad Raja, Kallyat Yeshmanan, Karakkattidam Nayanar, Vengayil Nayanar, Kurumathoor Namboothiri, Koodali Thazhathumveedu, Thazhakkat Mana etc., were the leading *janmis* of North Malabar. Some big *janmis* of North Malabar had thousands of acres of land under their control. Vengayil Nayanar held 2 lakh acres of land, whereas Kallyattu Chathukutty Nambiar alias Kallyattu Yeshmanan held over 36,000 acres of land in the eastern region of Chirakkal taluk<sup>5</sup>. One of the major landholders of South Malabar was Zamorin.

The enemies, who forfeited to the colonial masters their judicial powers, exercised as the custodians of law and order in the traditional society, were now made to act as intermediaries in the collection of revenue from the products of surplus<sup>6</sup>. The whole colonial period, which destabilised the functioning of the traditional society, was marked by increased interventions of the colonial rulers in land revenue administration. The rate of extraction was definitely high, and the *janmi*'s right to the collection of revenue remained undisturbed till the first half of the twentieth century. Unlike in princely states like Kochi and Travancore, all lands in Malabar were private

---

<sup>3</sup> Major Walker, *Report on the Land Tenures of Malabar*, Madras, 1802

<sup>4</sup> E.M.S. Namboothirippad, *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi*, Mathrubhumi, Thiruvananthapuram, 1947, p.43

<sup>5</sup> Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India. Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p.38

<sup>6</sup> William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol.1, Part II, in P.J.Chcrian, *Perspectives on Kerala History*, Kerala State Gazetteer, Vol.II, Part II, Kerala Gazetteer, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p.368

property. The passing of the *Janmi* Registration Act of 1896 had resulted in making a large area of wasteland which the government had hitherto regarded as its own, as the nominal property of *janmis* from whom land revenue was charged. One result of this settlement was that the whole of the lands in Malabar came to be treated as the private property of *janmis*<sup>7</sup>.

### **Eviction and Communist Resistance**

The *janmis* in Malabar, as elsewhere in Kerala, owned acres of garden sites on which tenants and agricultural workers built their houses, and bananas, coconuts, cashews, areca nut trees, mangoes, cassava, and other crops were grown there. The landless people were living under constant threat of eviction by the latter owing to the non-payment of the rent. Depending on the contract, tenants can make payments to the owner either of a fixed portion of the product, in cash or in a combination. In some systems, the tenant could be evicted at whim (tenancy at will); in others, the landowner and tenant sign a contract for a fixed number of years (tenancy for years or indenture). If the contract was violated at any stage, the tenants were subjected to eviction. The threat of eviction was a powerful weapon in the hands of landlords in getting exorbitant rents. The amount paid in rent to the lord was reportedly huge and it was not possible to assess precisely the percentage as it depended on the mercy and benevolence of the lord. It was common to refer to strings of bananas, several bunches of vegetables paid in rent out of the total garden-land produce. In case, the lords were content with the tenant and appeased by the yield, the eviction threat could be averted. In short, the life of the tenants living on the plots of the lords relied on the magnanimity of the lords.

---

<sup>7</sup> V.V. KunhiKirshnan, *Waste Land Cultivation and Peasant Agitation in Malabar (1940-1950)*, Indian History Congress, Vol. 44 (1983), pp. 450-457

The Malabar Tenancy Act of 1929 protected only the interests of the superior tenure holders and the subsequent amendments made in the act did not suit the interests of the poor peasantry. The grievances of the inferior tenants remained unsolved and so continuous and strong protests were made by them for getting their grievances redressed through the KS. Towards the close of the second world war, it was reported that there were huge arrears of rent to be paid by small farmers to landlords in several places of Malabar. As the arrears of rent were not properly realised, suits were filed against tenants for eviction under the provisions of the act of 1929<sup>8</sup>. The role played by the law courts under the British was also against the interest of the peasantry. As per the law, the courts intervened in favour of the *janmi* to evict defaulting tenants and this led to frequent land transactions which ultimately distressed the peasantry<sup>9</sup>. Thus, insecurity became a common feature in the agrarian structure in the entire North Malabar.

With the KS under the tutelage of CPI gathering momentum different types of programmes were launched to bring the peasants under the red flag. Plays including *Pattabaakki* and *Rakthapanam* were staged across Malabar exposing the naked social realities. Similar plays were organised at the grass root level under the supervision of local KS units. In Kurumbranadu, a play titled *Karshakanunarnnal*, written by K.SankaraKurup was staged under the direction of T.K.Narayanan at Maniyoor which brought to light the exploitation of the peasantry by *janmis*<sup>10</sup>. Similar plays and songs helped a lot in arousing enthusiasm among the peasantry in Malabar.

With the new developments, the tug of war between the tenants and the landlords took a new turn and the communist party offered protection to the

---

<sup>8</sup> K. K. N. Kurup, *Peasantry and the Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Kerala*, Social Scientist, Vol. 16, No. 9 (Sep., 1988), p.p. 35-45

<sup>9</sup> P. Govinda Pillai(ed.), *E.M.Sinte Sampoorna Krithikal*, Vol. 1X, p.p. 205-206.

<sup>10</sup> K. Gopalan Master, *Maattathinte Nalvazhikal*, p.46

former who were living under the shadow of the threat of eviction by the latter. In many places, helpless and hapless tenants were reportedly pushed onto the street by the *janmis* and their houses were demolished or converted for other purposes, despite injunctions issued by the courts. While the police came to the rescue of the lords, the party took a principled stand to support the eviction facing families. Eviction attempts of the *Janmis* with the support of *goons* were met with strong opposition and resistance put up by the KS workers. While these resistances provided solace to indigent families, some of the cases were taken to the courts of law to be settled legally. Under the auspices of the party, conciliatory talks were called and issues were resolved. Apart from this, Sangham workers arranged temporary makeshifts to accommodate evicted families.

North Malabar was marked by a series of strikes and resistances as early as 1940 under the KS against the eviction moves of the *janmis*. Significant struggle was held at Thimiri near Cheruvathur where C.P Gopalan, a *janmi*, tried to evict Kuthirummal Appu, a tenant. The latter lodged a complaint with Sangham pleading assistance to harvest his crop. Accordingly, Sangham extended all its support to Appu and he managed to harvest the crop<sup>11</sup>. During this time, at Madikkai a *janmi* evicted a farmer from 25 cents of land that the latter was cultivating for over 30 years and the disputed land was assigned to another farmer<sup>12</sup>. The party cell led by K.Madhavan and P.Ambu Nair came forward to oppose the wicked action of the *janmi*. With the help of the Sangham, the farmer launched cultivation in the field under question and successfully harvested the crop<sup>13</sup>. The court

---

<sup>11</sup> C. Balan, (ed.), *Kasaragod Charithravum Samoohavum*, Kasaragod District Panchayath, 2001, p. 372.

<sup>12</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.80

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.80

verdict which was pronounced six months after the incident came in favour of the KS leaders.

At Puthur in Peralam village, where KS unit was formed as early as 1937, a peasant was forcibly evicted from a land in the name of rent arrear. The Sangham took up the issue and the workers, as part of an attempt to establish a claim over the land, sowed seeds on the evicted field. When the time of harvest got near, *janmi* stake claim over the crop and made arrangements for the harvest. Simultaneously, the Sangham workers, without minding the *janmi*'s claim, were also determined to reap what they sowed at any cost. The successful harvest, thus, at Puthur by the Sangham marked a new turn in the agrarian history of the locality. The leadership of this strike was given by one Punnakodan Kunjambu<sup>14</sup>. In 1944, consequent to the attempt made by Koolerikkaran Krishnan, a *janmi*, to evict Thaivalappil Manikkam from her house, the party came to the rescue of the latter<sup>15</sup>.

Likewise, at Koonam in Thaliparambu, an anti-eviction committee was formed to resist the forcible eviction of Kuttyat Keloth Kunhiraman and his nephew Gopalan Nambiar from a land which was in their possession for long years, by the landlord Atthilatan Narayanan Nair<sup>16</sup>. The interference of the CPI and KSin the eviction cases at the grass root level created fear among the landed magnates from adopting anti-tenant measures.

In 1950s similar protests surfaced everywhere in Malabar against the authoritarian stands of the *janmis*. Under the leadership of the party, many programmes at the local level were launched to make tenants aware of the exploitation and injustices meted out by the lords and to bring them to the mainstream of society. The annual conference of the Pallipram Branch

---

<sup>14</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.301

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*180

<sup>16</sup> *Deshabhimani*,17-06-1953



*Harijana Sangham* held at Valappadu was presided over by E.T.Kunhan, a Communist. As part of the conference a procession was taken out in which the slogan, “*Harijans are not the private property of janmis...tenants should not be evicted.*” reverberated in the locality<sup>17</sup>. At Panchalay in Kannur, some *Harijans* were evicted from their houses by one Kunhan Kutty Nair<sup>18</sup>. The matter was taken up by the Thaliparampu Local Kisan Sangh representatives and following their interference a settlement was made<sup>19</sup>.

Protests began to surface against the atrocities and cruelties of the *janmis* in the Kurumbranadu region too. A significant move was against the eviction of an indigent *Harijan* lady named Parayi who was living at a hut in front of *janmi*'s house at Palayat Nada near Vatakara, in 1952<sup>20</sup>. The issue was taken up by the Communist party which decided to give protection to the lady. Meanwhile, the police interference led the issue being taken to the court for legal settlement. Before the final verdict came in favour of Parayi, the party had used all its resources and machineries by bringing leading advocates to win the legal battle<sup>21</sup>. Another eviction move, which was reported at Maniyoor near Palayat Nada, was foiled by the timely intervention of the Party workers where Kadambil Kanaran Nambiar, a *janmi* of Maniyoor and his men made a bid to evict one Thachilodi Thazhe Kuniyl Kelappan. On hearing this, Communists reached the spot with the red flag and enclosed 7 cents of land and established the right of ownership of Kelappan over the land by plucking coconut<sup>22</sup>. At Panikotti, near Vatakara, when the family of one Asari Pokkayi was evicted from his house, Communists like M..Kelappan

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*,17-01-1953

<sup>18</sup> Report of secretary of Pattuvam *HarijanSangham* in *Deshabhimani*,17-01-1953

<sup>19</sup> *Deshabhimani*,17-01-1953

<sup>20</sup> M.K. Panikkotti, *Amruthasmarana*, (Autobiography), p.73, The *janmi*, Kizhakkan Chal Narayanan, was a leading landlord and *de facto* supreme authority of the area.

<sup>21</sup> K. Gopalan Master, *op. cit.*, p.48

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*. p.45

(popularly called M.K.Panikkotti) and others gave asylum to the family. Remarkably, M.Kelappan donated his own land to Pokkayi<sup>23</sup>.

In Wayanad, as per the Malabar Tenancy Acts, rent courts had been set up and many rent cases were filed in these courts against the tenants. The unorganised tenants in the area were reeling under several problems including eviction threat. It was in 1945 that Wayanad *Taluk Kisan Sabha* was formed with Veliyath Mathayi as secretary which was the first agrarian organisation in Wayanad<sup>24</sup>. The formation of *Kisan Sabha* was a relief to the tenants as the latter was given legal assistance in the courts by the former. During 1953-54 period, the government officials tried to evict the tenants at a *Harijan* colony in Cheengeni and peasants launched a strong protest movement in which A.K.Gopalan played a significant role. Similarly, during 1952-57 period, when the peasants in Pulpally, especially in the revenue land stretching from Pakkam to Vazhavatta in Muttil, faced eviction threats by the government, the *Kisan Sabha* made intervention to resolve the issue<sup>25</sup>.

Farmers in Kumbleri village in Ambalavayal got direct ownership of their land as a result of agitation under Karshaka Sangham. The government had allotted lands as part of Grow More Food Project to interested farmers who were mainly migrants. In 1952, moves were made by government officials to recapture the lands by evicting farmers on the ground that they were violating the conditions earlier laid down by the government in the contract. The peasants got organised against the eviction move under the Communist party. As part of the opposition, a mass gathering of the peasants under the Party was held at a school in Kakkavayal<sup>26</sup>. As per the decision

---

<sup>23</sup> Interview with V.K.Balan Master at his residence in Panikkotti on 23-12-2020

<sup>24</sup> P. Krishnaprasad, *Vayanattile Karshaka Prasthanam: Charithravum Varthamanavum* in CPIM Vayanadu District Conference, Souvenir, 2011, Sulthanbatheri. p.55

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p.56

<sup>26</sup> Memoirs of Plathottam P.V. George in *Deshabhimani* 18-12-2014

taken at the meeting, a team of delegates visited Madhava Menon in Kozhikode and submitted a petition. Consequent to this, the eviction proceedings were suspended but the farmers received notices asking them to vacate lands. It was under such a situation that peasants launched protests. A.K.Gopalan, who came to Meenangadi as part of the campaign in the 1952 Parliamentary elections, was accorded a warm reception by the farmers' group. He called for a struggle against the eviction move and during his tenure as an M.P he used to visit Kumbleri in solidarity with the struggle<sup>27</sup>. It was after continuous struggle held under the red flag that the peasants established their rights over the land.

At Kumaranellur near Mukkam in Kozhikode, in 1952, Puthoor Madathil Kammuni Haji and others made an attempt to evict a woman named Ganga Antharjanam by taking forcible possession of *Thavannoor Illaparambu* land. Kumaranelloor village *Kisan Sangham* at its meeting convened against the backdrop of the eviction decided to resist the move of the *janmi*. A procession, with Communist party slogans under the leaders like P.N.Unneeri, Unniyeppan, Kurukan, C.M.Kunhen, Kolathum Kandy Kelan and others, was taken out to the *Illam* and two acre *Illaparambu* land was acquired and enclosed under the leadership of A.Chandu<sup>28</sup>. Likewise, in 1953, party workers successfully resisted an effort by some magnates in Mukkam to evict one Madathil Chathukutty from his shop. It was under the leadership of A.M.Ussan Kutty, RaruKutty Gurikkal and others that such an anti-eviction agitation was organised.<sup>29</sup>

In 1953 when some of the Muslim landlords made attempt to evict one Padikkal Ammad, the party took up the issue and strong protest movement

---

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Kanalppaadukal Oru Desathinte Innalekal*, CPIM District Conference Souvenir, Thiruvambady, 2011. p.136

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*137

was launched under the leadership of U.Kunhiraman<sup>30</sup>. Similarly, some *janmis* took forceful possession of two acre land which belonged to one Madathil Chathukutty at Aanayamkunnu in Kozhikode. It was under K.C.Nair that party workers interfered in the issue and made the *janmis* return the land to its original holder<sup>31</sup>. When effort was made to evict one Nangolath Govinda Kurup at Vakayadu in Kozhikode, party came to his rescue<sup>32</sup>. Resistance against an eviction attempt against Kambala Thottathil Imperi and Chekku near Thiruvambady in 1954 was also significant. The KS workers like Kunnathu Chekku, Kunhan, Karudathu Rarukutty Nair, Keezhadathu Krishnan Nair, Kampalathu Cherootty, Unnikutty, C.M.Kunhan and P.N.Unneeri took up the issue and stood with Imperi and Chekku. They managed to obtain a stay order from the court with the help of advocate Kunhirama Pothuval and thus, the move of the *janmi* to evict them was quashed<sup>33</sup>.

The successful movement to get back the lands of the tribals at Pannikottu in 1955 was a historic struggle undertaken by the party. The agitation was related to N.C.Koyakutty Haji who had purchased a vast stretch of hill land from Rankashesha Hills Private Company on which 42 tribal families were living for centuries. He made an effort to evict the tribes from their traditional holdings. Consequently, the workers in the locality got organised under the Communist party and thus, launched a protest against Koyakutty. It was after holding a meeting with A.K.Gopalan, M.P that party workers swung into action; a huge strike proclamation convention was held at

---

<sup>30</sup> K. Moosakutty, *Karmanirathanaya Karshakanethavu* in *Sakhavu U.Kunhiraman Smaranika*, Perambra p.75

<sup>31</sup> *Kanalppaadukal Oru Desathinte Innalekal. op cit., p.138*

<sup>32</sup> K.K. Madhavan- *Yu Vazhiyum Vazhikaattiyum* in *U.Kunhiraman Smaranika*. p.83

<sup>33</sup> *Kanalppaadukal Oru Desathinte Innalekal, op. cit., p.138,*

Pannikodu and the strike lasted for a year. At last, the Party managed to get the tribals back their traditional land<sup>34</sup>.

In the Valluvanadu region, the party got involved in the issues of the peasantry. Unlike north Malabar, south Malabar was the region which witnessed to historic Mappila revolt in 1921 and hence, the plight of the peasantry was beyond imagination. Suppression and exploitation continued unabated and eviction was common in the middle of the last century. There was an eviction issue related to Puthiyeduthu Rarichan Nair's wife whose land was taken over by the *janmi* and the former was ordered to get out of the land by the latter. Nair, instead of abiding by the order of the *janmi*, approached the court but in vain. Even after the adverse court order, Nair stood firm in his decision to stay in the land. The party got involved in the issue and rallied behind Nair. It took out a procession, comprising around 40 members including Cherukad, to the disputed land with the red flag. The *jatha* members removed the notice board with regard to eviction which was put up by the court officials and hoisted the party red flag affirming the right of the peasant over the land<sup>35</sup>.

### **Communists and Grow More Food Programme**

Famine had been a recurrent feature of Indian subcontinent. The colonial India saw an increase in the incidence of severe famines. As a result of the colonial policies, the Indian people were ravaged by famines one after another during the period from 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century. From 1760 to 1943, about 85 million Indians died due to massive famines. William Digby pointed out that in the entire 107 years from 1793 to 1900, only an estimated 5 million people had died in all the wars around the world combined, where as in just

---

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Cherukad, *op. cit.*, p. 484

10 years 1891-1900, 19 million had died in India in famines alone<sup>36</sup>. As the scholar and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has established the now widely-accepted doctrine that famines are nearly always avoidable, that they result not from lack of food but lack of access to food; that distribution is therefore the key, and that democracy is the one system of government that enables food to be distributed widely and fairly. Lack of democracy and public accountability, however, is what characterised British rule in India<sup>37</sup>.

With the commencement of the Second World War, the entire Indian economy was geared to meet the war demands. The colonial government resorted to a currency mechanism which led to inflation and the distress fell on the shoulders of the poor section of society. The scarcity of rice after the fall of Burma in 1942 created a famine in the country. In colonial India, Bengal has had its fare share of famines in the past including 1770, 1783 and 1897, but the most recent one, of which often British Raj is accused of was in 1943. Similarly, the food shortage in Madras state started with the cessation of imports of rice in 1942<sup>38</sup>. When the government failed to rise to the occasion, black marketers and speculators exploited the situation. The skyrocketing price of essential commodities tore the life of the common people into distress. The price of rice at the time of the commencement of the war in 1939 was just Rs.3.93 and in 1944 it rose to Rs.9.82<sup>39</sup>. This steep rise in the price of rice deprived the poor people of their staple food and left them in starvation.

---

<sup>36</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2016. p.177

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p.177

<sup>38</sup> V. V. KunhiKrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.452

<sup>39</sup> A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala District Gazetteers, Cannanore*, Kerala Gazetteers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1972

The scarcity of rice and the upward trend in prices continued even after the end of the war. Rajendra Prasad, Union Minister of Food and Agriculture, in a radio message made it clear that 17 lakh ton rice would have to be found at the time of harvest in the coming October 1947 and if that target was not met it would be impossible to retain at least 10 ounce ration for a family<sup>40</sup>. The Public Works minister of Madras, Mr.M.BakthaValsalam, declared that the government was going to introduce a five-year plan to increase food production in Madras state by bringing around 250,000 acres of barren lands under cultivation and thereby increasing the food production to 6,62,000 ton<sup>41</sup>. The Madras government held the view that the rise in the price of the rice in Malabar was the wrong propaganda being unleashed by the communists<sup>42</sup>. But later the government had to bow to the reality. As per the statistics in 1943-44 period, 3,64,000 tons of paddy is grown up in Malabar and 6,01,000 tons of rice is required for the entire population in the district. And the deficit is 2,37,000<sup>43</sup>.

As per the existing provisions in the law, the surplus paddy, in the wake of the food scarcity problem, had to be given to the government. Nevertheless, instead of handing over the surplus produce to the government, the landlords usually preferred to keep it in their godowns anticipating a further hike in the price and selling it out in the black market. As far as the government is concerned, it was not efficient enough to take prompt and stern action against defaulters. When the prices of essential commodities like paddy skyrocketed, the majority of the common masses could not afford to buy them. When the landlords and black marketers made huge profits

---

<sup>40</sup> *Deshabhimani*, I6-05-1947

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 31-05-1947

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*07-04-1953

<sup>43</sup> Andalat, *Vegampora*, Vol.1, Chintha, Thiruvanandapuram, 1978, p.21

exploiting the situation and the government failed to rise to the occasion, the common masses fell into poverty and untold miseries.

The Grow More Food (hereafter GMF) campaign was one of the most important strategies promoted across the subcontinent in 1942 to improve food production. In Kerala, there were many efforts under the campaign to boost cultivation in the rice-growing belts. As part of the efforts to improve food production, the Cochin government announced many new methods of cultivation. In the first half of 1942, newspapers carried reports about the importance of cultivating pulses and vegetables to prevent famines. It was suggested to the government that available land should be given to the people for one or two years, along with some financial support for cultivating vegetables and pulses.

In August 1943, a meeting was held in Calicut town hall to encourage production of food crops. People from all walks of life participated in this meeting. Mana Vikraman Valiya Thirumunpu of Nilampoor presided the meeting<sup>44</sup>. An all Malabar food committee was formed with T.S.Thirumunpu as secretary. On 15 August 1943, this committee met and formed a programme to collect the excess paddy stored by people in Malabar. The Kisan Sangh welcomed this programme and requested all the peasants to contribute to the success of this programme<sup>45</sup>. The Communists were at the forefront of every activity that could give relief to the distress caused by the war such as famine, scarcity of necessities like cloth and kerosene, the outbreak of epidemics, natural calamities etc.<sup>46</sup>

Left politics based on class struggle for social progress added strength and inspiration to the weaker sections. The famine of the 1940s and

---

<sup>44</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *My Struggles*, (Autobiography) p.64

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p.65

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Isaac. *op. cit.* p.74



devastating diseases destroyed the rural life of Malabar. Black marketing and scarcity of food grains during wartime made the situation terrible. The Communists divided themselves into squads and tried to lessen the miseries. When the Prakasham ministry of Madras approved the scheme of extracting surplus paddy at a fixed price and distributing food commodities through PCC'S, Communists were active in organising PCC's in villages<sup>47</sup>. The people's food committees worked in all villages to prevent essential commodities from disappearing into the black-market<sup>48</sup>. In most of the villages in Malabar, a kind of informal rationing system was affected by the cooperation of the people and the authorities.

The 'GMF programme' was seriously taken up by the KS and initiated a programme in Malabar known as Food Agitation to Food Production<sup>49</sup>. The Food committees were formed along the breadth and width of Malabar which demanded *janmis* to hand over their excess paddy to the PCCs to solve the food crisis in Malabar. Sangham took up a leading role to start food committees at taluk and village level as a part of alleviating the crisis. A District Food Organisation Officer was appointed to supervise the food distribution. As a part of this, Sangham made a conciliatory attitude towards *janmis* and sought their co-operation for the success of the programme.

Krishna Pillai gave a call to *Grama Seva Sangham* for coming forward to form a popular organisation irrespective of caste, religion and politics to solve the food scarcity problem and protect the orphans<sup>50</sup>. The Kisan Sangh requested the government to give all barren lands in the possession of landlords and the government to the farmers for cultivation and solve the

---

<sup>47</sup> *Karivellorinte Innalekal Pradheshika Charithram*, Karivelloor -Peralam Grama Panchayath, 2010. p.46

<sup>48</sup> E.K.Nayanar, *op. cit.* p. 65

<sup>49</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 23-05-1943

<sup>50</sup> Andalat, *Sakhakale Munnottu*, Vol.1, p.369

worsening food problem<sup>51</sup>. It, thus, approached *janmis* in their respective areas of North Malabar and appealed for cooperation in releasing wasteland and *punam* land for cultivation. Many *janmis* cooperated with their attempt. It also launched cultivation in government waste land and thus Chirakkal taluk became the model for “fighting hunger” according to the new scheme of the Communist Party<sup>52</sup>. Special care was taken to incorporate Congress activists in the committees formed under the initiative of the Party. The Congress leaders like Samuel Aaron actively cooperated with these food committees<sup>53</sup>.

The party units gave wide publicity for GMF and urged peasants to start *punam* cultivation in places like Peringhom and Panniyur areas. Punam cultivation became wide and tapioca was grown in many parts<sup>54</sup>. Individual communists distributed paddy from their own fields and granaries to the starving poor. The name of one comrade T.K.Narayanan Nambiar from Pathiyarakkara in Kurumbranadu *taluk* deserves a special mention in this regard<sup>55</sup>. Throughout villages, *Bakshya* committees and Relief committees were formed under the auspices of the Party. In Kozhikode *taluk*, N.Mammu was the convenor of the relief committee<sup>56</sup>. On 10 April 1943, a food meeting was held in Kannur which was presided over by K.P.R Rayarappan. The meeting which was attended by around 250 people from Machoor Mala and other places, wanted peasants to launch cultivation on more lands joining *Kisan Sangh*<sup>57</sup>. *Bakshyolpadana melas* were organised in places like

---

<sup>51</sup> E.K.Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.67

<sup>52</sup> *Deshabhimani Weekly*, 06-06-1943

<sup>53</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p. 94

<sup>54</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.107

<sup>55</sup> K. Gopalan Master, *op. cit.*, p.36

<sup>56</sup> T.P. Ramakrishnan, *op. cit.* p.47

<sup>57</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 25-04-1943 in *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, smaranika.* p.168

Mattanur, Pappinissery, Pazhassi South, Thillankeri etc<sup>58</sup>. In 1942 a *bakshya samaram* is reported to have taken place in Thillankery which was inaugurated by C.H.Kanaran<sup>59</sup>.

It was in such a situation when the community was suffocated by epidemic and starvation that the idea of Community Kitchen came into practice. For the first time in the history of Malabar it was launched in Oorathur near Kavumbayi in north Malabar and its initiative was taken by KS<sup>60</sup>. Similar community kitchens were opened in a number of places under the supervision of KS. Notably, Local *Kisan Sangh* units in consultation with teacher's unions distributed rice gruel to children at schools<sup>61</sup>.

The collective farming was a new initiative introduced in Malabar and it was an imitation of the Russian model of collective farming. It was introduced in Soviet Union as part of the first five-year plan in 1927 as a way to boost agricultural production. Collectivization was aimed at consolidating individual peasant landholdings and labour into collective farms<sup>62</sup>. Collectivization entailed major reforms of the agricultural sector in the Soviet Union. In Malabar, collective farming was designed under the *Karshaka Sangham* during the time of famine to provide some relief to the toiling people. It was launched in many places including Chirakkal, Mangattuparambu and Pariyaram.

The collective farming over 300 acre land at Kannenkayal near Ponnani *taluk* in south Malabar was noteworthy. The backwater known as

---

<sup>58</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.* p.107

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Payyannur Kunhiraman, Charithrasakshyam* in Alfa souvenir, Payyannur, 2012

<sup>61</sup> *Deshabhimani*,10-06-19 45

<sup>62</sup> Joseph Stalin holds the view that collectivization would free poor peasants from economic servitude under the farmland owners.

Kannenkayal was lying uncultivated for 35 years<sup>63</sup>. In tune with the Grow More Food Campaign, a historic decision was taken by the Ponnani Taluk communist party unit with M. Kanaran as secretary: launching cultivation after drying up waters in the lake<sup>64</sup>. The farming launched by the *Bakshyolpadhana* committee under the party was a huge success and many prominent figures including the great poet Edassery had become a part of it<sup>65</sup>. The initiative of the party to mitigate the poverty of the people, introducing a novel method, became a model and in several places the same method was followed.

In 1943 peasants, as part of the Grow More Food programme, launched cultivation in the lands at Irikkoor where almost all the lands were owned by Kallyat *janmi* and Karikkatidam Nayanar who denied peasants the right for *punam* cultivation. In Vayakkara village, Sanhgam took initiative to form PCCs and acquiring lands for cultivation<sup>66</sup>. At Pariyaram in Chirakkal around 50 acres of land were given to Sangham for cultivation. The land on which the peasants successfully launched farming, was given by one Narikkottilath Parameswaran Namboothiripadu<sup>67</sup>. The Mangattuparamba collective farming was significant in many respects as it was also started against the backdrop of the GMF campaign<sup>68</sup>. It was the cultivation of tapioca that was launched on a state-owned land at Mangattuparamba by the KS workers. But, unfortunately, without giving any value to the hard work of

---

<sup>63</sup> At present it stretched over more than three *panchayats*

<sup>64</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, pp.86-87

<sup>65</sup> It was at this context that the famous drama *Kootukrishi* was written by Edassery

<sup>66</sup> P. Jayarajan. *op. cit.*, p.107

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p.103

<sup>68</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *op. cit.*

the peasants, MSP destroyed the entire harvest alleging that the cultivation was illegal<sup>69</sup>.

Ellerinji, Kavumbai, Eruvassery, Payyavur, Blathur and Kuyiloor were other places in north Malabar where struggles were organised against stubborn lords by the desperate peasantry as part of GMF agitation. The lords, at last, had to bow before the organised strength of the peasants leaving lands to cultivation<sup>70</sup>. The historic Koothali struggle which lasted for many decades, had its inception during this period<sup>71</sup>. The agitation for cultivable waste lands was not a success story all along. For example, the *punam* cultivators, who daringly entered the lands in Ernad *taluk* belonging to Nilambur Kovilagam were arrested by the police.<sup>72</sup>

A remarkable aspect of the 'GMF campaign' was the large scale cultivation of tapioca at the behest of KS which was wide across the Malabar district and was a great relief amidst reeling poverty during the war time. At the time of the shortage of rice tapioca became popular<sup>73</sup>. In many localities, tapioca replaced rice which was out of stock in the market<sup>74</sup>. In Peringhom and Panniyur areas where Punam cultivation became wide, tapioca was grown<sup>75</sup>. At Onchiyam its cultivation was started under the supervision of Koroth Pokkan Karanavar which managed to solve the food scarcity problem to an extent in the area<sup>76</sup>.

---

<sup>69</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *Manninu Vendi*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 1975, p.31

<sup>70</sup> P.Jayarajan. *op. cit.*, p.104

<sup>71</sup> G.D. Nair, *C.H.Kanaran Jeevithavum Samaravum*, Progress Publication, Calicut, 2015, p.47

<sup>72</sup> V. V. Kunhi Krishnan, *op. cit.* p.455

<sup>73</sup> V.K. Madhavankutty's report in *The Hindu*, Trivandrum, 27-06-2019.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with T.V. Balakrishnan Nambiar at his residence in Memunda, near Vatakara on 08-02-2020

<sup>75</sup> P.Jayarajan, *op. cit.* p.107

<sup>76</sup> P.P. Shaju., *Padanilangalil Poruthiveenavar*, p.151. Interview with T.K. Kumaran at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

### *Nelleduppu Samarangal*

The scarcity of rice and the upward trend in prices continued even after the war. The Madras government possessed a step mother attitude towards Malabar. The food minister in Madras said that it would be more costly to bring rice from Orissa and Madhya Pradesh to a place of mountains like Malabar lying in a corner of the state and if it was carried by ship, it would also be costly<sup>77</sup>. Despite the scarcity of rice, the Madras government resorted to extreme steps by cutting short, on many occasions, the distribution of rice through ration shops in Malabar. The policy of the Congress government and the negligence and inefficiency of the bureaucracy together with the discrimination shown to Malabar led to a famine situation in Malabar.

The hike in the price of rice was visible not only in the public market but also in government-controlled ration shops. The producer-cum-consumer cooperative societies in Malabar (PCCs) could not function effectively for want of proper supplies. The ration system was largely controlled by a nexus of landlords and black marketeers in connivance with government officials. The food committees in Malabar itself were constituted by the officials like Tahsildar and not selected by the public<sup>78</sup>. As the food committees were in the hands of the nexus, the irregularities in the distribution of rice remained unearthed. Hoarding and black marketing, insufficient supply of food grains and rampant corruption at the government level and in PCCs were common phenomena across Malabar. Realising this reality, the secretary of Malabar Kisan Sangh, through a statement, urged people to send continuously letters and resolutions to T.S.Rajan, the Food Minister of Madras in order to oust black marketeers, landlords and vested interests from the food committees<sup>79</sup>.

---

<sup>77</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 07-04-1953

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 01-05-1947

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*.

The Malabar Kisan Sangh requested the government to put an end to the black-marketing that was going on and give all barren land in the possession of landlords and the government to the farmers for cultivation and solve the worsening food problem<sup>80</sup>.

With the August Resolution of 1946 after the termination of the World War, the Communists decided to carry out their anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggles. They were motivated by the political ideology of a 'revolutionary upsurge' and activation of the peasantry as demanded in the party document, 'Forward to Find Struggle' of 5th August 1946. In Malabar, the pauperised peasantry and the agricultural labourers adopted an action programme to stop black-marketing of food grains and cultivate more wastelands owned by the landowning class and the government. A meeting of the public functionaries to discuss the prevention of black-marketing against the backdrop of the rice shortage was held at Calicut under the presidentship of E.M.S.Namboothirippad. It was at this time that the Communist party gave a call for the peasants to pay the rent in cash instead of kind to the landlord in violation of the contract which demanded the rent in kind.

KS also gave a call to the peasants to get access rice, after having taken the required amount of paddy for family ration and kept as seeds, measured at the co-operative stores in order to avoid the black market and price hike<sup>81</sup>. The peasants in Malabar had almost complied with these instructions. Such steps taken in the interests of the people invited wrath from the anti-people landlords and black marketeers and in Kannur, their anger led to the murder of Narayanan Nambiar, the president of Kisan Sangh and vice-president of Irikkur Co-operative Society<sup>82</sup>.

---

<sup>80</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *My Struggles*, p.67

<sup>81</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 29-03-1947

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

As per the Communist party programme, Malabar Karshaka Sangham called upon the peasants to forcibly enter all the barren lands and cultivate them if the government did not take any steps by 15 December 1946<sup>83</sup>. The party organised an Anti-black Marketing day on 6 October 1946 across Malabar and burnt the effigies of black marketeers, as a prelude to the programme of 15 December<sup>84</sup>. As per the instructions of the party, the workers got determined even to have a clash with the landlords backed by the police. In many parts of northern Malabar, KS workers resisted the attempt of paddy shifting made by landlords in connivance with the police.

Protest meetings under the Communist party were held in many places like Kuruppath, Kottkara, Ancharakandy and elsewhere in Malabar against the government's decision to cut short the ration rice. At places like Kuruppath and Kottkara local people donated cash to telegraph messages to the Madras government<sup>85</sup>. At Cheruvannur in Kozhikode, a public meeting was organised by the Communist party in protest against the cut short of rice allocation. The meeting passed a resolution highlighting the demand to open the *patthayapuras* or paddy granaries attached to the houses of landlords under the supervision of a popular committee<sup>86</sup>. At Vatakara a combined meeting of the Communist Party, Beedi-Cigar Workers Union and Kisan Sangh held on 13-05-1947 called upon the government to save the life of the people by guiding the PCCs in right way and also to strengthen the procurement of paddy by bringing societies under the popular control and breaking the nexus of landlords, officials and black marketeers, or else people

---

<sup>83</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.* p.67

<sup>84</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala*, p.24

<sup>85</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 16-05-1947

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



would have to encounter a further terrible famine and an epidemic than that of 1943<sup>87</sup>.

The struggle organised by the peasantry under Communist party against black-marketing took a more vigorous shape in northern parts of Malabar. In many parts of northern Malabar, the KS workers resisted the attempt of shifting the paddy by landlords in connivance with the police. The peasants in the villages of Kankol, Korom and Vellur in Kannur seized carts and measured paddy, which was being carried without a permit for black marketing, at co-operative societies and consequently, the protesters were arrested and three of them at Kankol were sentenced to 10 months imprisonment<sup>88</sup>. While a procession was taking out at Kankol by KS activists on 12 December 1946, police waylaid it and arrested some activists including prominent leader V.M.Vishnu Bharatheeyan<sup>89</sup>.

A party meeting at Kayaralam near Paadikunnu on 25-04-1945 decided to organise *nelleduppu samaram*. The party workers including Chadayan Govindhan, marched to *janmi* Anandhan Nambiar's house and after taking possession of the paddy, distributed it among the people<sup>90</sup>. At Payam near Iritty, PCC had entrusted one Piriya for collecting paddy from peasants. He was allegedly an agent of *janmi* and hence, the paddy he collected did not go to PCC, instead, it went to the black market. Knowing about illegality at the times of scarcity, the Sangham workers seized his vehicle laden with paddy and distributed it among the people<sup>91</sup>. The incident led to a clash between the police and the locals<sup>92</sup>.

---

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*13-5-47

<sup>89</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op. cit.* p.26

<sup>90</sup> K. Balakrishnan, *Chadayan Poraliyum Theraliyum*. p.36

<sup>91</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.337

<sup>92</sup> *Pazhuzzi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika*, 30

It was on 14 October 1946 that *Nelledduppu* samaram was organised at Malappattam where during the times of scarcity One Illikkalathu Aboobacker, a *janmi*, made an attempt to traffic paddy without permit with an intention to be sold in black market. Knowing about this, the Party workers in the locality way laid the vehicle at Aalottu Vayal and seized the paddy which was later measured and sold at the Irikkoor Cooperative Society paying the sale proceeds to the landlord<sup>93</sup>. Registering cases against the Communists, police launched a search for the accused which led to the police atrocities in the locality<sup>94</sup>. Similarly, the peasants at Paccheni resisted an effort of the landlord, Appukutty Nair, to move paddy which he sold in the black-market, with the escort of MSP<sup>95</sup>.

The intervention of the police on the side of the landlord-black marketeer nexus led to firing at Karivellur in Kannur where peasants requested the landlord not to shift the paddy considering the food scarcity and to sell them through the local cooperative store. With the landlord turning down the request, MSP, on 20 December 1946, arrived in support of the landlord and arrested peasant leaders. When the crowd which thronged at the spot demanded their release, police fired at the crowd and killed a poor peasant and a boy<sup>96</sup>. In this protest, women including Devayani, wife of A.V.Kunjambu boldly encountered MSP with knives and sickles in their hands. Paddy seizing was also reported from other places. A case was registered at Thalassery special first-class magistrate court against seven communist activists including Chovvangan Kunhiraman hailing from

---

<sup>93</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.69

<sup>94</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.* p.,182

<sup>95</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op.cit.*, p.69

<sup>96</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op. cit.*, p.27

Kandoth for seizing and measuring paddy which was kept to be black marketed by one Mr.Srank Koran<sup>97</sup>.

In 1948, the new line of thought of the party known as the Calcutta thesis influenced considerably the agrarian struggles in Kerala. In accordance with the Thesis, the peasantry got mobilized. As the famine situation continued even after the war, essential commodities were highly priced by hoarders and black-marketeers<sup>98</sup>. The producer-cum-consumer cooperative societies(PCC's) in Malabar could not function effectively for want of proper supplies. The starvation and rural poverty drove the peasantry to rebellions. It was the festival season of *Vishu* and the starving peasants raised the banner of revolt against the oppressors. In several villages, the peasants moved in procession and demanded paddy from the landlords and they broke up the granaries and distributed paddy among themselves or through cooperative stores.

On 10-04-1948, a band of Communists and KS workers restrained a cart loaded with paddy belonging to the Kottayam Raja and distributed it among the local people. Consequently, cases were charged against the Communists. KS activists of Kankol *amsom*, east of Payyanur marched to the house of a landlord, Mavila Kunhambu Nambiar, and demanded paddy on 11 April 1948<sup>99</sup>. It was a period of extreme famine, that even for gold there was no availability of a little measure of rice. They demanded that Nambiar give them paddy and were ready to give a fair price to the landlord<sup>100</sup>. Nambiar refused and asked the peasants to get out of his courtyard and tried to beat

---

<sup>97</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 13-05-1947

<sup>98</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op. cit.*, p.52

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* p.58

<sup>100</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *op. cit.*, p. 42

them out, using his servants<sup>101</sup>. The peasants resorted to force and carried away the land lord's paddy and distributed it among themselves free of cost. On the 12<sup>th</sup> the police arrested the local peasant activists like T.P.C.Nambiar and K.P.Kunhhikannan Nambiar, immediately a crowd assembled and demanded their release. The police fired at them and B. Pokkan, a *harijan*, died there<sup>102</sup>. Pokkan was the first victim of the Calcutta Thesis in Malabar<sup>103</sup>. Much terror was unleashed on this occasion by the police against the villagers. The houses of A.V. Chindan and Natuvalappil Koran were burnt by the police and cases were charged against someone for committing dacoity. Some of the accused persons died in the police lock-ups on account of torture.

In Muzhakkunnu amsom, the peasant activists opened the granary of the Kanakathidam Vazhunnavar, landlord, and distributed three bags of rice on 25 April 1948. Even earlier there was tension in the village between the landlords and tenants. The landlord was in the habit of not issuing receipts for rent payments and he insisted on presents being made by tenants on the occasions like *Vishu and Onam*. The KSactivists had already protested against such illegal exactions but in vain. As instructed by the *Vazhunnavar*, the police charged a case against Manoli Kittan and 21 others. Most of them were sentenced to RI for two years in this case. Another case was also charged against Kallorath Madhavan Nambiar on this occasion by the personal animosity of the landlord<sup>104</sup>.

The *Nelleduppu Samaram* in Thillankeri is remarkable in the history of the Communist party in north Malabar. In Thillankeri, the party meeting which was held on 11 April 1948, at Nattuvayana school decided to seize the

---

<sup>101</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *op. cit.*, p.77

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *op.cit.*, p.58

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* p.59

paddy kept illegally in the *pathayapura* of *janmi* and distribute it among the people<sup>105</sup>. C.Anandhan was given the charge of organising the agitation. On 13<sup>th</sup> April 1948, KS workers under C.Gopala Kurup, and C.Anandhan marched to the house of Sankarankandy Kunhikanna Kurup and demanded to release paddy which was kept in heaps after extracting from the poor peasants as *vaaram* or rent. But the *janmi* repeatedly maintained that there was no paddy to distribute. Meanwhile, C.Anandhan offered a golden garland of his wife as price for the paddy<sup>106</sup>. Fearing, that the protesters, mainly belonging to *Thiyya* community, would enter his house and thus, get his house polluted, *janmi* released paddy which was distributed among nearly 200 persons<sup>107</sup>.

On *Vishu* day, 14-04-1948, the protesters reached Pullattu *janmi*'s house in Pazhassi raising a similar demand<sup>108</sup>. The KS workers under leaders like C.Anandhan were determined to go to any extent in the wake of the experiences on the preceding day. The *janmi*, though put up an initial resistance, could not withstand before the organised strength of the Sangham and the granary of the *janmi* got open for the starving people<sup>109</sup>. It is also said that they broke open a ration shop at Kuttimavinkeezhu and made the owner distribute rice to the people. The ration shop owner had closed his shop for many days when people were suffering from starvation which provoked protesters to move towards his shop<sup>110</sup>.

*Nelleduppu* struggles gathered momentum in north Malabar and more and more cases were reported one by one. The Prapoyil Chittari or granary of

---

<sup>105</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.322

<sup>106</sup> Interview with K. Gopalan Nambiar at his residence on 28-09-2021

<sup>107</sup> *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika*, p.32

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Gopalan Nambiar at his residence on 28-09-2021

<sup>109</sup> K. Bhaskaran Master, *Sakhavu C.Anandhan* in *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika*, p.69

<sup>110</sup> P. Jayarajan. *op. cit.*, p.323

Vengayil senior Nayanar in Vayakkara village was opened by the peasants on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1948 and paddy worth Rs.300 was carried away by them for distribution<sup>111</sup>. In Muzhakkunnu *amsom*, the peasant activists opened the granary of the Kanakathidam Vazhunnavar and distributed three bags of rice on 25 April<sup>112</sup>.

When the food shortage worsened, the Communist party convened a meeting of delegates in Ravaneswaram to plan the strike. The mode of struggles against the landlords who were engaged in hoarding paddy, was discussed; there was a discussion on whether to procure paddy giving money to the *janmis*. The meeting attended by *taluk* leaders like K. Madhavan, P. Ambu Nair, P. Chathu and M. Haridas decided that the landlords should be paid before paddy being procured and distributed. April 16, 1948, under the leadership of Ambu Nair and M. Haridas, the KS workers came to the *Illam* of Kundilayar in Pullur to procure paddy. They informed the Kundilayar of the plight of the natives. When the request for releasing paddy was turned down 30 sacks of paddy were taken and distributed on the spot. When it was not enough to give paddy to all the people who came to buy paddy, the peasants went in procession to the *Madam* of landlord Maniyan Pattar. The lord conceded to cede the paddy at the insistence of the protestors but refused to accept money for it. Nevertheless, the leaders deposited the money in a drawer and returned.

With the intensification of paddy agitation in various places in Payyanur *farkka*, the demand for agitation became strong in Kuttur also where

---

<sup>111</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala, op.cit.*, p.61. Consequent to the incident a case was charged against 21 persons and five of the accused were sentenced to RI for 5 years.

<sup>112</sup> Earlier there was a tension in the village between the landlords and tenants. The landlord, *vazhunnavar*, was in the habit of not issuing receipts for rent payments and he insisted the tenants on *Vechukanal* practice on the occasions like *Vishu* and *Onam*. The *Kisan* activists had already launched protest against such illegal exactions.

a decision was taken by the Sangham workers to break open the *Nayanar Madam* at Vengayil in Kuttur and distribute paddy. V.V. Kunjikannan was one of the participants in the struggle whose father was the third *karyasthan* of the *Madam* itself. The inflammatory decision came to the notice of the third *karyasthan* and he locked his son V.V. Kunjikannan at home. However, Kunjikannan managed to escape from home and participated in the historic struggle held on 20th April 1948<sup>113</sup>.

In April 1948, *nelleduppusamaram* was held at Thekke Madam, also known as AlappadampuValiya Madam owned by the landlord T.M. Sreedharan Nambeesan, to help the starving people in the village<sup>114</sup>. While protests surfaced throughout the *farkka*, the Communists in the locality stormed Alappadampu Valiya Madam near Payyannur and seized the paddy stored in the *Pathayapura*; later it was distributed among the people at a place near Kundyam Peedika<sup>115</sup>. A similar incident was reported at Kannattum Kavu in Pazhassi where paddy was being transported to the Kottayam *Kovilakam* from Chavassery. KS workers like Kunnummal Chathu Kutti stopped the paddy laden cart bound to the *Kovilakam* and the paddy was distributed among the starving poor<sup>116</sup>. Near the Shivapuram post office, a paddy laden cart was seized and paddy was distributed among the public by Communists like E.K.Kunhikrishnan Nambiar, Kalli Kunhikannan<sup>117</sup>.

The role of teachers in the *Nelleduppu* struggles deserves special mention. In 1948 workers including many teachers attached to Ayyallur L.P.School in Pazhassi, on hearing that a large amount of paddy was being

---

<sup>113</sup> Vinod Karippal's article in Mathrubhumi , 28-04-2016. For more visit <https://archives.mathrubhumi.com/kannur/kazhcha/1.1026674> .

<sup>114</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.107

<sup>115</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 02.05.2019

<sup>116</sup> *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika*, 2010-11, p.95

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* pp.101-102

transported to Kottayam *Kovilakam* for getting it sold in black market, reached Shivapuram and way laid the carts bound to the Kovilakam. V.Anandhan Master, K.K.Balakrishnan Master, Aalayadan Kunhikannan Master, P.Kunhikannan Master, Achumaster, K.K. Kunhanandhan Master and others in the school took part. When the request to sell paddy for fair price was rejected, they seized paddy and distributed it among the poor. In the melee with the police, V.Anandhan Master, K.K.Balakrishnan Master became martyrs and the remaining teachers were put behind bars. Besides, school's recognition was also withdrawn. It was after Malabar District Board in which communists had a majority that restored its recognition.<sup>118</sup>

In 1948, KS workers way laid a vehicle at Thillankeri and seized paddy which was carried by the assistants of Kottayam Raja to Koothuparambu and it was distributed among the people. The police arrested many persons including the elders and as a mark of protest, some women in the locality way laid vehicles at *Angadi*<sup>119</sup>. Likewise, a paddy laden cart belonging to Kottayam *Kovilakam* was waylaid at Thallodu Vayal near Koothuparamba in April 1948 by Sangham workers under Neelancheri Narayanan Nair and Azad Gopalan Nair<sup>120</sup>. The paddy on the seized bull cart was distributed among the starving poor in the locality<sup>121</sup>.

Even after the adoption of the parliamentary democracy by the party, communists did not withdraw from launching such protests against hoarders and black marketers. Seizure of paddy laden vehicles and distribution of the paddy among the starving were reported from many parts. At Vatakara, in 1956, a cart carrying paddy was seized by Communists under the leadership

---

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, p.142

<sup>119</sup> P. Jayarajan. *op. cit.*, p.232

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*. p.341

<sup>121</sup> P. Purushothaman, *Neelancheri Narayanan Nair*, in *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika*, 2010-11, p.81



of Kanaprath Kunhiraman and it was distributed among the locals at his shop in Peruvattum Thazha<sup>122</sup>. A similar incident was reported from Onchiyam where paddy cart was seized by KS workers including T.K.Kumaran<sup>123</sup>.

### ***Pullariyal Samaram***

*Pullariyal samaram* is a remarkable struggle in the history of KS in Malabar. The living condition of the poor in Malabar remained far below what any basic needs concept would require. They lived in dark, overcrowded thatched roof huts with no furniture and slept on coconut fiber mats on dirt floors and they had grossly inadequate toilet facilities. The houses of the poor were commonly called as *chettakudil* (*meanest hut*); coconut leaf mats and long grasses were used for its roofing. Usually, the women used to make mats with coconut leaves which they collected from the land of the *janmis*. In some parts of north Malabar, roofing of the houses were done with a particular type of long grasses called *muli* which is a type of grass growing up to 2 ft. tall<sup>124</sup>. It was an age-old right enjoyed by the tenant families to collect *muli* and other materials for hut making including grass.

The people, who lived on the lands of the *janmis*, tried their level best to satisfy the requirements of the *janmi* and his family. Never had they thought of protesting or even raising their voice against the *janmis*. Likewise, there was no opposition on the part of the *janmis* against the *de facto* rights of the tenants. This was a particular type of system of mutual assistance between *janmis* and dependants in the feudal society. But the scene began to change with the KS gathering up strength and *janmis* began to be subjected to criticism. Leaders of the Sangham in their speeches at public meetings which were attended by the dependents of *janmis*, challenged the authority of the

---

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Govindan.K at his residence in Vatakara on 02-02-2019

<sup>123</sup> Interview with T.K. Kumaran at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Gopala Krishnan.B.K, at his residence in Kasargod on 01-06-2021

lords and criticised their atrocities on the tenants. With or without knowledge the dependants of the *janmis* were becoming a part of the opposition against their lords. In such a situation, some of the *janmis* who were very much critical of the peasant organisations owing allegiance to CPI, started harassing the peasants: tenants were forcefully evicted and their traditional rights were curtailed. It was in this context that rights of the women folk to collect materials for hut making like wood and grass from the land of *janmis* were denied.

In the context of KS gathering momentum, oppositions began to be surfaced at the grass root level against the denial of the age-old rights and privileges of the tenants and poor families. The Sangham could not remain as a mute spectator to the injustices meted out to the tenants. Exploiting the situation, it began to organise peasants under the red flag taking up their issues. With the everyday life started getting disrupted, the wretched peasantry rallied behind KS for restoring their lost rights. North Malabar, thus, witnessed a novel protest called *Pullariyalsamaram*. In 1946 various parts of Kasargod witnessed such strikes which were marked by the participation of women.

Perumbala was one of the places where people launched protest against the denial of their traditional rights. The women in the area used to incise grass for the roofing of huts from Kakkandam and Kundadukkam areas and their right to grass was denied by *janmi* Kakkandam Abdul Khader which invited wrath from the people. With the KS taking up the issue women folk came to the forefront of the struggle. More than 30 women, as per the decision of the Sangham, determined to incise grass challenging the ban on it. The Sangham also deployed its cadres to give protection to the striking women. Though the *goondas* were brought by the *janmi* to prevent the women, they withdrew from the spot and thus, women successfully incised

grass. The police which was on the side of the *janmi* later raided the houses of the strikers and unleashed widespread violence in the area. It is reported that cases were registered against 18 people related with the incident<sup>125</sup>.

Similar struggle was also organised at Chemmanadu near Kasargod. As elsewhere in north Malabar, the right of the women folk in the area to collect *muli* was denied. Consequently, a strong protest was launched by the CPI to restore the lost right by incising grass at a place in Koliyadukkam. Karthyayani and Chomuamma, were some of the members of the participants in the strike<sup>126</sup>. In 1946 similar strikes were organised in and around Peringome where a large number of people including women participated<sup>127</sup>. Kunhappan, V.V.Raman Vaidyar and C.P.Narayanan led the strike at Peringhom. At Echilampara, *Mahila Sangham* activists like Pilakku Meenakshi, Pilakku Cheeri, Maniyeri Lakshmi, PuthiyaVeetil Lakshmi, Avarotti Narayani and Kana participated in a similar strike despite cruelties by the *janmis*<sup>128</sup>.

*PullariyalSamaram* received wide attention with the Kandakkai strike in 1946. The Kandakkai *adhikari* was the *janmi* of Kandakkai area who always stood against the interests of the peasants<sup>129</sup>. When KS began to question the authoritarian stand of the *adhikari*, the latter retaliated by denying the right of the tenants to cut grass for roof making. Consequent to this, Sangham convened a conference of the peasants from different areas which was held at the Mayyil Higher Elementary School in December

---

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Gopala Krishnan.B.K. at his residence in Kasargod on 01-06-2021

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid. Deshabhimani*, 10-01-2015.

<sup>127</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.169

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* p.228

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* p.168.

1946<sup>130</sup>. As per the decision taken at the conference, KS workers launched struggle and successfully cut grass<sup>131</sup>. KS volunteers from Kolacheri and Cheleri were there at Kandakkai to help the striking workers. K.K.Kunjanandhan Nambiar, P.K.Kunjikannan Nambiar, T.Othenan Master, Kuttancheri Kelu Master and others led the struggle.<sup>132</sup>

The struggle gave a severe blow to the authority of Kandakkai *adhikari* who filed a case against the peasants. The police beat the peasants up and destroyed the household utensils of the peasants<sup>133</sup>. Many houses of the peasants, their paddy and cattle were confiscated; as the house of one Kandoth Raman Nair was confiscated, his sister's delivery was under a tree<sup>134</sup>. The men were not able to get out of their houses, due to the fear of police action. It was at this juncture that under the leadership of Kunjakkamma, a procession of women was organized. They marched to the *janmi's* house carrying the broken vessels which were destroyed by the police and dumped them in front of the house of *adhikari*. It further infuriated the *adhikari* who again filed a case against Kunjakkamma and other 15 men for house breaking and thus, the police arrested them<sup>135</sup>. Apart from Kunhakkama, E.K.Sreedhevi Amma, V.V.Kunhathamma, M.P.Thampayi Amma, Chandrathil Paru, C.Chiyyayi, P.Mani, and Chemben Cheyyayi were other members who participated in the protest<sup>136</sup>. This protest which is

---

<sup>130</sup> K.C. Govindan, *Kandakkai Thirinju Nokkumpol* in *Sakhavu Krishna Pillai Smaraka Vayanasala-Kandakkai, Platinum Jubilee Smaranika*, p.38

<sup>131</sup> R. Radhakrishnan, *Keralathile Sthreesakthicharithram*, Maluben Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 2016. p.226

<sup>132</sup> K. Balakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.18

<sup>133</sup> T.K. Anandhi, *op. cit.* For more details visit <http://www.cds.ac.in>

<sup>134</sup> K.C. Govindan, *op. cit.* p.,38

<sup>135</sup> K. Balakrishnan, *op. cit.* p.,17

<sup>136</sup> C. Damodharan, *Sakhavu Kunhakkama* in *Sakhavu Krishna Pillai Smaraka Vayanasala-Kandakkai, Platinum Jubilee Smaranika*, p.43

known as *Kalamkettu Samaram* was a milestone in the history of the Malabar peasant struggle.

### ***Thol Viraku Samaram***

Thol Viraku *samaram* at Cheemeni estate in Kasaragod *taluk* was organised in 1946 to reinstate the age-old right to collect fire wood and leaves from an estate land<sup>137</sup>. Peasant women of the Cheemeni estate were using fuel and fodder from the estate area which was owned by Subramanyan Thirumumbu, an activist of the left wing. He sold this vast forest area to John Kottukapalli from Travancore<sup>138</sup>. When the land was sold out, the new landlord refused to give the fuel and fodder<sup>139</sup>. The womenfolk in the area who were using them for a long time, felt that it was their right to get fuel and fodder from the land on which they work. Thus, they, in association with KS, launched a protest movement to get back their traditional rights. K.A. Keraleeyan camped at Cheruvathur and gave leadership to the struggle<sup>140</sup>. Comrade T.K. Chandhan was one of the leaders of the struggle<sup>141</sup>. There were arrests and harassment by the Police but the women were not ready to withdraw from the protest. They marched forward and thus, regained the right for fuel and fodder.

An important feature of the struggle was the participation of women in a substantial scale. The protest was led by Karthyayani, wife of Subramanyan Thirumumpu who wrote a marching song for the struggle. More than 100 women took part in the struggle and they marched to the estate singing his song. There was brutal police repression: one woman was sexually abused

---

<sup>137</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, pp.162-68

<sup>138</sup> *Tholum Virakum Njangaledukkum* in *Madhyamam*, 01.08.2022

<sup>139</sup> P. Janardhanan, *Smruthipadhangalil Mayathe, Marayathe* in *Kayyur Rakthasakshi Smaranika*, Kochi, 1999. p.99

<sup>140</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *K.A. Keraleeyan*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015. p.39

<sup>141</sup> P. Janardhanan, *op. cit.*, p.99

and another was molested and others thoroughly beaten up<sup>142</sup>. Women from nearby villages like Thimiri, Klayikkode, Chervathur, Kayyur and Kodakkat also had actively taken part in the agitation. P.C. Karthyayanikutti Amma, Chettichi Paru, Marathi Parvathi, EdadomVettil Madhavi, Meethale Veetil Lakshmi, Vaniyathi Cheriya, M.V. Cheriya etc., were some of the noteworthy participants of this agitation<sup>143</sup>.

### ***Vila Koithu Samaram***

With the peasant movement gathering momentum, the hegemonic power, so far exercised by the landed magnates in Malabar, began to be shattered. Until the movement gathered strength among the landless and poor peasants, no voice of protest erupted against the magnates. With the peasants started to join the movement in large scale and question the unbridled power of the *janmis*, different types of protests were launched under the red flag. Those who joined the movement got educated and infused with courage enough to raise their voices against their lords. It was unusual among the tenants including women and children, who raised slogans against *janmis* in public as part of processions.

In the 1941-42 period, *Vila Koithu* struggles were organised in different parts of north Malabar under the KS. In the north Malabar areas, there was a system of confiscating the tenant's crop to realise tax arrears due to the landlords. The crop was usually confiscated at the time of paddy harvest and it was done with the support of *Gramadhikari*, the village head. Karshaka Sangham decided to hold harvest which was entitled to the tenants and raised the slogan "One who sows, shall reap" which provided the ideological basis

---

<sup>142</sup> Sreevidya.V, *Peasant Struggles in North Malabar: Women's Perspective*, Indian History Congress, Vol.62 (2001). p.608.

<sup>143</sup> K.Vijayan, *Peasant Movements in North Malabar 1948-52:A Case Study of Nelleduppu Samarangal*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Kannur University, 2018, p.127

for the resistance against this despicable system<sup>144</sup>. Various parts of north Malabar like Thimiri, Udhinur, Belur, Vishnumangalam, Ravaneeswaram, Eleri etc. witnessed *Vila Koithu* strikes<sup>145</sup>. In some places, strikes led to clashes with police. These strikes blasted the myth that *janmis* were invincible and protests against them were impossible.

Thimiri in Kasargod witnessed two *Vila Koythu Samarams* and the first one was held in February 1941<sup>146</sup>. It was the eviction attempt made by *janmi* C.P.Gopalan that led to the struggle. When Gopalan tried to evict his tenant Appu, the KS workers made intervention in favour of the latter. The Sangham workers harvested the crop in his field and consequently, a case was registered by the police against six persons. As there was no evidence against the accused, all of them were acquitted. It was in the second struggle at Thimiri, held in 1948, that the women participated and later appeared in the court. Out of the 28 accused in the case, 8 were women<sup>147</sup>.

The Eleri *Vila Koythu Samaram* was a remarkable one among the peasant struggles in north Malabar. At Eleri in Kasargod, the crop belonging to Veluthedan Kelu Nair was harvested by the Sangham volunteers and the crops were taken to the houses of peasants. A significant aspect of the struggle was the large-scale women's participation; Valliyodu Mani was one of the participants. Thazhe Veettil Karichi, a Mahila Sangham activist, after laying her three-month-old baby on the ground near the field, participated in the struggle<sup>148</sup>. Peasants from Karyankodu, and Mayeecha also had participated in the struggle.

---

<sup>144</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 01-01-2018

<sup>145</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.79

<sup>146</sup> *Desabhimani*, *op.cit.*

<sup>147</sup> P. Jayarajan. *op. cit.*, p.151

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*p.227

Palayi near Neeleswaram town witnessed to similar *Vila Koythu Samaram* in 1942. Aayavalappil Kunhikrishnan Nambiar, a native of Ayavalap in Palai, was the *janmi* of a land which was leased out to Thandalath Ambadi and Kovvalil Anbadi Panicker who cultivated the land<sup>149</sup>. When the crop in the leased land got ready for harvesting, Nambiar stake claim over it. He also filed a case against some tenants for rent arrears and won a favourable verdict<sup>150</sup>. When the *janmi* and his workers came to harvest the crop, KS workers successfully resisted their attempt and thus, *janmi* and his men had to leave the place<sup>151</sup>. Later, the Sangham workers harvested the crop. Consequent to this, cases were registered against the workers and some were sentenced to imprisonment.

Another successful attempt was made in 1942 at Udhinoor near Thrikkaripur where KS workers launched harvest at the field of one Vengalaattu Kunhabu Nair who was the *janmi*. As part of the struggle, the Sangham workers assembled near Thadiyan Kovil L.P School for making necessary arrangements for the harvest. In the historic struggle, which was held at a field in front of the Udinur Kshetrepalaka temple on 03-09-1942, many peasants including women participated<sup>152</sup>. The crop, thus harvested, was distributed among the peasants' houses by women workers like Kolavalappil Parvathi<sup>153</sup>.

The Madikai *Vila Koythu Samaram* is another incident that gave a severe blow to the authority of the *janmis* in Kasaragod *taluk*. The land of 25 cents cultivated by one Vazhakodan Kannan for 32 years was vacated by the

---

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* p.151

<sup>150</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 01-01- 2018

<sup>151</sup> P. Jayarajan. *op. cit.* p.151

<sup>152</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 01-01- 2018

<sup>153</sup> P. Jayarajan. *op. cit.*, p.151



landlord and it was given to another farmer<sup>154</sup>. This unjust eviction was strongly opposed by the Communist Party cell in Madikai which gave courage and confidence to Kannan to protest against it. With the time of harvest getting near, the Communists and KS, in solidarity with Kannan, workers moved to the paddy-grown field and successfully harvested crops without minding resistance put up by the *Janmi*<sup>155</sup>.

Chandhan Kunji of Veenacherry was a tenant of Vishnumangalam Devaswam temple and he had been cultivating on a field near the Vishnumangalam temple<sup>156</sup>. The *karyasthan* or steward of the Eratthitayar, with the help of PSP (Praja Socialist Party) workers, tried to evict Chandhan Kunji. When the latter was served with an eviction notice asking him to vacate the field, the Communists and KS workers rallied behind him. Sangham workers including women took out a march from Vellikoth to Vishnu Mangalam under the leaders like K.Madhavan, P.Chathu, C.Kelu Nair, and V.Raman and sowed seeds in the disputed field. Since the time of sowing to harvesting, the Sangham workers had guarded the field. When the time of harvest got near, workers raising the slogan “*Chantankunji ittavila, Chantankunji koitheduttukkum*”, (what *Chantankunji* sowed would be harvested by him) took out a march and successfully reaped the crop<sup>157</sup>.

The Belur harvest strike took place in 1949. A tenant named Onakan Kannan got evicted from the land where he had been cultivating for many years and it was leased to another person by the *janmi*<sup>158</sup>. With the KS taking up the issue, peasants gathered courage to fight against the injustice meted out

---

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* pp.152-53.

<sup>155</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 01-01- 2018

<sup>156</sup> P. Jayarajan. *op. cit.*, pp.156-57

<sup>157</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 01-01- 2018

<sup>158</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.158

by the *Janmi*. Thus, Kannan boldly entered the field and successfully harvested<sup>159</sup>.

When the *adhikari* of Kandakkai region, consequent to a quarrel, made a declaration that he would not allow KS workers to work in his fields. Accordingly, Oorada Kannan Nair, V.V.Chandhu Kutty Nambiar and other Sangham workers were restricted from harvesting their crops. Consequently, KS held Kayaralam area meeting at Mayyil Elementary School and decided to harvest crops at any cost<sup>160</sup>. As part of the struggle, KS workers from Irikkoor *farkka* flowed to Kandakkai raising the slogan “One who sows, shall reap”. Thus, KS workers including women rallied in the field and harvested crops<sup>161</sup>. The incident was a severe shock to the power exercised by the *adhikari* on the peasants.

The agrarian struggles undertaken by the KS under the aegis of CPI were instrumental in breaking the hegemony of the *janmis* over the peasantry. These were organised taking into consideration the plight of the peasantry who were reeling under poverty during the war and post war periods. As these strikes were pertained to their everyday life, large scale participation of women was perceptible despite the brutal suppression by the police. The Communist intervention infused a sense of self esteem as well as self identity among the peasantry. It also paved way for a specific class consciousness among them which almost or completely subsumed caste and other ethnic identity differences deep rooted in society. These strikes brought a large number of peasants and tenants to the fold of Communist movement in Malabar.

---

<sup>159</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 01-01- 2018

<sup>160</sup> K. Balakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.16

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* p.17

## **Chapter V**

### **Communist Values and Social Change**

The emergence of political and class consciousness among the people in Kerala is inextricably linked with the processes of social reform, nationalism and class struggle. Its roots can be found in the structural changes in the society and economy which were introduced brought about by the colonial intervention. The foundation stone of the progressive movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was laid by the socio-religious reform movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was further carried out by the progressive-minded persons in the Congress and later by the Communists. This chapter deals with the works of the Communists in wiping out superstitions and irrational practices apart from their intervention in socio-economic life of the people.

The Kerala society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was steeped in religious superstition and social obscurantism. The religious beliefs and practices of popular culture were a mixture of magic, sorcery, witchcraft, divination, and demonology. The upper caste Hindus, especially the Brahmans, exercised an overwhelming and decisive influence over the lower castes. Social conditions were depressing. The rites and practices observed at the time of marriage, birth, death, puberty, and pregnancy were absolutely absurd and irrational. The practices of untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability militated against human dignity. In fact, the caste rules and regulations hampered social mobility, fostered social division and sapped individual initiative.

The successors of the reform movements, in the nineteenth century, through their association with Indian National Congress launched a scathing

attack on the traditional and irrational customs and practices that kept away the lower caste people from mainstream. It was the progressive and revolutionary minds in the Congress who were on the front line of the social reform and anti-untouchability movement. For decades in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they had read and listened to the rhetoric of social reform, preached both by the Gandhian Congress and Kerala's own caste reformers. Now, they were given the leadership and the opportunity to act by the communist leaders<sup>1</sup>. The majority of the communists had learnt the basic lessons of social reform through their association with the Gandhians led by K.Kelappan while in congress and later, they began to play the role of the fighters against illogical and irrational social and religious customs and practices.

### **Communists and Social Reform**

As observed by EMS, Karshaka Sangham played the role of renaissance movements, that were in existence in Thiru-Kochi, in Malabar<sup>2</sup>. Unlike, the southern parts of the state, caste and religious organizations had little role in the social and political life of the people in Malabar except minority dominated regions. In the rise of the political consciousness among the wide range of people in Malabar, KS played a significant role. While Congress brought a large number of educated to the vortex of the National Movement, KS succeeded in penetrating further into the grass root level people. Many of the disciples of social reformers in Malabar, like Vaghubadantha and Sivanandha Paramahamsar, later became active workers and leaders of KS and CPI. C.H.Kanaran was one such leading figure<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *Matriliny, Marxism, and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940*. p.90

<sup>2</sup> K.N. Panikkar, *Kadathanadinte Sahithya Paramaryam*, p.76

<sup>3</sup> P.K. Sujith, *Samara Mukhangalil Priya Sakhakkal*, p.173

A large majority of the party leaders belonged to Upper Castes or well-to-do families. Though stiff opposition came from their traditional *taravads* against their progressive programmes, the lessons of the communist ideology did not deter them from getting involved in revolutionary social activities. They came forward to swim against the currents challenging the orthodoxy and age-old social system. Leaders like, N.E.Balaram, Moyyarath Sankaran and C.H.Kanaran were basically atheists and involved in atheist activities<sup>4</sup>. While in CSP, they had carried out rationalism and atheist propaganda. Different types of programmes were designed and traditional beliefs and practices were challenged. At a literary conference held in Thalassery, in which Vallathol was a chief guest, P.Kesava Dev delivered a speech exhorting people to burn the epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* which were obstacles to the advancement of the people<sup>5</sup>.

*Swathanthra Chintha Samajam* was an atheistic organisation set up at Kottayam *taluk* with Chandroth KunhiramanNair and C.H.Kanaran as president and secretary respectively<sup>6</sup>. *Swathanthra Chintha*, a manuscript magazine was published and hundreds of meetings and classes were organized under it. The activities of the organization evoked mixed responses from the people and some, who came in opposition to it, started to publish a counter magazine<sup>7</sup>. The verbal dual between theists and atheists resulted in an open debate at Oniyan School in Kodyeri in May 1934<sup>8</sup>. P.K.Koru Master and K.T.Chanthu Nambiar, who represented the sides of atheists and theists respectively, were deputed as the presiding officers of the debate.

---

<sup>4</sup> Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, *Smaranika*, p.52.

<sup>5</sup> K.M. Babu(ed.), *CH.Kanaran:Oru Ormappusthakam*, p.30

<sup>6</sup> G.D. Nair, *C.H.Kanaran Jeevithavum Samaravum*, p.31

<sup>7</sup> M.V.Govindhan Master, *C.H. Kanaranum Samoohya Anacharangalku Ethireyulla Samaravum* in *C.Hnte Lokam C.H.Kanaran Janmashadabधि Smaranika*, p.55

<sup>8</sup> G.D. Nair, *op. cit.*,p.31

Vagbhadanandha Guru, social reformer and famous orator on the side of theists and Chandroth Kunhiraman Nair representing atheists made speeches on the occasion. C.H.Kanaran was of the view that the progress of the people could be endured only if the superstitions were eliminated from the societies<sup>9</sup>.

At a time when progressive ideas were in their nascent stage of growth, the Socialists had to face stiff opposition and hence, they were subjected to beatings and stone pelting by the opponents. Recognizing the sharp criticism from the public which might turn out to be disastrous to the Socialist movement, some of the leaders made attempts to dissuade them from such revolutionary programmes organized in an immature society wherein people could not digest them. It was after the explanation given by C.A.K.Pillai at a CSP meeting on the issue of atheism that C.H.Kanaran and others withdrew from their rationalist propaganda<sup>10</sup>.

P. Krishnapillai and A.K.Gopalan themselves were participants as well as leaders in several anti-untouchability struggles including the temple entry at Guruvayoor. A remarkable role concerning social reform was played by A.K.Gopalan who lost even his wife on account of social reform. His first marriage was annulled by his wife's clan members who forced her to leave him, following a dispute relating to his 'impertinent and unpardonable act' of taking his wife to a *Harijan* colony<sup>11</sup>. It was under the leadership of Gopalan that a temple entry procession was taken out at Kandoth temple in Payyannur in 1930 for the right of temple entry of *Dalits*<sup>12</sup>.

Paliyam struggle and a number of temple entry struggles were carried out under the leadership of Communist party. Communists were in front of

---

<sup>9</sup> M.V.Govindhan Master, *op. cit.*, p.55

<sup>10</sup> K.M. Babu(ed), *op. cit.*, p.19

<sup>11</sup> *Deccan Chronicle*, 10-01-2018

<sup>12</sup> C. Bhaskaran, *Indian Communist Prasthanam Adyapathikar*, p.404

the efforts to bring to light the hollowness behind some of the practices followed in the name of religion and beliefs. Traditional beliefs were used to exploit and silence the poor by orthodoxy. At a time when dreadful epidemics like cholera and smallpox disrupted social life in the 1940s and 1950s, necromancers had taken maximum advantage of the situation by exploiting the people's misconceptions of the diseases. When the KS gathered momentum in north Malabar, the voice of protest began to surface against such irrational practices. The protests against temple priests like Kaattumaadam Namboothiri in Kurumbranadu during the times of cholera, and also against the *mooppans* in north Malabar during the times of smallpox were only a few instances.

The protests held at Onchiyam near Vatakara under Communist leaders like Mandodi Kannan, the high priest of Communist movement in the area, were directed against superstitions. Their protest was directed against the performance of *meleri*, also called *kanalattam*, which was performed at traditional *kavus* annually<sup>13</sup>. The performer who was called *theyyakaran*, used to jump onto the pile of embers during his performance but emerged without sustaining any burn injury. People believed that it was the arduous spiritual observances of the *theyyakkaran* that made him resistant to burns. The reality behind the performer not getting burnt had well been known to the Communists<sup>14</sup>. Under the leadership of Mandodi Kannan, Communists decided to expose the hollowness behind *kanalattam*<sup>15</sup>. During the time of the

---

<sup>13</sup> The performer of the *kanalattam* wearing tender coconut leaf mat runs and jumps into a huge pile of ember. His assistants swiftly pull him back before the fire gets a chance to burn his costume and the act is repeated over a lot of times. After plunging into the bonfire, he comes out safe which is believed to be a sign of his arduous spiritual observances having made him resistant to burns.

<sup>14</sup> During the time of *meleri* making supporting members used to throw sesame on the pile of ember to reduce the intensity of the heat. This reality was unknown to the faithful who believed in the divinity of the *theyyam* performer.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with T.K. Kumaran, at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

annual *theyyam* performance, while the men of *theyyakkaran* prepared pile of ember with sesame, the Communists put jaggery pieces on it to intensify the ember heat. Without knowing it, *theyyakkaran* jumped onto the *meleri* and sustained burnt injuries all over the body<sup>16</sup>.

Though the incident invited much opposition from the reactionaries, the comrades were not ready to come back even an inch from their stance. Later, Mandodi Kannan together with Ellath Kannan, Poyil Kanaran and others organised a parallel *meleri* at ThacharathVayal in Onchiyam and brought to light the reality behind the *kanalattam* performance<sup>17</sup>. Nevertheless, *kanalattam* and other *theyyam* performances continued to be performed at the *kavus* even after the incident. But the incident caused wide discussion among the public on the role of the Communists in exposing fake realities by challenging the orthodoxy.

Even though the temple entry legislation was passed in the Madras province in 1939<sup>18</sup>, the temple entry of the untouchables remained a distant dream in many parts of Malabar because of the unchanged mental state of the orthodoxy. The Communists, in some localities, took initiatives in organizing people and launching temple entry struggles unmindful of the orthodoxy's opposition. At Thalassery the Socialists took the lead in organizing a struggle

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> According to tradition, *meleri* performance was to be held only at Kavu premises. But the Communists organized it at a field where a huge pile of ember got prepared in the presence of hundreds of people and sesame was spread all over it. With the intensity of the ember heat got reduced the performer started to jump over it and the communists also followed the suit and they returned safe without sustaining any burn injury. For more details see P.P. Shaju, *Padanilangalil Poruthi Veenavar*, p.89

<sup>18</sup> Following the temple entry by Dalits at Madura Meenakshi temple under the leadership of Vaidyanatha Iyer, Chief Minister of Madras Presidency C.Rajagoplachari introduced legislation for the removal of the civil and social disabilities against the depressed classes. This legislation included the Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Act, 1939. The Madras Temple Entry Ordinance 1 was promulgated on July 17, of 1939.



for entry to Sreerama Swami Temple<sup>19</sup>. As part of this, a huge meeting was held at a field in front of the temple in which C.H.Kanaran exhorted the party workers to fall in line to eradicate the untouchability in society. As per the decision, the workers moved in procession to the Sreerama Swami Temple at Thiruvangadu and took bath in the temple pond. Some entered the temple and accepted *prasadam* from the temple priest. The temple entry of the lower castes in the area became a reality with this incident<sup>20</sup>. Similarly, Thrungali Methrukovil, where entry was denied to the downtrodden, witnessed an agitation led by the Party workers like Vamanan Nambothiri and Kori, a *harijan*. The strike paved the way for the entry of the *harijans* to the temple<sup>21</sup>.

The temple entry struggle at Pallyam temple in Thillankeri near Kannur was remarkable. The leadership of this struggle was given by C.Anandhan and Kunhappu Master. As part of the struggle C.H.Kanaran also had come to Thillankeri<sup>22</sup>. As designed earlier, C.Anandhan and a group of Communists who mainly belonged to the *Thiyya* community, proceeded to the temple in a procession. They along with some children took bath in the pond and entered the temple<sup>23</sup>. Consequent to the temple entry of *Thiyyas*, the temple, in the eyes of orthodoxy, got polluted and closed for two days for remedies.

The *kuli samaram* or bathing struggle was a novel method of protest against untouchability. They were organized following the temple entry acts

---

<sup>19</sup> When Gandhi came to Thalasseri as part of his *harijan yathra* the main demand he raised there was the temple entry of *harijans* to this temple. Interview with K.K.Marar master at Thalassery on 30-11-2021

<sup>20</sup> Pinarayi Vijayan, *C.H: Athulyanaya Sanghadakanum Poraliyum* in C.H.nte Lokam, Smaranika, p.41

<sup>21</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *Keralathile Communist Partyude Charithram 1940-1952*, II part p.184

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Atthikka Krishnan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

<sup>23</sup> K. Baskaran Master, *Sakhavu C.Anandhan Master* in *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal*, Smaranika, p.68

to establish equality and democratic rights<sup>24</sup>. This struggle gathered momentum along with the development of the temple entry struggles in Malabar. As per the temple tradition, untouchables, as in the case of temple entry, were not allowed to take bath in the sacred ponds attached to the temples. Bathing struggles were organized by taking the untouchables to the temple ponds. It was the progressive minded within the Congress party who first started organizing such protests and later it was continued by Socialists and Communists. The organizers of these struggles were KS leaders at the local level and the struggles were organized as a mode of protest against untouchability.

When the temple entry struggles got strengthened, the Party through its study classes convinced the members of the necessity to wipe out the age-old and rotten customs and practices in society and stressed the need to rally behind such struggles. At certain localities, individual Communists taking inspiration from party classes came forward to launch protest against orthodoxy. There were local level protests like the bathing struggle in some of the areas in north Malabar with the backing of KS during the period from 1936 to 1948.

It has been reported that 7 cases related to the protests were filed in Kozhikode court. M.K.Kelu, P.P.Sankaran and Paravan Chathu, were accused in them<sup>25</sup>. M.K.Kelu, popularly called Keluettan, was at the forefront of the struggle against untouchability in Kurumbranadu region<sup>26</sup>. Kelu was excelled in the martial art of *kalari*, which was prohibited to the untouchables. As a form of protest, he set up a special *kalari* at Paravanthala near Vatakara and

---

<sup>24</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Karshaka Sanghadakanaya Keluettan* in P.K.Sujith(ed.), *Samaramukhangalile Priyasaghakkal*, p.96

<sup>25</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p.77

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Bhaskara Panikkar, at his residence in Vatakara on 05-05-2021

training was imparted to untouchables with the help of his brother Kannan<sup>27</sup>. A similar *kalari* was also started at Verveetil at Cholam Vayal in Vatakara<sup>28</sup>.

Aarangottu Illam near Memunda in Kurumbranadu witnessed a bathing struggle in the 1940s. V.P. Kutti Master, Puthur Bala Kurup and others took part in the historic protest<sup>29</sup>. Those who participated in the struggle argued that the pond did not belong to the *melsanthi* but to the public<sup>30</sup>. The actual intention of the protesters was to take bath in the pond of *melsanthi* himself as a mark of protest against orthodoxy. T.K. Narayanan Nambiar, Puthoor Balakurup Master, Maruthiyattu Raman, Chulliyil Kelappan Gumasthan and Kottittayil Kannan were sentenced to 2 to 6 months imprisonment for their participation in the struggle. They were released from Kannur central jail on 08-08-1947<sup>31</sup>.

The bathing struggle at the temple pond attached to Keezhal temple in Kurumbranadu was organized by some youths leaning towards the Communist party. The incident shocked the orthodoxy and some of the violators including one Raman, a *Thiyya* was arrested and it was the party which played leading role in getting the participants released from jail<sup>32</sup>. A similar strike was organised at Vellarankottidam temple pond in Pathiyarakkara under T.K. Narayanan Nambiar<sup>33</sup>.

The bathing struggle at Mokeri near Kottayam taluk also deserves special attention in many regards where the protest was organized at a pond

---

<sup>27</sup> K.V. Kunhiraman, *Evarakkum Priyapetta Keluettan*. p.24

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> K.N. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p.77

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Vamanan Master at his residence in Keezhal on 10-12-2021

<sup>31</sup> K. Gopalan Master, *Maattathinte Nalvazhikal*, p.36

<sup>32</sup> Interview with T.V. Balakrishnan Nambiar at his residence in Memunda, Vatakara on 08-02-2020.

<sup>33</sup> K. Gopalan Master, *op. cit.*, p.37

attached to the *Pulinodu* temple. It is reported that 11 people including A.P.Krishnan, E.Kunhiraman Nambiar, N.P.Moidu, and E.K.Pokkan, participated in the protest. The action on the part of the comrades invited opposition from the orthodoxy. Naranath Karunakaran Nambiar, owner of the temple filed a case and thus, V.Kelappan Nair, Thaniyulla Parampath Kunhiraman, K.P.Kunhiraman, V.P.Balakrishnan, Chanthu Master were arrested<sup>34</sup>.

The impact of the protest movement was felt in the Valluvanad region, south of the Malabar district where protests were reported from Thrikkangodu temple and Paralasseri temple in Ottapalam. Under the leadership of the peasant movement, a group of men belonging to the Ezhuthachan caste, who were treated as untouchables, entered the Paralasseri temple pond and took bath as a mark of protest. Later they moved and polluted the Thrikkangode temple also. Mr. Ananthan Nair who was one of the leaders of the peasant movement gave leadership to this struggle<sup>35</sup>.

A significant struggle against untouchability was at Chaaliyar in Malappuram. The growth of KS gave the untouchables courage to question their traditional masters. The *Myladi Kovilakam* was situated on the banks of the Chaliyar river. The *Myladi* people used to take bath in the river and the dirt and the herbals used for the bath etc. used to make hindrance to the *Thampurattis* who also used to come to take bath in the river. And, hence continuous tension prevailed between the *Myladi* people and the *Kovilakam*<sup>36</sup>. Following the *Myladi* people were asked not to use the river banks, a strong protest movement was launched under Kathia, a *Dalit* woman to get back the riverbanks which was a common property. The struggle led to the victory of

---

<sup>34</sup> K.N. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p.77

<sup>35</sup> *Vikasana Rekha* Vol.100 Ottappalam Block-Vaniamkulam Panchayat in T.K. Anandhi's report. Visit <http://www.cds.ac.in> > krpcds > report > anandi

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Rasheedali Alangathil at his residence near Chaliyar on 19-05-2021

the Myladi people and Kathia was known as *Adhikari Kathia* and there were songs written appreciating her mobilizing women and leading the movement against the *Kovilakams*<sup>37</sup>. The fearless fights by *Dalit* women were possible only with the widespread mobilisation of the KS<sup>38</sup>.

The Koonathara school in Palaghat district is known to be the product of the anti-untouchability crusade of the party. At Koonathara, the children from the lower castes including *Thiyyas* and *Thandans* were not given entry to the Kavalappara School which was owned by the Kavalappara Mooppil Nair. So, their studies were at a school called *Thiyya* School set up at Vatakkekkara but this school imparted education only up to the fourth standard. As the Kavalappara School manager had not admitted them to his school, their higher education remained a great problem. The progressive minded persons had already raised their voices of protest against the denial of entry of the lower caste children in the Kavalappara School. Meanwhile, those who denied education at Kavalappara were temporarily imparted education up to seventh standard under a mango tree at Mangalath Nair Taravadu. But, consequent to the snake bite of a child, it was shifted to the *varanda* of a shed constructed by Valiya Veetil Krishnan Chettiyar where youths like Achyutha Varier and Madhavan Ezhuthachan took classes and arranged their higher studies also<sup>39</sup>.

In 1954 when Malabar Jilla Parishad was established with P.T.Bhaskara Panicker as the leader, education upto the seventh standard was made possible with the effort of Sekhara Varier and Ananthan Nair<sup>40</sup>. The Party's attempt to search for a new space for their education proved fruitful when a building, owned by Nedumpozhi Mana (jointly owned by Thivakaran

---

<sup>37</sup> T.K. Anandhi's report, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Interview with Rasheedali Alangathil, at his residence near Chaliyar on 19-05-2021

<sup>39</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, pp.184-185

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

Namboothiri who was a party leader as well, Vasudhevan Namboohiri and Krishnan Namboothiri), was ceded for conducting classes<sup>41</sup>. It was the party that took up the issue of the higher studies of the lower castes. The school later developed into a higher secondary school.

A strong protest was reported from Mokeri, near Kottayam taluk. As elsewhere in Kerala, admission of *Dalits* to a school at Mokeri was prohibited not only by the elites but by the *Thiyyas*, one of the untouchable castes. With the peasant movement gathering momentum, the issue of school admission was taken up by the Sangham and Communist leaders. Under the Sangham leadership including A.P.Krishnan, seven *Pulaya* children were admitted to the school<sup>42</sup>. Similar incident was reported at Kallyasseri in Kannur where K.P.R.Gopalan played significant role in an agitation for the readmission of a *Pulaya* student to Kalliassery Elementary School<sup>43</sup>.

Varikkassery Mana in Ottappalam was the center of a historic struggle under the Communist party where the protest was launched against the age-old irrational practices which were followed by the *mana* authority even after the independence. The lower caste workers including women, who worked at the *pathayapura* of the *mana* were not permitted to cover upper part of their body. Before entering the *mana*, entry to which was possible through the rear gate, women workers had to remove their jackets and keep them on the gate to be worn again at the time of exit after all their works at *mana*. Similarly, there was a chain tied to the pillars of the main entrance of the *mana* which

---

<sup>41</sup> Interview with K. C. Unnikrishnan at his residence in Koonathara, Palakkad on 29-11-2021

<sup>42</sup> K.N. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p.77

<sup>43</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op.cit.*, p.43

was meant to prevent the entry of lower castes to the *mana* through the main entrance<sup>44</sup>. Thus, the chain stood as the symbol of untouchability.

The party mobilized public opinion against untouchability and launched a protest near the *mana*. As part of it, a public meeting was organized in which M.P.Kunchu Manappadikkal, who was Ottappalam party *taluk* secretary, exhorted the workers to enter the *mana* wearing jackets. He also challenged the authority to prevent the jacket-attired women workers from entering the *mana*. Besides, giving a seven days ultimatum to remove the chain at the main entrance, he even threatened that “if the chain was not removed, it would be broken, if any Communist remained alive”. The authority had no option other than bowing before the organized strength of the people under the red flag. The protests succeeded in opening the main entrance for the lower castes and also in women’s entry wearing jackets.<sup>45</sup>

Social feasts were another form of protest against orthodoxy and they were organized as part of social reform. The inter-dining or of different castes or social feast initiated by Sahodaran Ayyappan and others in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a highly revolutionary activity and it had repercussions throughout Malabar where similar programmes were continued by the Socialist and Communist party leaders. On the sidelines of the conferences of KS and CSP, social feasts were offered in many localities. One such feast was organized by KS members at Perinthatta in Kannur where a procession was taken out to Chittayi in Kanayi against the oppressive measures and excessive taxation of the *janmis*, under the leaders like Vishnu Bharatheeyan, Keraleeyan, A.V.Kunhambu, Shenay and Kanthalottu. It was on this occasion that a social feast was organized at Karuvakkodi Vayal in

---

<sup>44</sup> Interview with K. Bhaskaran, at his residence in Vaniamkulam, Palakkad on 01-12-2021

<sup>45</sup> K.N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*, p.185

Perinthatta which instilled enthusiasm among the people in the region<sup>46</sup>. The programme could bring a large number of people irrespective of caste and religion to the party in Perinthatta and Thavidiyeri areas.

There were also individual efforts taken to organize social feasts. Revolutionary leaders like Moyyarath and others were the front runners in organizing such programmes. In May 1937, as part of the north Malabar District Congress conference, a social feast was organized by Moyyarath Sankaran at Panniyannur. Ayillath Chandroth Chinnu Amma, wife of Moyyarath and one of the volunteers of the feast, have had her food with untouchables. Though the programme was revolutionary in a social sense it invited stiff opposition from the reactionary family members of Moyyarath and the opposition was mainly directed against Chinnu Amma<sup>47</sup>. The incident resulted in both of them getting ostracized by their family. In protest against ostracism, Moyyarath started a fast which mainly targeted at the *karanavar*<sup>48</sup>. The fast which lasted for ten days was finally settled with the interference of K.Kelappan.

Three days long inter-dining held at Arayakkool in Eramam in 1938 was remarkable, which was organized under the Socialists. It was held in a plot, known as *Aalakkavalappu*, owned by one Kozhummal Chattati Krishnan Nambiar, a KS and CSP leader. R.V.Govinda Pothuval, K.C.Krishnan Nambiar, A.V.Kammaran, V.K.Nayanar and N.Koran Nambiar, and A.V.Chindan were leaders. AKG, A.V.Kunhambu, Keraleeyan and Shenayi attended the programme. People from different regions holding red flags and tri-coloured flags of Congress attended it<sup>49</sup>. Puthiya Vayal in Peruvaampa

---

<sup>46</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.180

<sup>47</sup> Moyarath Sankaran, *Autobiography*, Sahithya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2021, p. 223

<sup>48</sup> Kaviyoor Rajagopalan, *MoyyarathSankaran*. p.62

<sup>49</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.378



was another place of inter-dining during 1945-46<sup>50</sup>. Vishnu Baratheeyan, A.V.Kunhambu and Subrahmanya Shenayi attended it<sup>51</sup>.

In a place called Kundyathidathil at Aalapadampu in Payyannur a inter-dining was held in 1942. People not only from Aalapadampu but also from other places attended<sup>52</sup>. At Anthur Panchayat of Thalipparambu Block, Kannur, the role of four women deserves a special mention in the history of the social feast. Karichiriyedathi, C.Pandal, M.K. Narayani, and P. Madhavi who were active in all the peasant struggles in Kannur have taken part not only in inter-dining but also in *harijanodharanam*<sup>53</sup>. The inter dining, launched under red flag provided great means for the eradication of caste and creed disparities. The untouchables and touchables sat and dined together which was a new experience in a highly caste-ridden conservative society.

By 1940, the women of the left movement despite their caste hierarchy were ready to work for the peasants and workers at the bottom of society. They were also at the forefront of the temple entry movement and fought for the eradication of untouchability. Their brave move was inter-caste marriage through which they really questioned the caste hierarchy as well as the women's position in the institutions like marriage and family. Mixed marriage unlike mixed dining created a great change in the attitude of both the *savarna* towards the *avarna* and vice versa. That was seen as a cultural change for both the man and woman and the family that emerged from such a union was considered highly secular. The marriage between A.K.Gopalan who belonged to the upper caste and Susheela Gopalan hailing from a subaltern caste of Ezhava was exemplary in many respects.

---

<sup>50</sup> Interview with K.B. Balakrishnan at his residence in Peruvaampa, Kannur on 29-11-2021

<sup>51</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.378

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p.378

<sup>53</sup> T.K. Anandi's report, *op. cit.*

With the progressive movements gathering momentum, inter-caste marriages in a highly caste-ridden society are conceivable. During the 1930s a Nampoothiri Brahmin girl being wedded to an Ezhava man as well as Nair men marrying Thiyya women were reported. Despite stiff opposition from reactionary families and caste leaders, inter-caste married couples could lead an intrepid life. Though limited in number such acts were highly revolutionary in the social sense and were enough to shake the foundation of the orthodoxy. Kallat Krishnan was a Communist who married Priyadatha who belonged to a progressive Namboothiri family<sup>54</sup>. She is the sister of ICP Nambudiri, who was a worker of the Communist Party and was one of the inmates at the commune in Calicut.

Another revolutionary move was made by P.M.Nani, a teacher and one of the women leaders of KS in Kannur. She was very active in the political sphere by organizing different programmes: as part of the *Deshabhimani* fund collection she staged a skit. Challenging the age-old tradition, she came forward to marry C.H.Narayanan Nambiar, an upper-caste man<sup>55</sup>. In some families, members could not digest the alliance and hence, couples had to face stiff opposition. When one Krishna Kurup in Kurumbranadu married an Ezhava woman, his family could not accept the alliance and therefore he could not stay at his house. When Krishna Kurup was in trouble, the Party leaders came to his rescue and they arranged a house for the newly wedded couples<sup>56</sup>.

The inter-caste marriage on the eve of the social feast at Arayakkool school in Panniyannoor deserves special mention. T.N. Govindan Adiyodi, who was very active during the time of CDM, married Ms.Narayani teacher

---

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, pp.224-225

<sup>56</sup> Interview with V. K. Balan Master at his residence in Panikkotti on 23-12-2021

who belonged to the Thiyya caste under the auspices of V.T.Bhattathirippadu<sup>57</sup>. Initiative for this revolutionary wedding was taken by Moyyarth Sankaran who invited many to the auspicious occasion. Extending wishes to the newly wedded couples, he also made a long speech.<sup>58</sup> This type of initiative, like extending support to inter-caste marriages and settling issues in families emerging out of such marriages, was taken up by the Party cell units themselves.

The significant aspect of the social reform programmes was that they created a space for both lower and upper castes to get mingled with each other. The caste Hindus entered the living spaces of the lower castes and became a part of their lives. As part of their political activities, the upper caste leaders visited the *chettakudils* or hutments of the lower castes and untouchables. When the former initially visited the huts of the latter, they were received with suspicion and even fear. However, as they demonstrated their sincerity, their readiness to eat together and to treat all men as equals, they won for themselves considerable affection among the low-caste people, they sought to mobilize<sup>59</sup>. Visiting the huts of the subalterns and dining with them were revolutionary social changes that served a symbolic and social purpose. To earn the trust of the lower castes in society, Communists were asked to visit the huts of the peasants and ask for water to drink before leaving, to earn their trust<sup>60</sup>. In fact, the communist were consciously breaking those spatial practices that had defined traditional caste hierarchies. Such acts had a profound impact on winning the social and political support of the lower-caste communities. The formations of class organizations like

---

<sup>57</sup> Kaviyoor Rajagopalan, *op. cit.*, p.62

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p.62

<sup>59</sup> For more details see K. Madhavan, *Oru Gandhian Communistinte Ormakal*, Prabhath Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

KS were instrumental in the socialization of the sidelined and underprivileged. It is through these organizations that they happened to come to the mainstream of social and political life.

### **Collapse of Elite Hegemonic Power**

When the left movement became broad based with firm foundation and greater inner strength, the hegemonic power so far exercised by the *janmis* began to get collapsed. The organizational leadership and ideological impetus made the subaltern groups strong enough to face formidable challenges. The powerful backing of the Communist party made them raise their voices of protest against the excesses and wrong doings of their lords. This type of protest was obvious proof of the growing awareness of poor peasants and agricultural workers.

Some of the *janmis* in north Malabar used to invite their interested women, especially those in the tenants' families, to have sex with them. Tenants, who were living at the mercy of the lord, had no other option other than surrendering to the will of the *janmis*<sup>61</sup>. In certain areas of north Malabar, there was an abominable practice of newly wedded girls being offered to the *janmis*<sup>62</sup>. The girls have to appear herself before the *janmi* and stay at their *pathayapuram*<sup>63</sup>. In case the *janmi* got impressed with the girl, the first night of the latter would be with the former<sup>64</sup>. When the protest against irrational

---

<sup>61</sup> Interview with C. Balan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021. It has been understood that certain tenant families were proud of sending their girls to the *Janmis*.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Krishnan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

<sup>63</sup> M.V. Govindan Master, *Karshaka Thozhilali Prasthanam: Charithravum Varthamanavum*. p.45

<sup>64</sup> The couples, be it groom or bride, did not have any opposition in this sexual relation.

traditional practices got strengthened with the growth of CP, *janmis* did not dare to invite women or visit their houses any longer<sup>65</sup>.

There was an incident reported from Kanhiraadu near Thillankery in Kannur which was the expression of such type of protest. At Kanhiraadu, there was a toddy shop where workers of all sorts used to come for drinking toddy. There was an uninhabited shelter near the shop which was called *oliseva* where ladies were brought in nights for the magnates. The *kolkaaran* of the Chembum Keezhidam Adhikari used to come and have toddy at the shop and sometimes he used to visit the nearby *oliseva*. The toddy shop, which was also a space where everything under the sun was discussed, witnessed hot discussion on *oliseva*. Once, as planned earlier, Communists like Karippayi Valiya Kunhiraman and others waylaid and manhandled *kolkaaran* who was proceeding to *oliseva*. *Kolkaran* lodged a complaint with the *thukidi* against Communists that he was manhandled while going to collect tax. When case was registered comrades went absconding and *thukidi* came to the village as part of his enquiry. It was at this time that C.H.Kanaran came to Kanhiraadu village and appeared for the absconding Communists. He presented the arguments of the comrades in English and convinced the *thukkidi* that *kolkaaran* was manhandled for his own fault and not during the tax collection<sup>66</sup>.

In the 1940s, *Amsam Melkaaran* in Pazhassi was notorious for his anti-people activities. He was deputed for fixing the levy at the time of surplus paddy extraction. He exploited peasants at his will and fixed levy for paddy on the basis of the body structure of women. Besides, he made attempts to lure beautiful women coming from tenants' families through his tricks. When the issue was taken to the notice of the Communist party, a sharp protest was

---

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Krishnan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

launched against *Melkaaran* and peasants rallied behind the party. C.Anandhan lodged a complaint against *Melkaaran* with the sub-collector and subsequently, action was taken against him<sup>67</sup>.

Several cases of protests against *janmis* and their men were reported. The incident related to Kannuthalla who belonged to Parali of Palakkad was one among them. She was an active member of the KS. When a death took place in a *janmi's* house, Kannuthalla paid a condolence visit. As per the custom, she brought with her a big ash gourd to be given to the *janmi*. But *janmi* not only refused to accept it but threw it down. She took the pieces of broken ash gourd, and mobilized some women and men peasants along with her. After a march was taken out to Palakkad town where A.K.Gopalan was chairing a meeting, she presented the ash gourd to him. She was with the KS for a long time and mobilized women for various peasant struggles<sup>68</sup>.

It was the organised move of the workers that the cruelties of Kuttippadam Kuttan Menon from Muthalamada in Palakkadu were stopped<sup>69</sup>. Menon was notorious for his atrocities on the workers in his yard who were treated like animals. During the course of a struggle, he, coming on the horse back, beat workers with a *Chattavaar* (cane-like rope). The period 1955-56 witnessed to the struggle under the red flag against Menon which ended in favour of the workers<sup>70</sup>. The struggle also put an end to the cruelties on the workers by Menon.

Parakkunnath Thrivikraman Namboodhiri was a leading landlord in Cheroopa near Kozhikode. He was notorious for committing atrocities on

---

<sup>67</sup> K.Bhaskaran Master, *op. cit.*, p.68

<sup>68</sup> T.K. Anandi, *op. cit.*

<sup>69</sup> M.V. Govindan Master, *op. cit.* p.58

<sup>70</sup> A.K.Gopalan and Imbichi Bava had visited the strikers who were on the warpath for increase in wage. Visit <https://www.manoramaonline.com/district-news/palakkad/2022/05/18/palakkad-ksktu-strikes.html>

tenants and hence, people were very much fed up with him. The incident related to Sankunni Nambeesan and his family gave an opportunity for the party to stop his cruelties on the tenants. In 1953, the family of Sankunni Nambeesan in Peruvayal was evicted by Namboothiri with a court order<sup>71</sup>. The KS came to the rescue of the evicted; a peasant meeting presided by K.Raghavan Nair was held at Peruvayal which decided to extend financial help to the evicted family of Sankunni Nambeesan and the fund collection was started at the meeting itself<sup>72</sup>. Decision was also taken to encounter the cases which were filed against the peasants in Cheruppa and Peruvayal by Thrivikraman Namboodhiri<sup>73</sup>.

The protest against Kutty Krishna Mannadiyar in Pokkunnikalam in north Malabar was another incident in which a nine-year-old boy named Maniyan, son of Sankaran was hung on a wooden trunk after tying his both legs and hands at a coconut processing shed in Vadavannoor<sup>74</sup>. The boy was kept in a room where smoke was emanating from frying red chilly. This cruelty was committed by Mannadiyar as part of his trial related to the theft of a chopping knife<sup>75</sup>. The people who reached the shed after hearing the cries of the boy managed to save his life. The cruelty, as per the version of the locals, was committed as a part of an attempt to fabricate a theft case against a peasant woman who refused to yield to the wishes of the Mannadiyar and the boy was forcibly taken there to make him a witness against the woman. KS held a protest meeting and urged people to isolate him<sup>76</sup>.

---

<sup>71</sup> *Deshabhimani*,14-06-1953

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 16-06-1953

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 25-06-1953

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 10-01-1953

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

A similar protest was reported from Iriya in Beloor village near Kanhangad where peasants were subjected to the cruelties by the *Vazhunnavar* or landlord. His atrocities included eviction of peasants from their living land without any reason and collection of rent without giving a receipt, if a receipt was asked bribe was to be given<sup>77</sup>. Besides, sending *goons* and attacking peasants at the time of weddings and obituaries and forcible extraction of areca nuts, coconuts, and pepper from peasants were common cruelties done by the *vazhunnavar*. Such atrocities made the desperate people organize under the banner of KS. It was at this juncture that a meeting was organised against the lord by KS with PA Nair as president<sup>78</sup>. The organisation of the peasantry under the red flag itself was a strong message to the lord which prevented him from committing atrocities against tenants.

At Thrikarippur in north Malabar a *janmi* used to commit atrocities on the tenants and peasants. Tenants have to submit cock and heifer, along with some other items to the *janmi* during the time of fast in *Ramzan* month. Once a tenant submitted all items except the heifer which can be compensated with 8 rupees. But the *janmi* was not satisfied with the cash and he demanded 27 rupees more which was required to purchase a heifer<sup>79</sup>. But the tenant was not able to pay the additional cash and consequent to this, *janmi* started to harass him; the compound of the tenant's hut was fenced with an intention of prohibiting him from fetching water from nearby well. Following this, leaders like A.V.Kunhambu and V.V.Kunhambu submitted a memorandum to the *janmi* but in vain. Thus, A.V exhorted peasants to boycott the latter by not attending the works at the house and fields of the *janmi*. At last the *janmi* had

---

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 14-01-1953

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Payyannoor Kunjiraman, *A.V.Kunjambu*, pp.80-81



to bow before the organised strength of the peasants by demolishing the fence he made around the hutment of the tenant<sup>80</sup>.

The communists were also in forefront of ensuring justice for the poor from the atrocities of and highhandedness on the part of the government officials too. They raised voices of protest against malpractices and ensured justice for the poor. In Kodaliprom, near Koodali, when the village revenue officer collected a commission exceeding the rent by 25 percent, Vishnu Bharatheeyan drafted a letter of complaint to the *Tahsildar* of Chirakkal *taluk*. In response to this, the Revenue Officer was suspended<sup>81</sup>. Furthermore, individuals could now appeal to the unions outside their own *desam* to arbitrate disputes.<sup>82</sup>

### **Protest against Irrational Practices**

Different types of social practices and customary taxes also ceased to exist with the KS under the tutelage of CPI gathering momentum in the 1940s. In the traditional caste-ridden society in Malabar, the landlords enjoyed unbridled power and privileges. As far as the tenants are concerned, they have to abide by the traditions and customary practices which made their life miserable amidst many distresses. In the villages of Kasaragod taluk, *pattelars* or traditional tax collectors had some privileges; if there was *theyyam* or *thira* performance in any house, the legs of the cock or flanks of a goat should be offered to the *pattelar*. The KS workers decided to put an end to this type of practice. Accordingly, when *theyyam* was performed at the house of Kayattukaran Kottan at Kodakkat Kizhakkekara, he did not offer

---

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* pp.80-81

<sup>81</sup> Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India. Malabar, 1900-1948*, p. 140

<sup>82</sup> K. Vijayan, *Peasant Movements in North Malabar 1948-52: A Case Study of Nelleduppu Samarangal*, p.101

the legs of the cock to the *Pattelar* of Kodakkat<sup>83</sup>. The wicked action on the part of the Kottan provoked *Pattelar* who expressed his anger by kicking the face of the former. The nefarious activities of the *Pattelar* made KS workers give a call for a social boycott and they stopped providing him with services like those of a barber, washerman etc. to his family. At last, the *Pattelar* publically apologized before a large gathering of KS workers<sup>84</sup>.

In Malappuram, the comrades in Pulamanthol launched a movement to put an end to the system of offering *varam*. The *kudiyans* or tenants who were mostly *Dalits*, under Vatakkumkara Namboothirippad used to offer a *varam* apart from several taxes as per the conditions laid down in the contract called *kacheettu* and *kanaadharam*. The *kudiyans* used to offer *varam* once in a month to a temple in their locality and even after independence they had to continue the offering. Though there was stiff opposition on the part of tenants, no one dared to express it publicly. It was at this time that some of the Communists in the locality like Cherukad, K.P.Raman, K.P.Sankarankutty and K.V.Raman conducted door-to-door visits campaigning against *varam* and organised the tenants<sup>85</sup>. Thus, at the time of offering *varam* when tenants had thronged near the temple, the Communists gathered there and Cherukad, at the invitation of Manakkal Anujan Bhattathirippadu, entered the temple in the guise of having *varam* food<sup>86</sup>. But what he did was inviting all the tenants to the temple and serving them delicious *varam* food. The incident created much opposition from the orthodoxy but no one came forward against the violators as the Communist party had gained much strength by this time in the area.

---

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* p.100

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* p.101

<sup>85</sup> Cherukad, *Jeevithappatha*, p.487

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* pp.487-88

Another significant move was against *Vechhu Kaanal* practice in Thillankeri north Malabar. In the post-war period, famine conditions continued unabated in many villages and hence, the peasantry was in distress. Amidst distress, they had to abide by the traditional *Vechhu Kaanal* practice. According to this practice, the tenants living on the lands of the *janmi* had to give gifts to their *janmis* on auspicious days; whether it was carpenters, blacksmiths or potters they had to give their own traditional products of high quality to the *janmi*<sup>87</sup>. At the times of *onam* and *vishu*, or birth and marriage, peasants were required to submit vegetables, milk, curd, etc to the *janmis*. *Karyasthanmar* of *janmis* have sent special letters demanding vegetables on these occasions<sup>88</sup>.

Though discontent was prevailing against the practice, no one came to protest against it, until the issue was taken up by the Communist party unit. A meeting of the party held on 11-04-1948 at Nattuvayana school decided to put an abrupt end to the *Vechhu Kaanal* practice. As per the decision taken at the meeting, the Communists like Nellikka Raman under C.Anandhan gathered at a wayside leading to the house of *janmi* Chembum Keezhidam *adhikari*. The protesters sent back the tenants who were bound to the *adhikari's* house with their products for *Vechhu Kaanal*. This incident was a severe blow to the hegemonic power of the *janmi* who was not only the *Janmi* but also the village *adhikari*. It was with this incident that the practice came to an end in Thillankeri<sup>89</sup>.

Another traditional tax to be given to the *janmi* was *Sheela kashu* which was prevalent in some parts of north Malabar like Kayyur. It was

---

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Atthika Krishnan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

<sup>88</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *K.A.Keraleeyan*, p.38

<sup>89</sup> K. Bhaskaran Master, *op. cit.* pp.68-69. Interview with K.Gopalan Nambiar, at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

customary on the part of the tenants and dependents to give money to *janmi* whenever the former draw a matter to the attention of the latter whether it be a complaint, grievance or issue. It was after the peasants started to get organized under the Communist party that protests surfaced against this customary practice. The Party directed peasants to stop paying *Sheela kashu* and thus, the protests got strengthened. Meanwhile, the humiliated *janmis* started retaliation with the help of the police. In one instance, Aramana Kunhabu Nair, KayyalathValappil Koranand Thondiyl Kottan were charged with a case by the *karyasthan* of *janmi* Edathottu Cherippadi Raman Nair. The guilt they committed was that they refused to pay *Sheelakashu*<sup>90</sup>. With the Party strongly standing with the peasants the *janmis* gradually withdrew from the practice.

It was the intervention of the Party that was instrumental in putting an end to the barbarian system of selling Dalits as slaves at a temple called Valliyoorkkavu in Wayanad<sup>91</sup>. In a particular season every year, *Dalit* slaves were sold in the temple, with the goddess as a “witness”. For an instance, Vadakkeveetil Kanaran, who was a *janmi*, bought two *Dalits* namely Chakkan and Pokkan, for 10 years from Thekkeveetil Kumaran. Chakkan and Pokkan were just commodities. This was a traditional practice that Dalits being sold as commodities<sup>92</sup>. The KS workers took strong stand against it and succeeded in making awareness among the *dalits* of the inhuman practice. Thus, the system gradually ceased to exist.

---

<sup>90</sup> M.P. Narayanan Nambiar, *Kayyur Samarathinte Kaanaapuram* in *Kayyur Raktha Sakshi Smaranika*, p.67

<sup>91</sup> R. Ramakumar, *Aspects of the Peasant Movement in Malabar, An Interview with E. K. Nayanar*, 04-06-2003. Visit <http://ras.org.in> >

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Unnikrishna Varier, at his residence in Valliyoorkavu, Wayanad, 27-12-2022. He says that *dalits* were not being sold as commodities but they were taken to the houses of the affluent on the basis of a contract because of extreme poverty at home.

It was with the intervention of the Communists that the practice of people carrying the police men came to an end. At Mudappalloor in Aalathur, people used to help the police by shouldering to cross the river so that their boots did not get wet. As part of a struggle against Kizhakke Muriyil Appu, one of the leading *janmis* at Aalathur in Palakkadu, E.Kannan, a Communist dared to question the practice. It constrained the police from withdrawing the practice and with that the practice came to an end. The struggle awarded Vandaazhi a nickname *Moscow muk*<sup>93</sup>.

### **Communists in Social Life**

Party supremo Krishna Pillai always reminded the Communists of their duties. They were asked to place public interest above the personal interest. The social service activities carried out by the Party workers included the construction of houses, roads and canals apart from taking care of the indigent. Already in 1935, ABYS which was formed under the initiative of A.V.Kunhambu, had started constructive works like repairing roads and cleaning wells, canals, and houses of the poor. As the Communists have close contact with everyone in their localities they could easily identify the needs and necessities of the people. It was while working among them during the time of pandemic that they came forward to repair the houses of the poor. During the same period they also felt the necessity to construct and repair roads which was necessary for taking the patients and bed-ridden to hospitals at the time of emergency.

The Communists are credited with the construction of many roads across Malabar. At Mukkam in Kozhikode a road committee was formed for the construction of Mambaram-Mukkam road and the service rendered by the Communists to its construction is remarkable. On 28-01-1955 under the

---

<sup>93</sup> M.V. Govindan Master, *op. cit.*, pp.56-57

Communist party unit, a batch of 50 comrades coming in procession by holding red flags rendered their services for the road construction<sup>94</sup>. Similarly on 06-02-55 a group of workers, attached with Thiruvambadi estate and residences of Thongammal under the leadership of Krishnan Nair and Imbichi Kuttan, reached by a procession with red flags and got engaged in road construction works<sup>95</sup>. Besides that, a good number of Communists also got engaged in the road work for many days. Likewise, the estate workers in Mukkam, who were organised under the red flag, together with the Communists laid out a new road stretching from P.C.Road to Mambatta<sup>96</sup>.

As part of the Eruvasseri *vayanasala* construction at Eruvasseri Poopparambu a motorable road, parallel to the old road in front of the *vayanasala*, was constructed under the supervision of Kisan Sangh.<sup>97</sup> The works rendered by the native peasants and workers during the time of both *vayanasala* and road construction are of much appreciable. In 1946, at Thiruvambady, KS workers and other progressive minded men, in their joint effort, successfully laid out a road between Manassery and Chendamangaloor<sup>98</sup>. This road was very much beneficial for Kodyathur natives as it helped them reach at Manassery through Theyyathum Kadavu and Chendamangaloor.

The attempt to widen a road in Aroor, a suburban area of Vatakara, leading to Kakkattil was an arduous job for the authorities as the land owners were obstinate in ceding their lands. It was the intervention of the Communists like Kunhikrishnan Nambiar, K.V.Narayanan Vaidyar and others

---

<sup>94</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 02-02-1955

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* 22-02-1955

<sup>96</sup> *Kanalppaadukal Oru Desathinte Innalekal*, Souvenir, CPIM Thiruvambady Area Committee, p.96

<sup>97</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 24-01-1953

<sup>98</sup> *Kanalppaadukal Oru Desathinte Innalekal*, *op. cit.*, p.96

that resulted in the acquisition of required land for road. K.V.Narayanan Vaidyar sold his own land for meeting the expenses of the road construction. The road from Aroor to Kakkattil got materialised as a result of the effective intervention of such people<sup>99</sup>. The roads which connect Onchiyam with neighbouring areas including Vallikadu were constructed by the red volunteers. The volunteers were provided meal during the time of construction. Many came forward to help the volunteers serving food and water. One Cheeru of Kaarakunnumal was very active during the time of the construction of roads. Similarly, the role of M.R.Narayana Kurup in road layout programmes deserves special mention<sup>100</sup>.

For the Kakkad-Puluppi road construction, a committee was formed to lay out the road from Kottoli, Athazhakunnu, Panankavu, Kannadiparambu and Kolacheri to Kannur town<sup>101</sup>. Local unions and organisations have helped in their level capacity to make such a road reality. On behalf of the Chirakkal Taluk Tobacco Workers Union of Kakkad Division, an amount of Rs. 40 was collected from the *beedi* workers and it was donated to the road committee<sup>102</sup>.

The Communists took lead in hut making for the poor and also in renovating their hutments. The hutments of the poor were to be repaired every year before the commencement of monsoon. They, at their own initiatives, built houses and got engaged in the renovation works together with family members of the houses under repair<sup>103</sup>. The house construction of the Kunhambu-Devayani couple at Karivellur by the Party workers is remarkable in many respects. Besides, Karivellur *Dhuritha Nivarana* Committee in

---

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Raghava Kurup at his residence in Thiruvallur, Vatakara, 26-03-2021.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with T.K. Kumaran, at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

<sup>101</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 22-02-1955

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Interview with T.K.Kumaran, at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

association with KS constructed a new house for a destitute Muslim family by making collection from the villagers<sup>104</sup>. Similarly, at Cheruthazhathu a burnt house was reconstructed by the local Sangham activists<sup>105</sup>.

When a house of Peradichery Kuduppa at Vayakkara in Pulingom was caught fire and completely destroyed, the KS workers took the initiative in building a new house for him. The plot for house building was donated by Kappadan Krishnan Nambiar<sup>106</sup>. The workers managed to collect fifty rupees, apart from paddy and a lot of clothes during the time of fund raising. At Cheriya Moola in Karivelloor a house was totally burnt down on 22-05-1953 and next day itself a distress relief committee was formed under the leadership of *Kisan* leaders like K. Narayanan Nair and K Kunhambu<sup>107</sup>. The committee managed to build a house for the family with donations in cash and also in kind including coconut leaves, bamboo, rice etc. received from the locals<sup>108</sup>.

A commendable work was the house construction of Sankunni Nambeesan who was evicted by *janmi* Parakkunnath Thrivikraman Namboothiri with the help of a court order. The *Kisan Sangh*, organising a batch of volunteers, made a house for Nambeesan within a single day<sup>109</sup>. At a meeting of the peasants presided over by V.T. Achuthan Nair on 23-06-1953 at Cherooppa T.C.Narayanan Nambiar, MLA conveyed greetings to the *Kisan Sangh* activists for such an endeavour<sup>110</sup>. At Kanchiyam, when the request of Lakshmi Amma, a widow and mother of seven children, for constructing roof

---

<sup>104</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 10-06-1945

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 28-01-1953

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 02-06-1953

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-06-1953

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-06-1953



of her house was turned down by the *janmi*, KS workers came to her rescue by making roof using coconut leaves and by doing other required works<sup>111</sup>

The rehabilitation of Nambithode Madhavi Amma in Vatakara was a remarkable service rendered by the KS workers. In the war period, Paithothu Nambithothu Madhaviyamma from Perambra was subjected to eviction from her house. Her house was demolished and utensils were thrown away by a landlord Vikraman Kandy Kunhirama Kurup<sup>112</sup>. This wicked act on the part of the landlord invited wrath from the KS activists. Leaders like M.K.Kelu and some workers came to the spot and without minding the intimidation from *janmi*, they managed to make a hut and thus, Madhavi got accommodated in it<sup>113</sup>. The workers also gave protection to the hut for days and ensured her safety.

At Onchiyam a house was constructed by the Communists for one Kunjekkan. As part of the endeavour, a committee was formed with Mancha Parampath Kannan as convener and collected money for the house construction<sup>114</sup>. Coconut leaves required for the construction were collected from the houses of landlords in the locality. While some voluntarily donated leaves, some did drive away the volunteers while collecting them. At Maniyoor in Vatakara Communists used to make roofs of hutments of the poor. The dilapidated roofs need to be demolished and rebuilt before the onset of the monsoon every year. The roofing works were sponsored by party workers taking into consideration of the financial constraints of the families.

---

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-02-1955

<sup>112</sup> P.P. Shaju, *op.cit.*, p.100

<sup>113</sup> M.Kuttikrishnan, *Ennum Adbudhamaya Rashtreeya Saradhi* in P.K. Sujith, *Samara Mukhangalil Priyasakhakkal*, pp.86-87

<sup>114</sup> Interview with T.K.Kumaran, at his residence in Onchiyam on 09-02-2021

After the roofing works got over volunteers were served with a feast by the owners of the house<sup>115</sup>.

It is to be noted that the presence of Communists in the social life could be traced in many occasions. They took lead in finding solutions to many types of issues as mediators. Property and eviction related disputes, issues in families including those of divorces and money related disputes etc. were sometimes taken to the Party for settlement unless such issues were settled amicably by the persons or families concerned. It has been reported that people irrespective of their caste, religion and political affiliation had approached party leaders with their grievances. A large number of disputes were settled through the arbitration of party units, KS or workers' unions. Communist *vayanasalas* also played significant role as mediator in settling different sorts of issues; SJM Vayanasala in Kandakkai was one of the prominent among them<sup>116</sup>.

The dominant issues which were taken to the settlement with the Communists were related to agriculture. Boundary issues, irrigation and harvest related disputes, family problems, eviction etc. were common in agrarian societies. With the peasant movement started gathering strength in the villages, such issues were taken to the KS units. The case of Ambukutty at Kolacheri was settled as a result of the interference made by the KS. The crop of Ambukutty was wrested by his *janmi* without paying him any compensation. After listening to the concern of the former, Vishnu Bharatheeyan interfered in the issue. He directed Ambukutty to file a civil suit which resulted in the payment of the compensation to the plaintiff by the

---

<sup>115</sup> Interview with V.K.Balan Master, at his residence in Panikkotti on 23-12-2021

<sup>116</sup> K.C. Govindan, *Kandakkai Thirinju Nokkumpol in Sakhavu Krishna Pillai Smaraka Vayanasala-Kandakkai*, Silver Jubilee Smaranika, p.38

*janmi*<sup>117</sup>. Similarly, when the land of one Ananthan Nambiar was encroached on by his *janmi*, the KS resisted the illegal encroachment<sup>118</sup>.

In Chirakkal taluk the Sangham came to the rescue of one Kidaran Chandu and some of its workers in the area. Manippuzha *janmi* of Alakkat in the taluk lodged a petition against Chandu and KS volunteers at the Thaliparamba magistrate court in connection with the eviction of the latter. Consequent to this, A.V. Kunhambu and his ABYS volunteers marched to the spot and occupied the land. Though the police had to be called to evict the protesters, final verdict came in favour of Chandu. This indicated that the KS was always ready to extend moral as well as economic support to its members when they were facing trouble<sup>119</sup>.

In Kodakkat Kizhakkekara, a case of assault was reported in which Aalakkadan Kannan manhandled Kandathil Kannan, a KS member. The latter lodged a complaint with KS of Kodakkat village against the former. The issue was investigated and KS imposed punishment upon Alakkadan Kannan. Accordingly, Alakkadan was directed to feed the children of 3 elementary schools in the Kodakkat village with five *idangazhi* rice<sup>120</sup>. In another incident, the house of Mr. Puthiyadavan Ambu of Kannakai was set ablaze by one Paleri Kannan Panikkar. The KS imposed a punishment that Kannan Panikkar should provide porridge feast in the KS meeting to be held at Vellachal in Kodakkat by using twenty-five *idangazhi* rice. In both of the

---

<sup>117</sup> Dilip M.Menon, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>118</sup> For more details see Vishnu Bharatheeyan's *Adimakalengine Udamakalayi*, Kanav Books, Kannur, 1980.

<sup>119</sup> E. Balakrishnan, *A History of Communist Movement in Kerala*, p.195.

<sup>120</sup> K.Vijayan, *op.cit.*, p.100

incidents, KS could deliver justice and the wrongdoers accepted the punishments<sup>121</sup>.

In another instance, the crops of the Kada Kannan, an indigent peasant, were forcibly harvested by Koran Panicker. The meeting of peasants which was convened against the backdrop of the incident decided to take back the harvested crops from him. Thottoon Veetil Krishnan, in his speech, stressed the need to take back the crop. The struggle was marked by the large participation of the peasants. V.V.Mani and V.V.Unnamma were the female participants in the struggle<sup>122</sup>. In yet another incident in 1953, one Kollan Athiyadathu Kannan lodged a complaint with KS unit in Kannur against Athiyadath Appa for getting back his land as well as the pepper wrested by the latter. The KS, on the part of the complainant, measured the landed property and got the property registered in the name of Kannan and also made Appa agree to give back the pepper which he illegally collected from the land of the complainant<sup>123</sup>.

At Karimbummal near Panamaram in Wayanad the property issue between Krishna Gowdar and his siblings got settled with the interference of the party. Krishna Gowdar was a man who denied the share of ancestral property to his brother. He had also some problems with P.D.Chandra Prabha, son-in-law of the former. When Gowdar arbitrarily launched a tractor in the field owned by P.D.Chandra Prabha, the Communists interfered on the side of the latter. K.V.Govinda Variar from Panamaram, Peeli Chettan, Kanaran Mesthri, Dr.Jerom, M.K.Nanu Nambiar from Kaniyampatta, Vasu Vaidhyar, Sebastian alias Asari Velukutty, Kanaran Nair from Karani were the persons

---

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* p.100

<sup>122</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op.cit.*, p.227

<sup>123</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 20-01-1953

who got engaged to solve this issue. It was after this incident that communist groups were started to emerge in and around Panamaram<sup>124</sup>.

Once Machingal Muhammad, a magnate at Thariyottu in Wayanad, abused and intimidated a man belonging to *Kurichya* community with a gun<sup>125</sup>. At this time, K.Govindhan who was present on the occasion interfered in the issue with the help of one Alapurathu Sreedharan Master. Organizing *Kurichyas*, they took out a procession and held a public meeting and a *satyagraha*. These developments made the magnate apologize in public. It was after this incident that a party cell was formed in the Thariyottu locality<sup>126</sup>. Similarly, Kunhiraman Mesthri and K.M.George from Thavinjal and T.Raghavan and A.M.Krishnan from Mananthavadi were influential leaders of the party who solved many agrarian problems<sup>127</sup>.

It was in May 1952 that the Kisan Sangh unit was formed at Kayanna near Perambra. Within a period of one and half month after the formation, nearly 10 cases related to divorce, money, eviction etc. were taken to be settled with the Kisan Sangh<sup>128</sup>. The Kisan Sangh unit was able to solve seven out of ten issues which came before them, including the one between a *Harijan* named Kappa and his wife<sup>129</sup>. These settlements were made possible with the interventions of Sangham leaders like C.P.Kunhiraman Nair and T.K.Kunhiraman, president and secretary of the Sangham respectively and one A.P.Gopalan Nair<sup>130</sup>.

---

<sup>124</sup> E. K. Nayanar, *Communist Prasthanam Vayanattil* in CPIM Wayanad District Conference Souvenir 2011, p.p.20-21

<sup>125</sup> *Kurichya* is one of the tribal groups in Malabar.

<sup>126</sup> E. K. Nayanar, *op.cit.*, p.21

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 08-08-1952

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> T.P. Ramakrishnan, *Kozhikode Jilla Communist Party Charitram* , p.39

At Naripatta an arbitration meeting held on 03-08-1952 under Kisan Sangh with M. K.Kelu as president, managed to solve a money related issue between Uchhamkandi Kunhikanaran and Nambapoyil Pathu. Likewise, a money-related cheating case had been filed at District Munsiff court in Thaliparambu by Chemrottu Puthan Purayil Othenan against Chembonchery Abu and his wife. This case got settled outside the court with the mediation of *Kisan Sangh*<sup>131</sup>. At Chooliyad the intervention of *Kisan Sangh* resulted in reaching a compromise between two families. The combined arbitration talk convened by Kattavu local *Kisan Sangh* units which represented the two families concerned, could solve their property related issue<sup>132</sup>. Similarly, the effective interference of the KS unit succeeded in resolving a shop rent issue between Adiyaru Veetil Kunhamu and Kakkuzhikkal Ummar Kutty and his brother Soopy<sup>133</sup>.

At Elankoor in Malappuram, a case was settled with the intervention of *Kisan Sangh*. The issue between Kolleri Narayanan Nair, a peasant and Vaisravanatthu Namboothiri, a *janmi* at Elankoor was that the latter confiscated the crops of the former in the name of realising rent arrear. It was in the presence of the *taluk Kisan Sangh* secretary that a compromise was signed between the respective parties<sup>134</sup>.

The intervention of the party in getting back *Cherumakkals* their households in Thenkara was remarkable. At Cherumkulathu colony in Thenkara village in Mannarkkad, residents were evicted by the *janmi* and many trees including the sprouted ones on their lands were also chopped

---

<sup>131</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 20-01-1953

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 20-01-1953

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* 22-02-1955

down<sup>135</sup>. The matter was taken to the notice of the Payaniyedam local *Kisan Sangh* which took up the issue and held a talk with the landlord. Consequently, the holdings were given back to the Cherumakkals and an amount equal to that of chopped trees was also paid by the *janmi*<sup>136</sup>.

At Karivelloor, the office bearers of Chirakkal *kovilakam* made an illegal attempt to extract 2/10 of the rent from the *kovilakam* tenants. On hearing this, the workers of KS along with tenants met the Chirakkal *Thamburan* and convinced him that according to the law, the tenants had no obligation to pay 2/10 of the rent to the landlord and also that, the landlord had no right to extract such an amount of rent from the tenants<sup>137</sup>. Likewise, a remarkable role was played by the *Kisan Sangh* unit at Azhinjilam where a small canal way which was the sole source of water to a paddy field, was blocked by a landlord Raghavan Nair. The peasants approached the *Kisan Sangh* with their complaint and subsequently, the representatives of the *Sangh* met the landlord and found a solution to the problem<sup>138</sup>.

At Cheruvathur, one Puthiya Maliyekkal Ayammad, a landlord, was in the practice of not giving a receipt for rent to tenants. In February 1955, he made an attempt to forcefully harvest the crops of Kadangott Veettil Ambu<sup>139</sup>. This attempt was foiled by a group of people under *Kisan Sangh*. When the *Sangh* volunteers came to know that the landlord and his men were proceeding to harvest the crop, the volunteers guarded the ripened crops and thus foiled the attempt. They also extended all possible assistance to Ambu for harvesting his own crop<sup>140</sup>. At Panathadi the issue of extracting rent

---

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 04-06-1953

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* 17-12-1955

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* 07-04-1953

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* 22-02-1955

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

between peasants and Neeleswaram Valiya Raja, the leading landlord, was settled at a meeting chaired by the south Karnataka district collector. The *Kisan Sangh* representatives who participated in the meeting reached an agreement with the landlord and the amount of rent was fixed<sup>141</sup>.

A dispute which emerged between Kunnimal Krishnan Nair, and Poyil Kanna Kurup at Kunnathara in Attholi came to a solution with the intervention of KS. The dispute was related to the ruin of the cultivation of the former by the water falling from the trees belonging to the land of the latter. Krishnan Nair approached Kunnathara *Kisan Sangh* with a petition. In pursuance of the petition, the *Sangh* held a parley with the farmer concerned and an amicable solution was reached and the issue got resolved<sup>142</sup>. Another issue was at Valiyakunnu village where Puthusseri Kunnath Kunhan Nair lodged a complaint to *Kisan Sangh* that Kaladi Padinharedathu Manakkal Krishnan Namboodhiri and Vasudevan Namboodiri were not permitting him to water a plantain tree which he planted<sup>143</sup>. It was following *Kisan Sangh's* interference that the plaintiff was permitted to do his work.

At Naduvattam near Kozhikode city, a Muslim family was prevented from repairing the roof of their hut for not remitting *Karayma* to the landlord. The family was reported to have been living in the hut drenched in rain for days. When the matter came to the notice of the Communist party, the workers collected an amount equal to one-year *karayma* from the local people and paid the landlord<sup>144</sup>. It was after the issue got settled that the hut roof got repaired with the consent of the landlord.

---

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* 26-02-1955

<sup>142</sup> T.P.Ramakrishnan, *op.cit.*, p.39

<sup>143</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 07-04-1953

<sup>144</sup> T.P. Ramakrishnan, *op.cit.*, p.38



When two workers were entrenched from Kariyil tobacco factory in Kannur, Chirakkal Taluk Tobacco Workers Union came in support of the entrenched workers. As it could not reach at a settlement with the management, the Party took up the issue. It was after the intervention of K.P.Gopalan , M.L.A that the workers were taken back<sup>145</sup>.

Notably, the party leaders showed courage and boldness to deliver justice to the victims irrespective of the social status or party affiliation of the offender. Even if the Party men or sympathizers were found guilty, justice was, indeed, delivered in favour of the victims. Never had they made any effort to protect or defend party workers who were involved in wrong doings. The Party stand to protect a Muslim family in Puthuppally from an eviction attempt made by P.Kesava Dev, renowned litterateur and Party activist, was one of the instances<sup>146</sup>. Similarly, Putthan Punatthil family at Valayam near Nadapuram was a leading landlord family in the area and was a distant relative of C.H.Kanaran. The family had extended full support to C.H.Kanaran during the times of elections. While there was a friendly relationship between them, the peasants and tenants in the area were on a war path against the exploitation and suppression of the *janmi* family. When the issue of Vengarottu Chathan, a tenant was taken to the notice of the Party C.H.Kanaran held talks with the family. Consequent to the failure of the conciliatory talk, KS, as per the direction of Kanaran himself, launched a struggle under the leadership of Alakkal Kunhikannan<sup>147</sup>.

---

<sup>145</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 21-06-1953

<sup>146</sup> It was after this incident that Dev wrote a short story entitled “*Kollaruthaniya Kollaruthu*” against the Party. See P.K. Gopan(ed.) *N. Sreedharan: Oru Ormappusthakam*, p.56.

<sup>147</sup> P.Mohanan Master, *Comrade C.H.Narayanan and Nadapuram* in *C.Hnte Lokam*, Souvenir, p.77

The Communists are credited with services rendered to people through PCCs (Producer-cum-Consumer Cooperative societies). During the time of famine and poverty in the 1940s party took lead in organising PCCs at local levels<sup>148</sup>. They were formed to collect access paddy from the farmers and distribute it to the people through PCCs. When the Prakasham ministry of Madras approved the scheme of extracting surplus paddy at a fixed price and distributing food commodities through PCCs, Communist party was active in organising them in villages<sup>149</sup>. In many places in Malabar PCCs could not function effectively for want of proper supplies as the ration system was largely controlled by a nexus of landlords and black marketeers in connivance with officials. The food committees in Malabar itself were constituted by the officials like *Tahsildar* and not selected by the public<sup>150</sup>. As the food committees were in the hands of the nexus between the officials and black marketeers the irregularities in the distribution of rice remained hidden.

KS gave a call to the peasants to get the access rice, after having taken required amount of paddy for family ration and kept as seeds, measured at the co-operative stores in order to avoid black market and price hike<sup>151</sup>. Communists and KS workers came forward to prevent black marketing of essentials and to seize paddy-laden vehicles which were intended for black market. In many parts of northern Malabar the KS workers resisted the attempt of shifting the paddy by landlords in connivance with the police. The peasants in the villages of Kankol, Korom and Vellur in Kannur seized and measured paddy, which was carried without permit to be black marketed, at

---

<sup>148</sup> These were formed during the time of food scarcity in Malabar to ensure proper allocation of food and other essentials to the people.

<sup>149</sup> *Karivellorinte Innalekal, Pradheshika Charithram*, 2010. p.46

<sup>150</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 01-05-1947

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-03-1947

co-operative societies and consequently they were arrested and three of them at Kankol were sentenced to 10 months imprisonment<sup>152</sup>.

Paddy seizures were reported from other places also. A case was registered at Thalassery special first class magistrate court against seven communist activists including Chovvanganadan Kunhiraman hailing from Kandoth for seizing paddy which was kept to be black marketed by one Mr.Srank Koran<sup>153</sup>. The peasants at Paccheni resisted an effort of the landlord, Appukutty Nair, to transport paddy which he sold in the black-market, with the escort of MSP<sup>154</sup>. At Malappattam, peasants seized paddy which was being shifted without permit by landlord Illikkalathu Abubekkar and measured and sold it at the Irikkoor Cooperative Society paying the sale proceeds to the landlord<sup>155</sup>.

*Aikya Nanaya Sanghams* or community-based thrift societies run on cooperative lines was a landmark in the growth of the Communist party. Party workers were actively engaged in organising *Sanghams* in their respective localities. It was under the provision of Co-operative rules of 1932, KS took initiative to start peoples banking known as *Aikya Nanaya Sangham* to give loan to the peasant at a nominal interest. Later they were converted as important co-operative societies and banks in the respective areas. In addition to giving loan, the Sangham opened ration shops for supplying kerosene and *korathuni* (cotton cloth) in addition to the rice. Thus it provided some relief to the toiling peasantry. The Party mobilised all sections of the population to become members of the *Aikya Nanaya Sanghams* by taking shares. It was also very active in the effort to convert

---

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-05-1947

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> E.K. Nayanar, *My Struggles, An Autobiography*, p.69

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69

PCCs into *Nanaya Sanghams*. The assistances extended by *Nanaya Sanghams* in the form of loans benefitted the indigent in many ways to redress their grievances and thus, it infused confidence among them to stand on their own and lead a decent life.

Significant works done by the Communists were during the time when they led the Malabar District Board.<sup>156</sup> The new executive led by P.T Bhaskara Panicker and K.V.Moosan Kutty as President and vice President respectively took a number of pro-poor measures. It was this board that declared May Day as holiday in Malabar which was the first ever declaration in any Indian district<sup>157</sup>. During this time many schools, of which recognition had been withdrawn for the role of teachers in these schools in Communist activities, were reopened. The case of Ayyallur L.P.School was just one among them<sup>158</sup>. Establishment of new schools opened up a new era in the history of education of untouchables in Malabar. It was the Board which took measures to establish school at Koonathara in Palakkad. The education of the students belonging to untouchable castes upto the seventh standard was made possible with the school.<sup>159</sup> Besides, the Party managed to introduce a number of grievance redressal, outreach programmes and welfare schemes through the Board.

It is an undisputable fact that the majority of the Communists learnt the basic lessons of social reform through their association with the progressive minds in the Congress. Later, they were leading the movement themselves against illogical and irrational customs and practices. Giving a final blow to

---

<sup>156</sup> In the Malabar District Board election Communist Party and the independents who got party support managed to win 24 seats out of 48 and thus assumed power for the first time.

<sup>157</sup> T.P. Ramakrishnan, *op.cit.*, p.206

<sup>158</sup> *Pazhassi-Thiillakeri-Payam Smaranika*, p.42

<sup>159</sup> K.N.Ganesh, *op.cit.*, pp.184-185

the traditional caste-ridden society and orthodoxy, communists created a space in which equality flourished. Lower and upper castes mingled together and their differences began to fade. The Communists brought the hitherto sidelined people to the mainstream of society through a number of programmes. Upholding Communist values in personal and public lives and getting engaged in the everyday life of the people communists became part and parcel of the lives of the grass root level people. The amicable settlement to a large number of family and property issues by the interventions of the Party leaders was enough to create an impression among the people that only the Communists could deliver justice to the poor. In each village, the number of individuals and families, who were benefitted by the Party intervention, getting attracted to the communist party increased and multiplied over the course of time which placed party in comfortable position by 1957.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Ideological Transformation through Public Sphere**

It can be seen in previous chapters that the distress relief works and the intervention of the communists in the everyday life of the people broadened the base of the party in Malabar. It would not have been possible unless there was a public sphere or representational spaces. The importance of the new social spaces in the middle of the twentieth-century in creating political consciousness in Kerala is undeniable. Social spaces played an important role in taking communism to the masses and also in shaping a progressive public consciousness. This chapter discusses the role of informal spaces like reading rooms, teashops, work places etc. in shaping public opinion and also the assembly election in 1957.

The public sphere, in the words of Habermas, is seen as a domain of social life where public opinion can be formed. He declares several aspects as vital for the public sphere. Mainly it is open to all citizens and constituted in every conversation in which individuals come together to form a public. The citizen plays the role of a private person who is not acting on behalf of a business or private interests but as one who is dealing with matters of general interest in order to form a public sphere. There is no intimidating force behind the public sphere but its citizens assemble and unite freely to express their opinions.

In spite of the unorganised appearance, the Malayali villages in the mid-twentieth century have quite elaborate social structures. Each will have at least one school and a public library; it will have a public health service, trade union branches, and political party groups, places of worship (often a temple, a church, and a mosque) and always a few tea shops which serve as

gathering-places for the various communities<sup>1</sup>. The various institutions which represent the village's corporate life are usually so scattered that only the small knot of stores and teashops, with a trampled field as a market place for fish merchants and potters, serves as the centre around which the settlement unobtrusively clusters<sup>2</sup>.

Communists were quick to realize the importance of representational spaces (lived spaces) – both private and public – in communicating communism to the masses. Unlike institutional spaces that are maintained and worked under rigid party guidelines, informal spaces enjoyed an autonomy that allowed them to create a broader network of people cutting across party differences. The main forms of Communist propaganda and agitation are: personal discussions, participation in struggles by the trade-union and political workers' movement, and the impact of the party's press and literature. Oral, person-to-person propaganda were carried out above all through systematically organized door-to-door campaigns by working groups established with that purpose. Special care was taken to ensure that no dwelling in the reach of local party units was omitted. Every member, without making any negligence, took part regularly in this activity in one way or another. E.M.S. Namboothirippad notes that despite having been introduced to socialism through books while younger, it was only when he started to interact with people from diverse backgrounds that a sense of public responsibility was instilled in him.

The literate high class members who were already attracted to Marxism saw engagements with the peasant and labourers- most of whom belonged to the lower class- as being important to win their trust. For this,

---

<sup>1</sup> George Woodcock, *Kerala a Portrait of the Malabar Coast*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1967, p.45

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

they were asked consciously to break those spatial practices that had defined traditional caste hierarchies<sup>3</sup>. The high caste members visited the houses of the untouchables and before leaving the houses they never forgot to drink water from their houses and some even had food with them. All the opportunities they got to pay visit of their houses were effectively used and succeeded in creating good rapport with them. At a time when KS conference was organized, party members got engaged in works like *pidiyari shekaranam* (collection of handful of rice). As part of the *pidiyari shekaranam*, Paakkathillathu Vasudhevan Namboothiri along with Cheerngottu Illathu Narayanan Namboothiri, N.K.Naru Unnithiri and others visited the houses of untouchables in Kannur<sup>4</sup>. Such conscious and conspicuous efforts on the part of the elite party workers had profound impact on the subaltern: it injected self confidence among the latter and eventually helped win the social and political support of them.

Communist youths and women's organizations awakened the interest of many proletarians, who were uninterested in politics, in the activity of collective organizations, through their classes, reading groups, special trips, festivals, Sunday excursions, and so on. In this way, they could ensure their participation in the organization and in useful party works like distributing leaflets, newspapers, pamphlets, etc. It was realized that ensuring the active participation of the people in the common movement was the best way to free them from petty-bourgeois inclinations. Kunjakkama from Kandakkai who was in absconding after Kandakkai incident in 1947, had to stay at the houses of some party workers and during these days, she made use of these stays to organize women in those areas. Her caliber and the ability to influence other

---

<sup>3</sup> K. Madhavan, *A Village Comes to life: The Story of Madikkai* in S. Harikrishnan's *Communicating Communism Social Spaces and the Creation of a Progressive Public Sphere in Kerala*.

<sup>4</sup> P. Jayarajan, *Kannur Jilla Communist Party Charitram*, Part 2. p.224



women resulted in a collective action of the peasant women. With her backing women came forward to do harvest even when MSP came with big guns to shoot at them<sup>5</sup>.

The gathering of the youths at nooks and corners of streets and towns was seen as a potent factor to proselytize them. In the evenings people used to throng at streets after their works and talk on divergent issues. It was the discussions and activities at *Angadi Mukku* or *Viplava Mukku* as called by critics in Koyilandy that brought many a number of youths to the Party. There was a popular *beedi* shop in *Angadimukku* which, in the 1950s, served as a public sphere. The shop was owned by M.C.Ibrahim and many communists used to come there<sup>6</sup>. U.A Khadher was one of the youths who regularly came and spent time with them<sup>7</sup>. The talks and activities of the Communists were instrumental in wooing many youths to the party.

The Communists were rapid in utilizing the space emerged out of the rehabilitation zones where people shifted accommodation temporarily on account of the spread of epidemics. In north Malabar, during the times of small pox in the 1940s and 1950s people used to vacate their houses in order to avoid contact with the infected at homes. The family members, after vacating their houses, went to agrarian fields and erected a temporary makeshift and stayed there till the infected patients get recuperated. There were many such makeshifts of different families in the locality during these times.

The people were staying there with a lot of mental pain as they left their dearest to the fate of the god. Party activists used to pay visits such

---

<sup>5</sup> T.K. Anandhi, pp.179-182. Visit <http://www.cds.ac.in> › krpcds › report › anandi

<sup>6</sup> A.Suresh, *Puthuvazhivetti Munneriya Koyilandiyude Charithrakhyanam* in *Halla Bol* souvenir, p.127.

<sup>7</sup> U.A. Khader was one of the famous litterateur in Kerala and recipient of Kerala Sahitya Academy award

makeshifts to console the families in distress. Different types of programmes were organized as part of entertaining the families. Cultural programmes including skits were usually staged and every family member had to play the roles of characters in the skits<sup>8</sup>. These plays were called as *Velleri nadakam* (cucumber plays) which was called so as the play was staged on the banks of agrarian fields where cucumber was cultivated. The stories in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were main themes of the skits. There were also speeches by the leaders on the existing social system in which the *Janmi* system and the oppressions and cruelties of the authorities were exposed. There were people from different castes who lived in the temporary sheds and as far as the Party was concerned, these were opportunities to proselytize the people and instill in them class consciousness<sup>9</sup>.

Work places also developed quickly into vibrant spaces of discussions on divergent issues. In villages, the local shops of the *beedi* rollers etc. were as important center as the local village library for radical discourse, particularly for the less erudite. In the *beedi* shops, someone literate used to read the daily newspaper aloud, and other *beedi* rollers listen attentively. The newspaper was usually read out by the Party workers themselves<sup>10</sup>. T.K.Hamsa, in his early days, used to go to *beedi* companies and speak out loudly *Deshabhimani* and *Navayugam* to the workers<sup>11</sup>. Besides, novels were also read out to the workers. C.Kannan notes that novels like *Thottiyude Makan* of Thakazhi, *Odayil Ninnum* of Kesava Dev, *Paavangal (Les Miserables)* of Victor Hugo, and *Amma (Mother)* of Maxim Gorky were brought to his *beedi* company<sup>12</sup>. Sometimes outsiders were brought to read them. Notably, workers used to do

---

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Krishnan at his residence in Thillankeri on 21-09-2021

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> K.V. Kunhiraman, *Evarakkum Priyatetta Keluettan*, p.57

<sup>11</sup> T.K. Hamza, *Njan Engane Communistayi*, p.28

<sup>12</sup> G.D. Nair, *C.Kannan*, p.24

additional work of those who set aside their works for reading papers for others.

In Alathur near Palakkad, Pineapple Beedi Company and *Poona Eli Beedi* Company were leading companies where workers unions were formed by the efforts of R.Krishnan.<sup>13</sup> News readings were a regular practice in these companies. Narikutty Mohanan who was the son of Narikutty Madhavan, one of the leaders of *Beedi* Workers Union, while studying in high school, used to go to his father's *beedi* company and read out newspapers and other publications for the workers<sup>14</sup>. It was the father who directed son to read them for the workers. These readings also helped Mohanan a lot in finding answers to many of his questions including inequality at his own classroom.

Workers also used to engage in long discussions which were held after the news reading and topics including local, national and international came up for discussion. Talks on the speeches and activities of E.M.S.Namboothirippad and A.K.Gopalan and on Soviet Russia and China were matters of emotional experience for the workers<sup>15</sup>. It can rightly be said that the *beedi* making shops were also a kind of educational centers where many illiterate workers came to know about the national and international developments. Apart from them, they got acquainted with communist ideology and the party programmes and policies. The intermittent visit of the Communist party leaders at these shops infused enthusiasm among the workers. The role of the *beedi*-cigar workers under the banner of their unions, which were affiliated to the Communist party, during the times of distresses was noteworthy aspect of the workers' movement in Malabar.

---

<sup>13</sup> R. Krishnan Alathur, *Palakkatte Beedi Thozhilali Sanghadana*, in *Spark Souvenir*. p.107

<sup>14</sup> Narikutty Mohanan, *Orormayude Izhakal*, in *Spark Souvenir*, pp.108-109

<sup>15</sup> T.K.Hamza, *op. cit.*, p.28

Daily political newspapers assumed an important role in the emerging public sphere in Malabar. Newspapers changed from mere institutions for the publication of news into bearers and leaders of public opinion-weapons of party politics. The press remained an institution of the public itself, effective in the manner of a mediator and intensifier of public discussion, no longer a mere organ for the spreading of news but not yet the medium of a consumer culture<sup>16</sup>. The public sphere cannot happen without print and regular publications. In Kerala, the social turbulence of the 20<sup>th</sup> century happened in a public sphere, which was made possible partly because of the spread of print, publishing and newspapers<sup>17</sup>. Print enabled the formulation and discussion of social and political issues and the mobilization of significant numbers of people around such issues.

It was of great necessity for the Party to maintain a newspaper at any cost for its sustainability. Despite suppressive measures adopted by the government the party managed to survive through its print media. *Deshabhimani* was the mouthpiece of the party after *Prabhatham* ceased to exist and it reached a much larger number of people in every nook and cranny of Malabar. It was the party workers in the respective localities who took it to the common folk in villages. They used to read it out to the public at places like *beedi* companies, tea and toddy shops, barber shops, reading rooms and wherever people used to throng. It was also reported that *Deshabhimani* was read out by the Communist teachers to their students<sup>18</sup>. The party messages, ideas and programmes were taken, thus, to the grass root through a process of downward filtration.

---

<sup>16</sup> Jurgen Habermas, et al., *The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article*, New German Critique, No. 3. (Autumn, 1974), pp. 49-55

<sup>17</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers, and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800–2009*, p.485

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

The reading rooms, tea-shops, toddy shops, ayurveda shops and barber shops were new spaces that signaled and influenced a transformation in social relations. Party workers, after getting educated at the political classes organized by the Party forums, used to participate in the discussions held at these centers. At Mukkam in Kozhikode there was an *ayurvedic* shop which was run by Unniyeppan and Nottan Vaidyar and *Deshabhimani* was available there. This shop too witnessed discussions on different topics especially related with Party. It was these talks and discussions at this shop that invited wrath and governmental action against it.

### **Tea Shops and Communists**

The role of tea shops in the emerging public sphere of Kerala could not be trivialized. By the 1940s, the working classes and labourers in Kerala patronized tea-shops with “stern resolve”, as tea, coffee and cocoa became increasingly popular and substitutes to local drinks like buttermilk<sup>19</sup>. One observer notes of the tea-shops in Kerala in the mid-twentieth century that in his travels across south Asia, he had never seen anything like the little tea-shops of Kerala in the mornings crowded with *coolies* scanning the newspapers or listening while others read them aloud<sup>20</sup>. More than 40 newspapers in the Malayalam language are published in Kerala; they are read and discussed by people of all classes and castes<sup>21</sup>.

The tea-shops in the villages served as a center of political discussions for the Socialists and Communists and provided a space where people gathered for any updates on matters of importance. They emerged in Kerala’s public sphere as representational spaces where the traditional social relations

---

<sup>19</sup> For more details see T.K.V. Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual Vol.3.*, Government of Travancore. Trivandrum, 1940 in S.Harikrishnan, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> George Woodcock, *op.cit.*, p.35

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p.35

were openly challenged. The presence of *coolie* labourers made such spaces important for Communist leaders to tap into. By virtue of automatically being spaces that necessitated interaction between the different castes, tea-shops could not be controlled by upper-caste Brahmins<sup>22</sup>. Most tea-shops in Kerala had emerged by the 1930s as political spaces and had an extremely influential role in shaping the public consciousness and strengthening communist thought among the common people. Exploring the potential of tea shops, party units tactically ensured participation of educated party members in the discussions.

Tea shops which served as non-formal centers of political education, played an important role as spaces where communism was introduced to the public. People, be literate or illiterate, used to throng the shops in the evenings and discuss the issues related with their everyday life problems. It was a habit among the people of all age groups to visit the shops and listen the talks or get engaged in the discussions.<sup>23</sup> Having a cup of black tea and a light snack, customers spent much time in the shops. There, as mentioned by one Achuthan, used to be a tea-shop next to the *Desabandhu Vayanashala* where people would come for tea but the newspaper reading would continue even after the tea was done. Later, taking this matter into consideration, a little shed with palm leaves was set up near the tea shop and newspapers were made available there. So people who finished their tea could sit on a bench in the shed and continue reading<sup>24</sup>. Vibrant political engagements were common across the tea-shops in the rural areas and that eventually drew many closer to left politics. The tea shops which developed into left-leaning spaces also shaped many friendships and brought many to active politics.

---

<sup>22</sup> S. Harikrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.277.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Raghava Kurup at his residence in Thiruvallur on 26-03-2021

<sup>24</sup> S. Harikrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.276

The tea shop owned by Padannayil Govindan at Karimpanapalam near Vatakara played a significant role in arousing political consciousness in the locality<sup>25</sup>. A.K.Gopalan and Krishna Pillai intermittently visited the shop. The tea shop of Chappan Nambiar at Aroor near Vatakara was also such a space where people of different classes and having different ideologies used to gather. While some kept mum and listened the talks of others, some actively engaged in the hot discussions<sup>26</sup>.

The role of Poyil Peedika at Onchiyam was remarkable in arousing class consciousness among the locals. The shop which was run by one Poyil Kanaran, was frequented by people from divergent backgrounds. It was a centre of discussions in both day and evening times, and later turned out to be a center of cultural activities too. The shop, on account of the vibrant discussions, came to be known as *jeevidunna peedika* or the shop which gives lives to people. Similar tea shops were located in many places in and around Onchiyam including *Chappayil Peedika* run by Parayulla Parampath Kannan, *Kolavattathu Peedika* of C.P.Chathu. Theevandi Chal Peedika, *Ayaattu Peedika* etc. were other shops which played their own role in the social and political transformation of the village<sup>27</sup>.

As elsewhere, tea shops in Mattannur and surrounding areas in north Malabar, served as centers of political education. The shop owned by Idaveli Chathukutty near Ayyaloor was exemplary. It was a mini centre of political activities which were started with the news reading of comrades like Chathampally Kunhiraman. A regular group of villagers used to visit the shop in order to listen them. Messages and statements of the party leaders and explanations on party policies and programmes were imparted to the listeners.

---

<sup>25</sup> K.N. Panikkar, *Pradesam, Rashtram, Lokam, Kadathanadinte Sahithya Parambaryam*, p.84

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Raghava Kurup at his residence in Thiruvallur on 26-03-2021

<sup>27</sup> P.P. Shaju, *Padanilangalil Poruthiveenavar*, p.154

Party leaders like Mulloli Krishnan, Kunkan Nair, Kozhukunnon Krishnan Nambiar, and K.V.Gopalan paid regular visits which enlivened the shop<sup>28</sup>. In the 1940s when the presence of the medias was limited, the social life in the locality was centered around this small tea shop.

The Koman's tea-shop at Kanhangad, which was the home village of K.Madhavan, served as the "central office" of political activism and political discussions for the Communists. It was also a space where people gathered for any updates on matters of importance: If any problem arose in the village people usually ran to Koman's tea shop<sup>29</sup>. As people used to gather, news of all types spread across the village like wild fire from his tea shop.

A tea shop run by one P.N.Unneeri at Kaaramoola in Kaarasserri has an important place in the growth of communist ideas in Karasserri area in Thiruvambady. Unneeri was the convener of the party cell when it was formed at Muttolikattu on 18 December 1949. The tea shop was open to all irrespective of caste and religion and subjects like national struggles, imperialist aggressions and local issues were used to be discussed. There was a rumour that communist ideas were getting spread in the locality from this tea shop. It created panic among the authorities and anti-communists as well and they started moving against the shop<sup>30</sup>. Finally, due to the pressure from them, at the instruction of the shop owner, Unneeri was compelled to vacate the shop in December 1950.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> *Pazhassi-Thillankeri-Payam Smaranika*, p.73

<sup>29</sup> K. Madhavan, *A Village Comes to Life: The Story of Madikkai*. p.53

<sup>30</sup> N.B. Vijaya Kumar's article in *Kanalppaadukal Oru Desathinte Innalekal*, p.136. Different allegations were leveled against the shop and police started enquiry into them. Finally Unneeri had to vacate the shop. There was a huge protest procession against the eviction of the tea shop taken out by the communists.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.136



It was recognizing the potential of the tea shops that party launched its educated members to take advantage of the newly emerged public spheres. Tea shops were provided with *Deshabhimani* and other party publications which were read out to the public by any literate party men, most probably by school teachers<sup>32</sup>. It was also read out to the public in many village reading rooms and even read out by communist teachers, who are numerous, to children in the schools<sup>33</sup>. The vibrant teashops belonged to a specific time period of Kerala's political history when communism and progressive ideals seemed attractive to the youngsters.

The tea shops played significant role in breaking the traditional caste rules by giving opportunities for both lower and upper castes to get mingled each other. Wearing *lungi* or *mundu* (waist clothes) which reached below the knee and shirts lower caste people began to come and sit on the same bench where *savarnas* used to sit and have tea together with their upper caste counterparts at the tea shops. Even without drinking tea, people used to visit tea shops for renewing acquaintance and having friendly talks. It also became an entertainment for some to spent spare time at tea shops with their class members. In fact, tea shops all over Malabar provided a common place for people to meet and drink together irrespective of caste and created an atmosphere for free discussions on divergent issues. Thus, tea shops played a significant role in widening spaces of socialization.

The narrow world view of the listeners ranging from teens to veterans began to get widened in due course. Gradually, changes were evident in their attitudes and outlooks towards every social and political institutions which paved the way for class consciousness. That, *Deshabhimani* and the party

---

<sup>32</sup> There was an allegation levelled against the primary school teachers that they were teaching communism to children

<sup>33</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers, and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800–2009*. p.477

Congress funds were collected within no time at the tea shops, points out the great potential of the tea shops in Malabar. Recognizing the danger at tea shops the police had tightened its vigil on them and many tea shops had been demolished or burnt down alleging that they were the hide outs of the absconding Communists. This was wide and common during the post-Calcutta thesis era in Malabar.

### **Role of *Vayanasalas***

*Vayanasalas* or reading rooms were another important center which emerged as a public sphere by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Public libraries started to come up in Kerala in the nineteenth centuries and it was by the 1930s that they permeated into every nook and cranny of the state. The library movement in Malabar was slower as compared to the rest of Kerala, as British authorities were suspicious of political activities surrounding libraries, and tried its level best to minimize spaces of socializing. With the growth of the Socialist movement its committees were established in different villages of Malabar, with a disciplined core of volunteers and organizations of peasants and trade unions complementing this main political organization. It was necessary for the Socialists in the Congress to develop political consciousness among the ranks. It was with this objective that *vayanasalas*, libraries, and night schools were established in villages. In the middle of the fourth decade *vayanasalas* started to come up across Malabar and both Socialists and Nationalists took initiative in forming *vayanasalas* keeping aims and intentions in their minds. With that reading rooms and libraries cropped up at an amazing speed in almost all the villages, where local activists taught illiterates to read socialist books and pamphlets and conducted study classes.

The leftists' first attempt at-mass organization after they emerged from the jails in 1934 had concentrated on the working class and within a year the CSP activists had established their committees in almost every village in

Malabar which were backed by reading rooms where local activists taught the illiterate to read socialist books and pamphlets and conducted study classes<sup>34</sup>. The Communist leaders made a conscious effort to establish reading rooms and a night-schools in every village by the end of the 1930s<sup>35</sup>. *Vayanasalas* played significant role in the growth of the Communist movement. In the words of E.M.S.namboothirippad, MSP first destroyed these educational institutions on account of the fact that these were acting as the instrumental of disseminating knowledge among the peasantry for uniting against government and *janmis*<sup>36</sup>.

The reading rooms became an integral part of the new political culture of Malabar. They became a part and parcel of people's life. It was instrumental to establish some degree of control over a popular movement. Thus, literacy became an essential part of the KCSP programme. Thus, reading rooms were started in almost every rural areas in Malabar particularly in north Malabar. It kept open between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. so that labourers could read after their work<sup>37</sup>.

*ABYS* formed by A.V.Kunhambu in 1934 played significant role for the growth of *Vayanasalas* in North Malabar especially in Northern part of Chirakkal *taluk* and neighbouring Kasaragod *taluk*. Under the initiation of *ABYS*, night classes were organized in the reading rooms and libraries<sup>38</sup>. Evening classes and night classes were conducted in many *vayanasalas* as a part of popularizing political as well as class consciousness among the rural peasantry. The formation of *ABYS* was a milestone in the history of KCSP as

---

<sup>34</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala: A study of Political Adaptation*. p.72

<sup>35</sup> E.M.S. Namboodirippad, *Talking about Kerala* (Interview by V.K. Ramachandran). Frontline, 28 April, 15th edition 1992 in S. Harikrishnan, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> P. Govinda Pillai(ed.), *E M Sinte Sampoorana Krithikal*, pp. 318- 19.

<sup>37</sup> K.Vijayan, *op.cit.*, p.275

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

well as KS of North Malabar and Kasaragod *taluk*. It was a politically oriented organization with definite programme of social services like construction of new roads, thatching the houses of the poor, cleaning of public wells, helping diseased people, starting of reading rooms and conducting of night classes etc<sup>39</sup>. During the same period, similar movement known as Youth League on the model of ABYS was formed at Kallyssery by the initiation of KPR Gopalan. It organized different activities both in the Chirakkal and Kottayam taluks.<sup>40</sup>

The well organised and co-ordinated activities of the *vayanasalas* began to be perceptible in Malabar by 1937<sup>41</sup>. On 12-06-1937 a meeting, presided over by K.Kelappan, president of Malabar District Board, was attended by over 300 *vayanasala* activists as well as those interested in its activities from across Malabar. K. Damodaran was the secretary of the working committee of the Conference<sup>42</sup>. The meeting took a decisive decision to form Vayanasala Sanghams. This was significant in many respects as it resulted in the formation of large number of *vayanasalas* across Malabar. Though the initiative to form *vayanasalas* in the early phase was taken by the nationalists, they were taken over by the Communists and used them for their ideological propaganda. For instance, *Thillankeri Dhesheeya Vayanasala* was founded in 1953 and its initiative was taken by P.V.Padmanabhan Master, C.V.Padmanabhan Master, K.Kannan Sakhavu and others. It was first under

---

<sup>39</sup> Payyannoor Kunjiraman, *A.V.Kunjambu*, p.48

<sup>40</sup> Prakash Karat, *Malabarile Karshika Bandhangalil Oru Patanam*, p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> K.N.Ganesh, *Keralathile Communist Partyude Charithram 1940-1952*, III Part, pp.176-178. In 1937 a meeting, presided over by K.Kelappan, president of Malabar District Board, was attended by over 300 *vayanasala* activists which took a decisive decision to form *Vayanasala sanghams*. In 1943 Kerala Granthalaya Sangham got registered with incorporating all the *vayanasalas* in Kerala. From 1954 onwards, literacy activities were taken as the primary duty of the *vayanasalas*.

<sup>42</sup> K. Vijayan, *op.cit.*, p.275

the supervision of the Congress and later it came under the control of the Communists.

The *vayanasala* activities in Kandakkai was remarkable in many respects. Noteworthy role was played by S.J.M Vayanasala at Kandakkai in Chirakkal taluk which was set up in 1938 by KS workers. Earlier, some of the youths in the locality under Kammaran Master had erected a *pandhal* (temporary makeshift) for reading *Mathrubhumi* newspaper and this later developed as SJM Vayanasala<sup>43</sup>. The Vayanasala played a significant role in the social life of the people in the locality. During the second world war period when cholera was spreading fast the workers of the *vayanasala* got engaged in wiping out wrong beliefs with regard to cholera<sup>44</sup>. It also played the role of a mediator in family disputes including property related and social issues<sup>45</sup>. Another prominent centre of *vayanasala* activities was Kallyasseri in Kannur which became the centre of youth movements as well. *Shri Harshan Smaraka Vayanasala* in Kallyasseri, which was opened with the efforts of K.P.R.Gopalan, was the epicenter of the *Vayanasala activities* and in the course of time other *vayanasalas* began to crop up one by one. E.K.Nayanar also helped in its formation which was named after Harshan, a member of the oppressed caste who was tortured to death at the Kannur Central Jail for his participation in the national movement<sup>46</sup>.

Around 1940, a *vayanasala* was active on a shop near Nadukadam in Mooli, known as *Aikya Pradhayini Vayanasala*. Earliest party leaders like Sardar Chandroth, and Narayanan Master, V.K.Kunhiraman Master, Koolothu

---

<sup>43</sup> K.C. Govindan, *Kandakkai Thirinju Nokkumpol* in *Sakhavu Krishna Pillai Smaraka Vayanasala-Kandakkai, Silver Jubilee Smaranika*, p.38

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p.47. The Vayanasala functioned as the office of Irikkur *Farkka* Communist Party office. After the Kandakkai incident the Vayanasala, which was renovated in 1942, got again set ablaze.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> R. Krishnakumar's article in *Frontline Magazine*, 18-06- 2004

Kumaran, P.P.Anandhan were its organizers. But, the *vayanasala* was in existence only for a short period<sup>47</sup>. Shortly after the execution of Kayyur comrades, a *vayanasala* known as *Kayyur Raktha Sakshi Smaraka Vayanasala* was set up at Kozhummal. One Parangodan Kunhiraman was at the forefront of its formation<sup>48</sup>. Great effort in the *vayanasala* movement was taken by one Parammal Krishnan Vaidyar who took initiative in acquiring land for a *vayanasala*. He also took the initiative in its construction at Padannapuram and later, on account of his contribution, the *vayanasala* was named *Sakhavu Parammal Smaraka Mandiram*<sup>49</sup>. Some of the *vayanasalas*, earlier set up by the Socialists, developed into public *vayanasalas*. *Velam Pothujana Vayanasala* started by Subrahmanya Shenayi and K.A.Keraleeyan is one of such *vayanasalas*<sup>50</sup>. It functioned as the epicenter of political activities as well as peasant movement in the area.

Recognizing the importance of *vayanasalas* in the social and political life, the leaders like P.Krishna Pillai, A.K.Gopalan, A.V.Kunhambu, K.P.R.Gopalan and T.S.Thirumumb urged Party workers to take initiative in their formation. Through their speeches they exhorted Party workers to come forward to set up *vayanasalas* and educate the people. It was at the behest of A.K.Gopalan who was on a party programme in Kambil, that *Kambil Yuvajana Vayanasala* was started. The initiative to form the *vayanasala* was taken by Communists like Chadayan Govindhan and Govindan Vaidhyar. As part of establishing the *Vayanasala*, Chadayan conducted a door-to-door visit to collect books. Later *Kambil Yuvajana Vayanasala* came to be known as

---

<sup>47</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op.cit.*, p.150

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p.251

<sup>49</sup> *Cheruthazham- Charithravaum Samskaravum*, Souvenir, 2010. p.110

<sup>50</sup> *Sakhavu Krishna Pillai Smaraka Vayanasala-Kandakkai*, Silver Jubilee *Smaranika*, p.47. It served as a centre of the communist party programmes also. In 1946, during the post war crisis era, it was burnt down by MSP and congress workers.

AKG *Smaraka Vayanasala*<sup>51</sup>. Parangodan Kunhiraman was at the forefront of the formation of a *vayanasala* at Peralam near Karivellur which later named as *Peralam Pothujana Vayanasala*. When he took initiative in starting a UP School at Kozhummal; its first classes were held at the *vayanasala* and later classes were shifted to the school<sup>52</sup>.

*Vayanasalas* were set up in Eranjoli and Thalassery by the initiation of Kudanjeri Kunhiraman Master and N.E.Balaram respectively. Azheekkodan Ragahavan who was one of the prominent Communist leader in Malabar was responsible for the formation of *Deshavardhini Vayanasala* at Kakkad, near Kannur in 1940- 41 period. It became a centre of many social activities in the area during the period. Some of the rehabilitation centers which were opened during the times of epidemics later got converted to *vayanasalas*. In the year 1943 when cholera spread in Malabar, many relief centers were opened and some of them later started to function as libraries. When A.K.Gopalan was released from prison, under his initiative, one such relief centre was converted into reading room which came to be known as Mayyil public library. This library was renamed later as Moidu Memorial library.

At Punnol near Thalassery, it was the *vayanasala* activities and distress relief works of the party carried under the leadership of C.H.Kanaran that helped to make firm foot for the Party<sup>53</sup>. At Anthur near Kannur *vayanasala* activities were organized and the name of some women deserves special mention: Karichiriyedathi, C.Pandal, M.K. Narayani, and P. Madhavi who were active in all the peasant struggles in Kannur. Under the leadership of this group there was a night school functioning in Anthur during 1945<sup>54</sup>. Nights

---

<sup>51</sup> K.Balakrishnan, *Chadayan Poraliyum Theraliyum*, p.26

<sup>52</sup> P. Jayarajan, *op. cit.*, p.251

<sup>53</sup> A.V. Mukundan, *C.H. Ayirunnu Njangalude Adharsha Purushan* in *CHnte Lokam*, p.81

<sup>54</sup> T.K.Anandi's Report, visit, <http://www.cds.ac.in> › krpcds › report › anandi

classes were organized at various villages under the auspices of the Communist party and Karshaka Sangham. In some localities classes were called 'Ragezhuthu'. K.K.Balakrishnan Master in Pazhassi was a teacher in Pazhassi West U.P School and he got involved in literacy activities at Pazhassi school<sup>55</sup>. Likewise, classes under the auspices of *Payam Grameena Vayanasala* held at Payam school were taken by A.V.Kunhikannan<sup>56</sup>.

At Vatakara *Kairali Vayanasala* was started on 15 September 1934 on a shop near Nut Street. It was at the initiative of M.K.Kelu, that *vayanasala* was started. Kelu had earlier been a regular visitor of *Viswabharathi Vayanasala* in Vatakara which served as a platform for many youths<sup>57</sup>. Drawing inspiration from *vayanasala* movement, he took himself initiative to form the *Kairalivayanasala*; later it was shifted to a plot which he received as maternal property<sup>58</sup>. Classes and speeches of Vaghdanandha Guru, Vidwan Kavil P.Raman Panikkar, Raman Vaidyar and Achyuthan Gumasthan were organized as part of the *vayanasala*<sup>59</sup>. Its significant role was in organizing training programmes especially in art of speech. The *vayanasala* became one of the nerve centre of socio-political and cultural movements in Vatakara. It was on account of this fact that the it was set ablaze by the anti-communists in the darkness of night in 1948<sup>60</sup>.

The initiative of *Eruvasseri Kisan Sangh* to set up a *vayanasala* deserves special mention. The *vayanasala* building was constructed at Eruvasseri Poopparambu to which peasants and workers have contributed at

---

<sup>55</sup> A.K. Hareendran Master, *Sakhavu K.K.Balakrishnan Master-Pazhassi* in *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal*, *Smaranika*, p.63

<sup>56</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 14-08-1952

<sup>57</sup> P.K. Sujith, *Samara Mukhangalil Priya Sakhakkal*, p.104

<sup>58</sup> A.V. Kunhiraman, *Evarakkum Priyapetta Keluettan*, p.33

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*



their capacities<sup>61</sup>. As part of the donation, paddy was collected with receipt. A significant aspect of the construction was the sincerity and dedication on the part of the workers. The workers who were very busy with their livelihood works in the day time, came in the evenings and rendered their services like bringing required soil from distant places with the help of petromax<sup>62</sup>. It was reported that people belonging to *Kattadiyan* community supplied 74 bamboos and a group of mahouts in the locality brought woods with the help of their elephants as donations for Vayanasala construction.

It was the primary school teachers who had taken initiative to launch *vayanasala* movement. Their role in making people literate could not be overlooked. In fact, they played dual role in the social transformation; being mentor of their students in the day times and teacher of the people in the evenings. Besides their teaching at schools, they got engaged in the task of imparting knowledge to the illiterate at night classes which were held in *vayanasalas*. Notably, majority of the party leaders in the earlier times were elementary school teachers and leaders of teacher's movement in Malabar. The role of teachers at Ayyallur L.P.School in Pazhassi is only one of the several instances<sup>63</sup>. The teachers of aided schools acted as a catalyst agent in the socio-cultural transformation of Malabar. Almost all the activities of the Communist party during the 1940s and 1950s were chalked out and led by teachers.

*Vayojana* education was a significant achievement of the *vayanasala* movement. Special committees were constituted for organizing and conducting classes for the elders. Apart from learning reading and writing, the participants were imparted classes on contemporary social and political

---

<sup>61</sup> *Deshabhimani*, 24-01-1953

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Pazhssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika* 2010-11. p.42

developments. K.A Keraleeyan remembers the role of A.V.Kunjambu in *vayojana* education and his dedication as a teacher. When Keraleeyan came to see Kunjambu at Manakkatu in Karivelloor, the latter was taking class as part of *deseeya padasala* under ABYS for people from different parts of Karivelloor<sup>64</sup>. The former had to wait till the end of the class to see the latter. Sakhavu K.C.Krishna Kurup in Kannur who practiced *visha chikitsa* rendered commendable service in the field of literacy. He started educational institution at a shed attached with his house and imparted education to illiterates. Communist Party classes were also conducted at this shed<sup>65</sup>.

The role of Kollacheri Kumaran in Onchiyam near Vatakara in the literacy movement deserves special mention. The night literacy classes held at a *vayanasala* run by him imparted education to the illiterates in the locality. The financial assistance to run the classes was met by Kumaran himself and Valiya Valappil Pokkan, M.R.Narayana Kurup and others helped Kumaran in his endeavour. Edavalath Krishnan Nambiar and Thaippalli Narayanan Nambiar were among those who took classes there<sup>66</sup>. Similarly, T.K Kumaran was one of the leading figure in the *vayojana vidhyabhyasam* in the locality which was held at Kolavattath Peedika in Onchiyam<sup>67</sup>.

Vayanasalas were centers of cultural programmes as well and were instrumental in the formation of arts clubs. Different types of programmes were organized with the participation of different types of social groups. The members of the clubs were given training in different art forms including plays, *kolkalli* etc. The plays written by Communists like K. Damodaran, Thoppil Bhasi, and others portraying the social, political, and economic

---

<sup>64</sup> Payyannoor Kunjiraman, *A.V.Kunjambu*, pp.47-48

<sup>65</sup> E. Narayanan Maloor, *Sakhavu K.C.Krishna Kurup* in *Pazhuzzi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal*, Smaranika, p.104

<sup>66</sup> Interview with T.K. Kumaran at his residence in Onchiyam, 09-02-2021

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

conditions of the people were often staged under the aegis of the libraries, generating discussions and forming public opinions. At Panikkoti in Kurumbranadu *Aikya Kerala Kalasamithi* was started by M.K. Panikotti and others in 1952. Under the *Kalasamithi*, a special troupe was started which excelled in singing songs and organizing plays. The troupe was later invited to stage programmes at several places including distant ones<sup>68</sup>. Some of the programmes were organized in a manner to expose the corrupt social and political systems of the period. These arts forms were used for the ideological propagation of the Communist party. When the authorities began to get exposed, the programmes of these suspected arts clubs were brought under the strict surveillance of the police.

*Vayanasalas*, tapping the potential of the teens and youths, created spaces for the cultural and sports activities for the villagers. *Bala Sanghams* and youth organizations and sports clubs were formed as part of *vayanasalas* and different games like football and other competitive matches were organized. The youth club formed at Chirakkal under the leadership of K.P.Gopalan was significant in many respects; A.K.Gopalan was a member of it. Children and youths who became part of the clubs began to attend classes and programmes organized by the Communist party in the name of *vayanasalas*. Thus, the early Socialists and Communists through these programmes were able to create vibrant cadres to work among the peasants.

*Vayanasalas*, through which political education got disseminated, were instrumental in creating political consciences among the rural masses. At the progressive level, they conducted classes creating awareness among the people of the need to think rationally and scientifically with a view to eliminate blind beliefs and social evils from the minds of the people. The night schools and study classes along with the libraries and reading rooms set

---

<sup>68</sup> Interview with V.K.Balan Master at his residence in Panikkotti on 23-12-2020

up by the Party and KS units became converted to the repository of left political propaganda. While school education provided the base for reading and writing, the political as well as class consciousness injected among the rural mass through such reading rooms. *Vayanasalas*, thus, became the nerve centre of cultural activities of the respective localities and majority of them turned to be breeding grounds of Communist ideologies.

The establishment of the *vayanasalas* can be considered as an inspiration for the young people for reading the better books during that era where books were not abundant in the villages. The number of people visiting *vayanasalas* and getting educated increased in the course of time. The substantial increase in the number of such people was quite in favour of the Communists who were instrumental in spreading communists' works, including that of distress relief, in their families and localities. The libraries and reading rooms, thus, ushered in a new space in the modern public sphere that eventually shaped mini-publics in villages where matters of social and political importance were discussed and debated. It was often here—in the local reading rooms—that later political leaders began their association with the cultural, literary and political institutions.

It was against the backdrop of the mushrooming of *vayanasalas* in the villages of Malabar by the efforts of the leftists that the state machinery started to tighten its vigil over them with the help of police. MSP began to destroy them as they were instrumental in disseminating communism among the peasantry. The period of ban imposed on the Party in Malabar, especially aftermath of Calcutta Thesis, was effectively used by the opponents in suppressing all the Communist literacy activities. *Vayanasalas* which were apparently maintained by the Communists were set on fire and demolished. Even those nationalists who got educated at these *vayanasalas* had not shown any sympathy in raising their weapon against the centres of learning. By the

time the party adopted a new policy based on parliamentary democracy and lifting ban on it in 1951, the Party was almost wiped off the cultural sphere in Malabar. And hence, the Party had to re-start from the zero; what was left there were the remnants of the earlier cultural activities. But the strong tradition of the literacy movement helped it escape from the fossilisation process. After 1951 a large number *vayanasalas* under the auspices of the Communist party re-surfaced across Malabar; many restored in the name of earlier *vayanasalas* itself. Thus, there was an unprecedented growth of the *vayanasala* activities under the Party which gave a predominant place to the Party in the cultural sphere.

The reading rooms, tea-shops and work places were new spaces that brought a transformation in social relations. Unlike formal spaces, informal spaces enjoyed an autonomy that allowed them to create a broader network of people cutting across class and caste differences. By the mid-twentieth century, they also managed to create a strong network of new social spaces which constituted informal but vibrant associational spaces for the youngsters, predominantly male.

### **Assembly Election -1957**

*Vayanasalas*, tea shops and other centers were provided with the construction of public sphere so as to link the people together and react against the clutches of landlordism and colonialism. This comes up against the apolitical public sphere envisaged by Habermas, which is associated with the emergence of bourgeoisie society under liberal capitalism and separated from the state, market and family<sup>69</sup>. The Party machinery in the 1940s and 50s was, at its best, exploring the potential of class root democracy in asserting a counter-hegemonic use of space. In the second half of the twentieth century, Communist party-led trade unions, arts and cultural associations, literary and

---

<sup>69</sup> K.Vijayan, *op. cit.*, p.288.

science forums all inundated the public sphere, taking communism to the common masses through theatre, music, pamphlets, lectures and stories. It enabled the formulation and discussion of social and political issues and the mobilization of significant numbers of people around such issues.

Communist-printed media of communication are written simply, often by local well-known party writers, some of whom did not have even basic education other than reading and writing, and such materials used to teach reading to the illiterate folks and are available for all grades. In the villages, many of the rare books related with the party experiences in Communist countries are used in a highly sophisticated manner<sup>70</sup>. Because of the scarcity of books it was common to find small group of locals listening to a reading or lecture by members of the Communist Party. In the small shops including tea shop, barber shop etc. where people are congregated, such literature is often read to them. The result of this entire process is the emergence of highly indoctrinated workers and sympathisers of the party.

The exponential increase in the number of cadres and sympathisers and the situation of the mushrooming of party units across Malabar except some religious zones placed party in comfortable position. The advent of the non-communists and those who remained so far neutral in political affairs to the party fold was discernible in places where party workers effectively made intervention in redressing the condition of the distressed. Its importance becomes clear when it is realized that public opinion was largely moulded, not by radio and television or newspaper and social media as it is today, but by word of mouth and a belief in charismatic types of leadership of the party.

In a society in which there is little outlet for diversion, political affairs and personal happenings are the topics of conversation for many hours. The

---

<sup>70</sup> Benjamin N. Schoenfeld, *Kerala in Crisis*, Pacific Affairs, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Sep., 1959), p.240

distress relief works and intervention of the party in everyday lives of the people became the subjects of discussion in the emerging public sphere. It got exaggerated and the prestige of both the local Communist workers and the Party were enhanced. Their campaign touched a sympathetic chord in the minds and hearts of thousands of people outside the influence of the Party. In the end, as Benjamin N. Schoenfeld observes, both the contribution of the voter, his support of the party, and the loyalty which was won over are all magnified and the party emerged as the image of the masses in the mind of the individual voter. By 1957, party managed to develop a well-informed, alert and highly indoctrinated workers and sympathisers in Malabar. This enlarged and informed body of Marxian public opinion inevitably played a vital role in the first legislative assembly election in March 1957.

The first general election, held in independent India in 1951-52, awarded a good victory for the alliance of Communist party in Malabar mainly in the contest for assembly seats in the state of Madras<sup>71</sup>. The Congress won only 4 out of 30 seats in Malabar. The alliance of CPI and Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP), founded by a group of ex-Congress socialists, won 15 seats, and the Muslim League and Socialist Party won the remainder of the seats. The Communists also managed to win the election and lead Malabar District Board administration in 1954. In the Board there were 48 seats and out of these seats Communist party and the independents who got party support managed to win 24 seats.

Towards the assembly election in 1957, there seems to have public opinion in favour of the Communists. The food shortage, low standard means

---

<sup>71</sup> Of the 375 seats, the Congress secured 152 seats, the Communists 62 seats, the Kisan-Majdoor-Praja Party 35, the Tamilnad Toilers' Party 19, the Socialist Party 13, the Krishikar Lok Party 15, the Commonweal Party 6, the Madras State Muslim League 5, the Forward Bloc (Marxists) Party 3, the Scheduled Castes Federation; 2, the Justice Party 1 and Independents 62. For more details visit <https://www.assembly.tn.gov.in> › Review-1-52-57

of living of the poor, unhealthy food and circumstances, pro-elite measures of the authorities, and all the distresses of the people caused by the policies of the incumbent governments – all of it became ammunition for the Communists against the Congress party. Apart from them, the party's effective intervention at the time of the calamities and epidemics not just reinforced the confidence of the people in the party, but also helped voters re-imagine the role of political parties in everyday life. It is a fact that the marginalized and the depressed social groups and sub-groups rallied around the Leftists.

The 1957 *Lok Sabha* election was the first one held after the enactment of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. The poll process in 1957 was held in three-and-a-half months from February 24 to June 9. All the 18 seats were contested and the parties were - Communist, Congress, Muslim League, PSP, RSP and a number of Independents. Out of the 18 seats in the state, CPI fielded candidates in 15 constituencies and bagged 9 seat and out of the total polled votes it bagged 37.5%<sup>72</sup>.

Table - 1<sup>73</sup>

Seat position of parties in 1957 Lok Sabha election

Party	Contested	Won	Percentage	Polled	Percentage
CPI	15	9	50.0	22,67,888	37.5
INC	17	6	33.3	21,02,887	34.7
M.L	4	1	5.6	3,51,940	5.8
PSP	8	1	5.6	4,38,459	7.2
RSP	3	.....	.....	3,08,742	5.1
Independents	11	1	5.6	5,80,536	9.7

<sup>72</sup> Congress party managed to win 6 out of 17 seats they contested bagged 34.7% votes.

<sup>73</sup> K. R. Rajgopalan, *Elections in Kerala-A Factual Study*, The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 21, No. 2 (April-June, 1960), pp. 165- 183.



After the Lok Sabha election, the first Kerala Legislative Assembly election held in March 1957. There were 101 single member constituencies and 12 double- member constituencies or 24 seats<sup>74</sup>. One seat -Manjeswar- was uncontested where independent M. Umesh Rao was declared winner<sup>75</sup>. Thus, election was held to 125 seats. The Communist party captured 60 out of 101 seats it contested, and was able to get an absolute majority with the support of 5 independents with whom it had electoral alliance<sup>76</sup>. It was the first time that Indian Communists had come to power in any Indian state, and this was accomplished by means of a victory at the polls in a free and fair election (see the table 2 below). The manner in which they achieved this victory by the ballot box, and the prospects that it held for a number of countries in the poor world, seemed to confirm Nikita Khrushchev's sanguine prognosis of a peaceful transition to socialism, expounded at the 20th party Congress of the CPSU in 1956<sup>77</sup>.

Table-2<sup>78</sup>

Seat position of parties in 1957 Kerala assembly election

Parties	Contested	Won	Percentage	Polled	Percentage
CPI	101	60	48.0	20,59,547	35.3
INC	124	43	34.4	22,09,251	37.8
M. L.	17	8	6.4	2,70,470	4.6
P.S. P.	64	9	7.2	6,28,261	10.8
R. S. P	27	.....	.....	1,88,443	3.2
Independents	55	5	4.0	4,81,605	8.3
Total	388	125	100.0	58,37,577	100.0

<sup>74</sup> Statistical Report on General Election, 1957 to the Legislative Assembly of Kerala, Election Commission of India, New Delhi

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> There were 101 single member constituencies and 12 double-member constituencies which included 24 seats. The Communist party won 14 double member seats, and 46 single member seats.

<sup>77</sup> N. Krishnaji, Kerala Milestones: On the Parliamentary Road to Socialism, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 42, No. 23 (Jun. 9-15, 2007), p.2170

<sup>78</sup> K.R. Rajgopalan, *op. cit.*, p.173

The result indicates that a considerable number of the lower sections of social ladder have supported the party in 1957, the reasons for doing so was necessarily an endorsement of the party's effective interference in redressing the grievances related with everyday life of the people.

There is no one theme that can explain how the voters responded to the numerous political choices before them. Parties with strong and visible leadership might have the same appeal as leaders that show empathy for their daily needs and struggles. The victory of the Party is not aided by any strident public resentment against the congress or other oppositions, as viewed by a section of the analysts<sup>79</sup>. Therefore, can be considered a positive verdict in its favour. It is to be noted that in the next assembly election held in 1960 the Communist strength went down to 29<sup>80</sup>. But, it is significant that the Communists actually increased their votes by about 1 million over the 2.06 million (35.9 per cent of the total) they had polled three years ago<sup>81</sup>. Therefore, it can be argued that a considerable number of the lower sections of social ladder have supported the party in elections, the reasons for doing so was necessarily an endorsement of the party's effective intervention to mitigate the sufferings in the everyday life of the people.

Despite the victory of party in Kerala, the Communists failed to accomplish this feat in other states. It is fairly clear that in Kerala, the CPI grew out of the anti-colonial movement and it succeeded in integrating the struggle against imperialism with struggle against landlordism and thus

---

<sup>79</sup> *The New York Times* observes that the factor which led to the Communist victory in 1957 was the weak, inefficient and corrupt administration of the Congress regime in the State for a decade since independence. *The New York Times*, 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1960

<sup>80</sup> Statistical Report on General Election, 1960 to the Legislative Assembly of Kerala Election Commission of India, New Delhi

<sup>81</sup> Horst Hartmann, *Changing Political Behaviour in Kerala*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 3, No. 1/2, Annual Number (Jan., 1968)

brought a large number of people to the fold of national movement. While the socio-reform movements prepared the social background for the growth of the Party, the CSP works prepared its political background. Through *vayanasala* movement the Communists carried out literacy programme and brought peasants and workers to the mainstream of society in which the Elementary School teachers played significant role. It would also appear that the Communist movement was an agent of structural transformation in Kerala: socio-reform tradition was carried forward giving a final blow to the caste-ridden society and thus, the elite hegemony got shattered. This type of social engineering was absent in other states where party failed to create a strapping foundation for the movement and to maintain its social base.

It will also be seen that the demands such as 'land to the tiller' raised by the party through its manifesto were effectively encountered by the bourgeois proposed programmes like *bhoodhan* movement. Many of the Communist programmes had already been taken up by the Congress and incorporated them in its election manifestos in the states. Most significantly, the adoption of Socialism as the basic goal of Congress at Avadi session of Congress in 1955 should have to be seen against the backdrop of the Communist threat. Through these strategies the Congress was able to nip the Communist activities in the bud in many Indian states.

As far as west Bengal is concerned, at the onset of independence, the CPI in Bengal and Kerala were two regional parties with different levels of organizational strength. In Kerala, the CPI grew out of the anti-colonial movement in the region whereas in Bengal it grew largely in separation from it and remained independent of the Congress Party, as well as the nationalist movement it led. It seems to be correct that the Communist party in Kerala grew out of a tradition of mass-based, grassroots organization, while in

Bengal it was more isolated from popular movements. Unlike the Kerala Communist Party, as opined by Manali Desai, the CPI in Bengal was not an agent of structural transformation because it did not have the means to initiate such a process. It can unambiguously be said that the party machinery in Kerala managed to possess a disciplined and dedicated band of volunteers, mainly consisting of elementary school teachers, through which it implemented its policies and programmes including social reforms. In short, the two parties had different levels of organizational strength and different political capacities to work among the masses.

It can be proposed that the party was organisationally powerful and has quite a strong base in Malabar. If we compare the party's share of the total votes polled in the 1957, 1960 and 1965 elections, there is a decline in its strength in the State as a whole but only in Malabar the Party maintained its position relatively intact. Palakkad district in Malabar continued to be its stronghold. In Kozhikode and Cannanore, the other two districts of Malabar, the Party has registered substantial advances. In Kozhikode, where the CPI won 3 seats in 1957 and 6 in 1965, and where its share of votes has also risen from 17.31 percent in 1957 to 24.1 percent in 1965<sup>82</sup>. In case of Cannanore district the CPI won 7 seats in 1965, the same number that it had won in 1957 and a significant gain over the 1 seat it won in 1960.

*Mathrubhumi*, one of the leading news paper in Kerala and critical of the Communist Party policies, published an editorial on the eve of the 1957 election result which clearly underlines the dedication of the Party workers in Malabar: "The Communist party is deep rooted in the soil of Kerala and tended by the constant care and attention of its activists. In every remote

---

<sup>82</sup> Statistical Report on General Election, 1965 to the Legislative Assembly of Kerala Election Commission of India, New Delhi

village, there are Communist activists who are closest to the most down-trodden of the people and have identified themselves with these sections. He has an objective that keeps him inspired. And to achieve that objective he devotes his self-sacrificing endeavours. The party is his body and soul”<sup>83</sup>. It was a true picture of the Communist volunteers who have been working in this manner with an energy and a devotion for about two decades.

The Communists succeeded in transforming the proletarian public sphere to communist public sphere and thus, made inroads in many rural belts. The willful presence of the educated Communists in tea shops, work places and *vayanasalas* acted as catalyst in this transformation. Towards the general election of 1957, Party was in a comfortable position and there was a swing in favour of the Communist candidates in Malabar other than the minority-dominated areas where religion played significant role in political life of the people. The party reaped the benefits of the works it provided to the people in distress. Having managed to combat the epidemics and overcome the sufferings of the people with considerable efficiency, the Party made some daring moves in social engineering that continued to ripple and finally manifested in the 1957 assembly election.

---

<sup>83</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 21-03-1957

## Conclusion

The lineage of the Communist movement in Kerala can be traced to the political leanings towards leftist ideology within the Congress and the crystallization of the former in the CSP. The Communists in Kerala were successful in linking their class and mass organizations with the national movement. As the illiterate peasants could not digest the ideology of Marxism-Leninism properly, or its political philosophy of class struggle the Communists designed distress relief works, which was the need of the hour, to get into the masses. It can rightly be said that launching diverse programmes which ranged from inter-dining with untouchable to the burial of the pandemic victims and to taking food to the needy the party won the confidence of the people. Even though its popularity got eroded considerably on certain occasions it managed to retrieve it with these wilful works. Within a short period of less than two decades they managed to create a strong base for the movement which was instrumental in the victory of CPI in the assembly election of 1957.

The foundation for the socio-reform movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was laid by the socio-religious reform movements in the 19th century. The successors of the reform movements led by Sree Narayana Guru and Chattampi Swamikal through their association with Indian National Congress launched a scathing attack on the traditional and irrational customs and practices that kept away the lower caste people from mainstream. Consequent to the Vykkom *satyagraha*, they began to think temple entry for the lower castes which was felt necessary for the social and cultural upliftment of under-privileged castes. The resolution, regarding the launch of *satyagraha* in front of the famous Guruvayoor temple was the manifestation of the brewing protest in congress against

stubborn orthodoxy. The activities of K.Kelappan, A.K.Gopalan and Krishna Pillai succeeded in taking congress to a new height. They were the vanguards of many reform activities including temple entry agitations, social feasts etc. The procession taken out under the leadership of A.K.Gopalan in front of the Kandoth temple in Kannur where temple entry was denied to untouchables and the inter-dining programmes organised by Moyyarth Sankaran and many others are the results of the progressive views of the congress party. The progressive minded in Congress always stood for changes and they strove hard for them unmindful of oppositions within it. With the radicalisation of the congress party, they were also influenced by the socialist ideas in the 1930s and they came forward to launch different programmes for the marginalised under the red flag.

Malabar district in Madras presidency was economically backward comparing to other princely states in Kerala but politically advanced. The national movement has taken its root in the district by the second decade of the last century. It was the CDM in 1930s that brought large number of people to the fold of the national movement. The radicalisation of the Congress party towards the left, similar to the national level, led to the formation of KCSP and KS. Even before the Dutt-Bradly thesis, Socialists had taken initiative to form class and mass organisations. The Socialists even raised revolutionary slogans within the platform of Congress like those of abolition of landlordism and began to take up the issues of the peasants and workers. However, the stubborn right wing strongly opposed them which resulted in sharpening the conflict between the right and the left.

It was very much difficulty for the left leaders to adjust with the right wing in the KPCC. For the sake of unity of the congress organisation, the socialists had sacrificed many of their political programmes. The platform of

the Congress was perceived as ineffective in organising a larger movement against caste and class oppression. When the Communist party started to function openly, it shouldered the burden of launching protests for the under-privileged. Hence, it can rightly be said that, it was the Left movement under the Communist party that first succeeded in implementing the ideological perspective of Sree Narayana Guru's Renaissance movement on the ground. The Congress which was left with reactionaries and a few radicals, on the other hand, gradually withdrew from its earlier progressive stands and concentrated in suppressing the Communist movement.

The Socialists were able to expand the national movement in Malabar by integrating it with the anti-landlord movement. They effectively used the congress platform to enrol people simultaneously to Congress party and to Karshaka Sangham. Joint meetings of the Congress and the KS were held and the nexus between the colonial government and the landlords were exposed in these meetings. Similarly, literary and art forms were consciously used for developing people's movements. Plays including K. Damodaran's *Pattabakki* and novels were some of the boosting factors for the growth of peasant and labour movements.

The Congress platform had effectively been used by the socialists to spread the socialist ideology among the people by organising the peasants and workers and thereby taking up their miseries. Hence, it can be said that that while working in KCSP, the ground has been prepared for the growth of the communist movement. Class and mass organisations were on the war path raising their own class demands. The party formation in 1939 was just a transformation of the KCSP unit into Communist Party. As a result of this fact, the Party did not need to make significant efforts to form local level committees in many parts of Malabar. Additionally, there were no



fundamental changes in the programmes and policies that were originally designed and implemented by earlier Socialists and later Communists.

Since the formation, the party has been in a position to possess a dedicated and energetic batch of volunteers and this was the backbone of the party programmes at the ground level. In the beginning, there were only a few members in many party cell units in the interior parts of Malabar. The People's War policy during the war period created much confusion within the party and it had to encounter many allegations and Communists were branded as anti-nationals which resulted in many functionaries deserting the party. Another occasion in which party got isolated from the people had been the Calcutta Thesis in 1948 which resulted in the killing of a number of Communists and imposing ban on the party. Towards the close of the 1940s party machinery ceased to exist and party was on the verge of extinction. Many hesitated to join the party and its feeder organisations fearing atrocities and in some parts, those who joined them had to face social ostracism. On these occasions, it was the dedication and confidence of a handful of party functionaries who always stood with the party, amidst suppression, that managed to have a successful recovery for the party in the beginning of 1950s.

It was with this limited number of cadres that the party carried out its political programmes including distress relief. Party directed everyone in its ranks to commit their energy and time to the party, to the extent possible under given circumstances, and to always do their best in its service. The Communists worked diligently and thoughtfully in order to ensure the most benefit to society. They placed the interests of the people and the party above personal interests and cultivated comradely relations towards one another. State level camps were organised and physical and mental training was imparted to inculcate such values and qualities among the red volunteers. The

commune life in the nascent stage of the Party was also a significant part to this effect that helped bring discipline among the inmates. Many of them remained bachelors throughout their younger days. The first generation of the Communists, thus, lived for the party, worked for it and died for it.

A remarkable aspect of the Communist movement in Malabar was that the party units at the grass root level had been blessed with the presence of a good number of able and efficient elementary school teachers. They acted as the catalyst for the growth of the movement. Many of the party state and local level leaders started their career as teachers and joined congress and became socialists and communists. They were the organisers of the party cells in villages and vanguards of peasants' and workers' unions. It is the grass root level work of the teachers who enjoyed a respectable position in society that brought the common people closer to the party. They were known for their personal integrity and incorruptibility and lived simply and without ostentation. A large number of these teachers were from upper castes and were in forefront of organising several social reform programmes including social feast. They also took initiative to launch libraries and *vayanasalas* and got engaged in the task of imparting knowledge to the illiterate holding night classes. These night classes and reading rooms along with the libraries later got converted to the repository of left political propaganda. As part of party programmes, they worked along with untouchables and mingled with them by eating and sleeping together. Like ordinary members, they actively participated in every party works and programmes, and organised strikes and courted arrest. Some were behind bars for long years and some sustained MSP'S bullet injuries and became martyrs. It is absolutely right to say that the growth of the party at a rapid pace would not have taken place unless there was such a band of Communist teachers in Malabar,

Remarkable service rendered by the party volunteers was during the times of epidemics in Malabar where different types of diseases were noticed including cholera, plague, small pox, chicken pox, diarrhoea, malaria, yellow fever etc. It was cholera in 1943 and small pox in 1944-45 period which was virulent in all forms and took a heavy toll of human lives in Malabar. During the times of pandemic people were scared of helping each other or even coming out of their houses due to exposure to infection. When the deadly pandemic spelt disaster, the human lives did not have even the price of cattle; many died on the way side and dead bodies remained unburied for days. When the pandemic started to claim the human lives in large number the entire party machinery was geared to meet the challenge. The red volunteers were scientific and practical in handling the emergencies. It was after taking vaccine against diseases and other precautionary measures that volunteers got engaged in the treatment of patients and eradication of the epidemics. The tragic episode during the distress relief works was the death of some volunteers like Mallissery Kunhikannan while discharging their duties assigned by the party.

The volunteers worked even in areas where health officials and other organisations hesitated to venture into. Wiping out blind beliefs centered around the epidemics, they directed people to take medicine and get vaccinated. The communist mission helped provide them emergency materials like food, water, and medicine supplied by the health department in addition to creating awareness among the people of the pandemic. In a period of great socio-political strife and callousness on the part of government to the penury, poverty and perils of the people, the dedicated work of the red volunteers came as a healing touch. Despite the big challenges and panic and fear, the volunteer squads formed by the party, thus, managed to save many

lives in pestilence torn regions in Malabar<sup>1</sup>. They were, in fact, infusing among the people in distress, the spirit of rejuvenation and confidence. The first generation of the party, thus, was left with a distress relief legacy which cemented the social base of the movement in Malabar.

It is a fact that, besides the Communist Party, Congress organisations like Grama Seva Sangh and other organisations like DMRT have got engaged in distress relief activities. But what distinguished communist works from these organisations was the former's strategy of getting into the masses. Communists, through these works, had created a good rapport with the people they have taken care of at *illams* and *taravads* of elites and *chettakudils* of the subalterns. They were also keen in maintaining and renewing this relation even after their relief works got over. Congress volunteers also have taken care of the patients whose families were supplied with medicines and other necessities. But, the 'elite' leaders and workers of Congress failed to conquer the minds of the people by talking sincerely to or maintaining acquaintance with them. This space left by the Congress volunteers were skilfully and effectively used by the Communists. After their visits, they cordially invited them to *vayanasalas* and party programmes. Before leaving their houses, the Communists used to have a glass of water and thus, gained the trust of the poor and the downtrodden.

Kerala People's Relief Fund was a milestone in the distress relief works of the party. It was designed by the state leadership with a view of raising fund to meet the requirements during the distress relief works. Communist volunteers approached people in their locality, who were financially sound, to raise funds. Party volunteers visited places even out of the state; Moyyarath Sankaran had been at Kolar gold fields, Bangalore etc. to

---

<sup>1</sup> The distress relief activities of the Communist party could be seen out of Malabar including Cochin and Travancore.

collect contributions to Kerala People's Relief Fund. Similar was the case of Red Aid Fund. Through these initiatives party could take essentials to the needy and indigent which infused sense a feeling among them that only Communists could deliver goods for the poor.

The party got involved in resolving many issues related with the everyday life of the people in different capacities. Party extended assistance to the wretched through works on co-operative lines. At a time when people were reeling from extreme poverty, it started collective farming as part of Grow More Food programme. Party workers approached landed magnates in their localities as part of the campaign and succeeded in making them grant land for cultivation. Lands which were not given for cultivation by adamant lords were forcibly taken over and launched cultivation. The cultivation launched in Kannenkayal was a significant achievement of the Communists. Besides, through community kitchen programme, party could take food to the starving during the war time. These programmes provided great relief to the people and reduced the severity of death during the inter-war period.

The growth of the cooperative movement in Malabar was another remarkable contribution of the party. When the Producers' and Consumers' Cooperative (PCCs) societies were formed to ensure food to all, the party was at the forefront to organise them at village levels and ensure equal distribution of food to all. *Aikya Nanaya Sanghams* or community-based societies run on cooperative lines became wide spread with the growth of Communist party. Party workers were actively engaged in organising Sanghams, which concentrated in affording low interest loan to people to carry out their works, especially pertained to agriculture, in their respective localities. In many places the PCCs were converted into *Aikya Nanaya Sanghams*. The assistances extended by sangham in the form of loans benefitted the indigent in many ways to redress their grievances and it

infused confidence and hope among them to stand on their own and to lead life during the times of distresses.

With the Communist movement gathering momentum in Malabar Gramscian concept of hegemony so far exercised by the landed magnates in Malabar began to be shattered and it paved way for the political hegemony of the peasantry. The authority of *janmis* was challenged and their power was bridled by the KS under red flag. The intervention of the party helped to root out many irrational customs and practices like *vechu kanal*, *sheela kashu*, *vaaram kodukkal*, etc. Besides, several parts of Malabar witnessed to the organised protest against their traditional masters in the form of *Nelleduppu Samaram*, *VilaKoithu Samaram*, *Pullariyyal Samaram* and *Tholvirak Samaram*. These were organised against stubborn landlords who denied tenants of their traditional rights and basic needs including food and shelter. Unfortunately, as the authority and police stood with the lords bloodshed was inevitable and many Communists lost their lives. Significant feature of these struggles, except *Nelleduppu Samarangal*, was the large scale participation of women as these struggles were related with the everyday life of the people.

The tug of war between the tenants and the landlords took a new turn with the Communist party offering protection to the former who were living under the shadow of eviction threat by the latter. While the police came to the rescue of the lords during the time of evictions, the party took a principled stand to support the eviction facing families. Eviction attempts, thus, were met with strong oppositions and resistances put up by the party workers. These resistances provided solace to many indigent families. When some of the eviction cases, including those of Parayi at Maniyoor in Kurumbranadu, were taken to the courts of law to be settled, party provided legal assistances to the evicted. Besides venturing into the war path, the party units took

initiative in calling conciliatory talks between the evictor and the evictee to amicably settle the issue. Notably, the houses of party workers were used temporarily to accommodate the evicted families and some of the leaders did not hesitate to donate their own lands to the families evicted.

With the hegemony of the *janmis* got shattered, the communists began to take lead of the oppressed and depressed. When people stopped the practice of consulting *janmis* on matters related with marriage, death etc. The space, thus left by the traditional masters, was filled by popular leaders of the party. The Communists acted as the mediators of all sorts of issues and managed to find out viable and amicable solutions to them, instead of dragging such issues to the courts of law. Property related disputes and issues pertained to divorces, clashes in families and boundary and money related disputes, etc. were taken to the party units for getting settled, in case such issues had not been settled by the persons or families concerned. At the time of marriages and demises in families, the interference of Communists was a great respite. During such times, it was party and KS units that visited the houses and extended whatever assistance was required to the families. They took part in almost all ceremonies and functions in families as one of their family members or close relatives. This type of interventions endeared Communists to the people and therefore, the latter never forgot to ensure the presence of the former in all their ceremonies and functions.

A remarkable aspect of the personality of communists was their style of mingling and behaviour which were instrumental in bringing many to the party fold. Their public life was known for their probity and total dedication to the movement. They approached workers and peasants with smiling faces and talked to them as one of their class members. The words and deeds of the Communists were moulded to cater to the requirements of the party. Unlike earlier style of congress politics, whose political stance was one of conscious

and wilful distancing from mass politics, the communist party formed volunteer squads to get into the masses. Taking advantage of the potential of each and every member, the party skilfully launched programmes. During the times of door-to-door campaigns, *pidiyari shekharanam* and fund collection drives for *Deshabhimani*, the upper caste members including *namboothiris* were roaming around the villages visiting the hutments of the lower castes and untouchables. Such visits, which were uncommon in the traditional caste-ridden society in Malabar, had profound impact on the untouchable communities in favour of the party.

The main forms of Communist propaganda were personal discussions, campaigns, distribution of pamphlets, rallies etc. Oral and person-to-person propaganda were carried out and systematically organized door-to-door campaigns by working groups were carried out with the purpose of getting into the masses. The Communists realized the importance of representational spaces (lived spaces) in communicating communism to the masses. Public spaces such as the village-squares and public grounds were appropriated and used to reach out to the common masses. The libraries and *vayanasalas* played significant role in bringing masses to the fold of communism. They shaped mini-publics in villages where matters of social and political importance were discussed and debated.

In many villages, tea shops, and local shops of the *beedi* rollers and other workers were as important centre as the local village library for radical discourse, particularly for the less erudite which signalled and influenced a transformation in social relations. Their importance becomes clear when it is realized that public opinion was largely moulded, not by radio and television or newspaper and social media as it is today, but by word of mouth and a belief in charismatic types of leadership of the party. In a society in which there is little outlet for diversion, political affairs and personal happenings are the topics of



conversation for many hours. They had an extremely influential role in shaping the public consciousness and strengthening communist thought among the common people.

The distress relief works and intervention of the party in everyday life of the people happened to become the subjects of discussions in the emerging public sphere. They started getting exaggerated and the prestige of both the local communist workers and the party were enhanced. The communist campaign touched a sympathetic chord in the minds and hearts of thousands of people outside the influence of the party. Thus, the contribution of the voter, his support of the party, and the loyalty which was won over are all magnified and the party emerged as the image of the masses in the mind of the individual voter. This enlarged and informed body of Marxian public opinion inevitably played a vital role in the first legislative assembly election in March 1957.

By 1957, party managed to develop a well- informed, alert and highly indoctrinated workers and sympathisers in Malabar. The exponential increase in the number of cadres and sympathisers and the number of mushrooming of party units across Malabar placed party in comfortable position. The only exception to this is the minority dominated areas especially Wayanad, Eranadu and Valluvanadu where religion played significant role in the social and political life of the people. It does not mean that Communist party failed to make inroads in these areas: the works rendered by Imbichi Bava and others prepared the ground for the growth of the party in *Mappilanaadu*. It is fairly clear, that the Communists have not much support in the minority dominant regions in the 1957 election. It is evident that the Catholics, as a community, almost wholly opposed to the Communist party<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> In the Kottayam District, where the largest concentrations of Catholics are to be found, the Communists got only 3 out of 18 seats, though they secured nearly 30 per cent of the total votes polled.

During the campaign for the 1957 elections, the All Kerala Catholic Christian Convention called on all Catholics to oppose the Communist candidates and to support the Congress. In the Muslim majority constituencies in Malappuram regions, the Communists did not secure any seats at all.<sup>3</sup>

The Communists approached people with Communist Manifesto in one hand and distress relief in another hand. Taking communism to the illiterate, ignorant and marginalised in highly caste-ridden society was an arduous task or was impossible to a large extent. But, the situations created by the war including those of famine and consequent epidemics together with the failure of government machinery to provide relief to the people were effectively and scrupulously made use of by the communists and reaped benefits. Having managed to encounter the challenges in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and overcome the distresses of the people with considerable efficiency, the party made some daring moves in social engineering that continued to ripple in the 1950s. All that paid rich dividends for it, while the opposition remained mute spectators to the developments.

Already in 1953 CPI fought alone in the elections to the Malabar District Board and won the elections and managed to hold the post of President of the board. It is significant that it helped party bring about socialist reforms and further broaden its base. In the 1957 Lok Sabha election CPI fielded candidates in 15 constituencies and bagged 9 seat and out of the total polled votes it bagged 37.5%. Following to this, the first Kerala Legislative Assembly election was held in March 1957 in which Communists managed to secure absolute majority with the support of their 5 independents. Thus, for the first time Communists came to power in any Indian state, and this feat was accomplished by means of a victory at the polls in a free and fair election.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Muslim League captured 8 out of 9 seats and Congress 1.

Since the formation of the party in 1939, the Left movement under the Communist party has exercised a considerable influence in Kerala society, be it politics or not. The party made inroads across Malabar by largely through the enthusiasm shown by a band of disciplined and dedicated workers, mainly the elementary school teachers, who approached people with communism in one hand and distress relief on the other. Through the timely intervention they were able to provide relief to the people who were in distress and thus, got into the masses. They managed to keep daily contact with the people, they have taken care of and took the messages of the party to every heart. The communists have been working in this manner for nearly two decades and set up a major socio-cultural base in Kerala, even before the first Left government was formed in 1957. The success of the party in the 1957 election was the recognition it deserved.

## GLOSSARY

<i>adhikari</i>	:	head of a village
<i>adhyayana samajam</i>	:	organisation for learning
<i>adiyar</i>	:	servants of a lord
<i>aikya nanaya sangham</i>	:	Community thrift society run on cooperative lines.
<i>amsam</i>	:	A land revenue division
<i>angadi mukku</i>	:	a corner of a town where people usually throng
<i>angadi</i>	:	small town
<i>bakshyolpadana mela</i>	:	food production fair
<i>bala sangham</i>	:	organisation of children
<i>beedi</i>	:	tobacco product for smoking
<i>chattavar</i>	:	a type of cane
<i>chekuthan</i>	:	devil
<i>cherikkal land</i>	:	land of king
<i>chettakudil</i>	:	hutments of the poor
<i>dalit</i>	:	untouchable caste
<i>desam</i>	:	Smallest revenue unit, may be a village.
<i>Deseeya padasala</i>	:	National School
<i>ezhuthachan</i>	:	father of letters
<i>farkka</i>	:	A sub-division of a <i>taluk</i>
<i>goondas</i>	:	hired servants of landlords
<i>grama seva sangh</i>	:	congress organisation
<i>gramadhikari</i>	:	head of the village
<i>guruthi</i>	:	offering to the goddess
<i>harijan</i>	:	untouchable caste
<i>hoondipetti</i>	:	money box

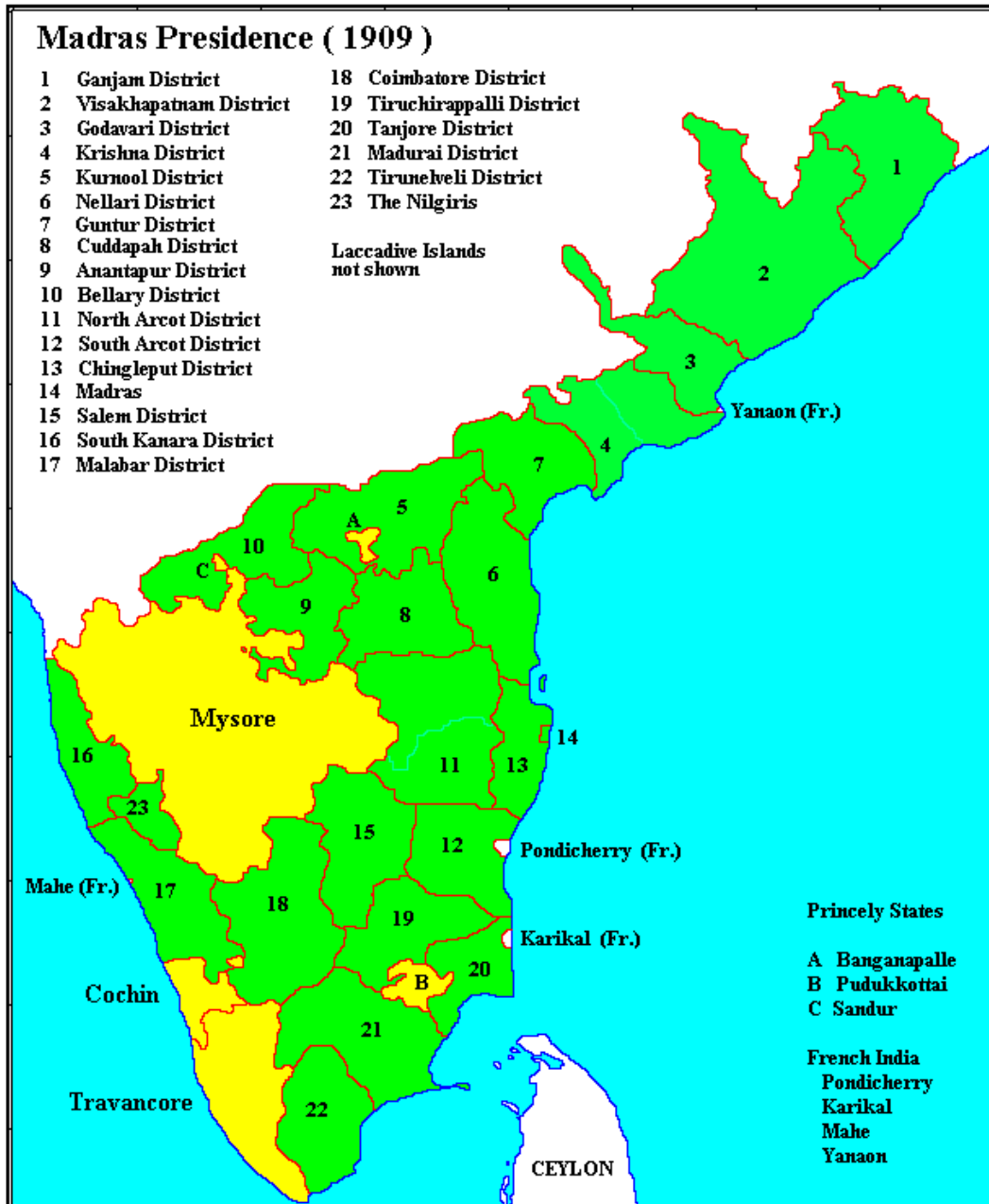
<i>idangazhi</i>	:	A device of measurement of paddy
<i>illam</i>	:	Brahmin's house in Kerala
<i>janmam</i>	:	Hereditary proprietorship in Land.
<i>janmi</i>	:	Landlord.
<i>jathi</i>	:	caste
<i>kacheettu</i>	:	contract
<i>kalamkettu samaram</i>	:	women's struggle using pots
<i>kalari</i>	:	A kind of gymnasium in Kerala
<i>kalasamiti</i>	:	art club
<i>kanakkar</i>	:	The holder of <i>kanam</i> tenure or a lease holder.
<i>kanalattam</i>	:	a ritual art form performed in temples in Malabar
<i>kanam</i>	:	A customary land tenure interpreted by the British
<i>karanavar</i>	:	The eldest male member of a Nair family
<i>karayma</i>	:	rent
<i>karshaka sangham</i>	:	Organisation of peasants.
<i>karysthan</i>	:	servant
<i>kashayam</i>	:	traditional medicine
<i>kisan</i>	:	peasant
<i>kisan sangh</i>	:	peasant organisation affiliated to CPI
<i>kolkaraan</i>	:	an official in charge of tax collection in a village
<i>komaram</i>	:	devotee blessed by Kodungaloor deity
<i>kovilakam</i>	:	Residence of royal family
<i>kudiyam</i>	:	tenant
<i>kuli samaram</i>	:	bathing struggle
<i>mahila sangham</i>	:	organisation of women
<i>mana</i>	:	residence of <i>namboothiri</i>

<i>mela</i>	:	fair
<i>melkkaraan</i>	:	a village official
<i>melsanthi</i>	:	chief priest
<i>mooppan</i>	:	devotee of Kodungaloor deity
<i>muli</i>	:	a type of grass
<i>muliyariyal</i>	:	cutting of <i>muli</i>
<i>naduvazhi</i>	:	chieftain of an area
<i>naithu thozhilali</i>	:	weaving worker
<i>namboodiri</i>	:	Kerala Brahmin.
<i>nelleduppu</i>	:	Paddy lifting.
<i>onam</i>	:	national festival of Malayalees
<i>pathala lokam</i>	:	underground world
<i>pathayappura</i>	:	granary of a landlord
<i>pattam</i>	:	Rent or share on land produce especially for garden
<i>pattelar</i>	:	village revenue officer
<i>pattini jatha</i>	:	<i>procession of the starving people</i>
<i>pidiyari shekharanam</i>	:	collection of a handful of rice
<i>poorna swaraj</i>	:	complete independence
<i>prasadham</i>	:	sandal paste given to devotees
<i>pullariyal samaram</i>	:	grass cutting struggle
<i>punam</i>	:	A form of dryland cultivation
<i>ragezhuthu</i>	:	a type of writing
<i>sadhu rogi samrakshana fund</i>	:	fund for poor patients
<i>samara sahayam</i>	:	strike assistance
<i>satyagraha</i>	:	a non-violent method of struggle
<i>sheelakashu</i>	:	A form of illegal exaction by the <i>janmi</i> .
<i>swaroopam</i>	:	administrative unit
<i>taluk</i>	:	a sub-district unit of revenue administration

<i>thampuram</i>	:	The venerating words used by tenants to address their lord
<i>thampuratti</i>	:	female members in <i>kovilakam</i> or royal palace
<i>thandan</i>	:	a sub caste among lower castes
<i>tharavad</i>	:	Residential unit of a landowning family.
<i>theyyakkaran</i>	:	performer of <i>theyyam</i>
<i>thiyya</i>	:	a lower caste
<i>tholviraku</i>	:	firewood
<i>thuruth</i>	:	island
<i>vaaram</i>	:	Rent on paddy land mainly in kind to janmi
<i>vaidyan</i>	:	traditional physician
<i>vayanasala</i>	:	reading room
<i>vayojana vidhyabhyasam</i>	:	literacy program for elders
<i>vazhunnavar</i>	:	chieftain of a region
<i>vechhukanal</i>	:	A feudal levy-offerings to janmi either in kind or cash
<i>velleri</i>	:	cucumber
<i>vila koithu</i>	:	harvesting
<i>vishu</i>	:	new year festival of Malayalees
<i>vishuchika</i>	:	cholera

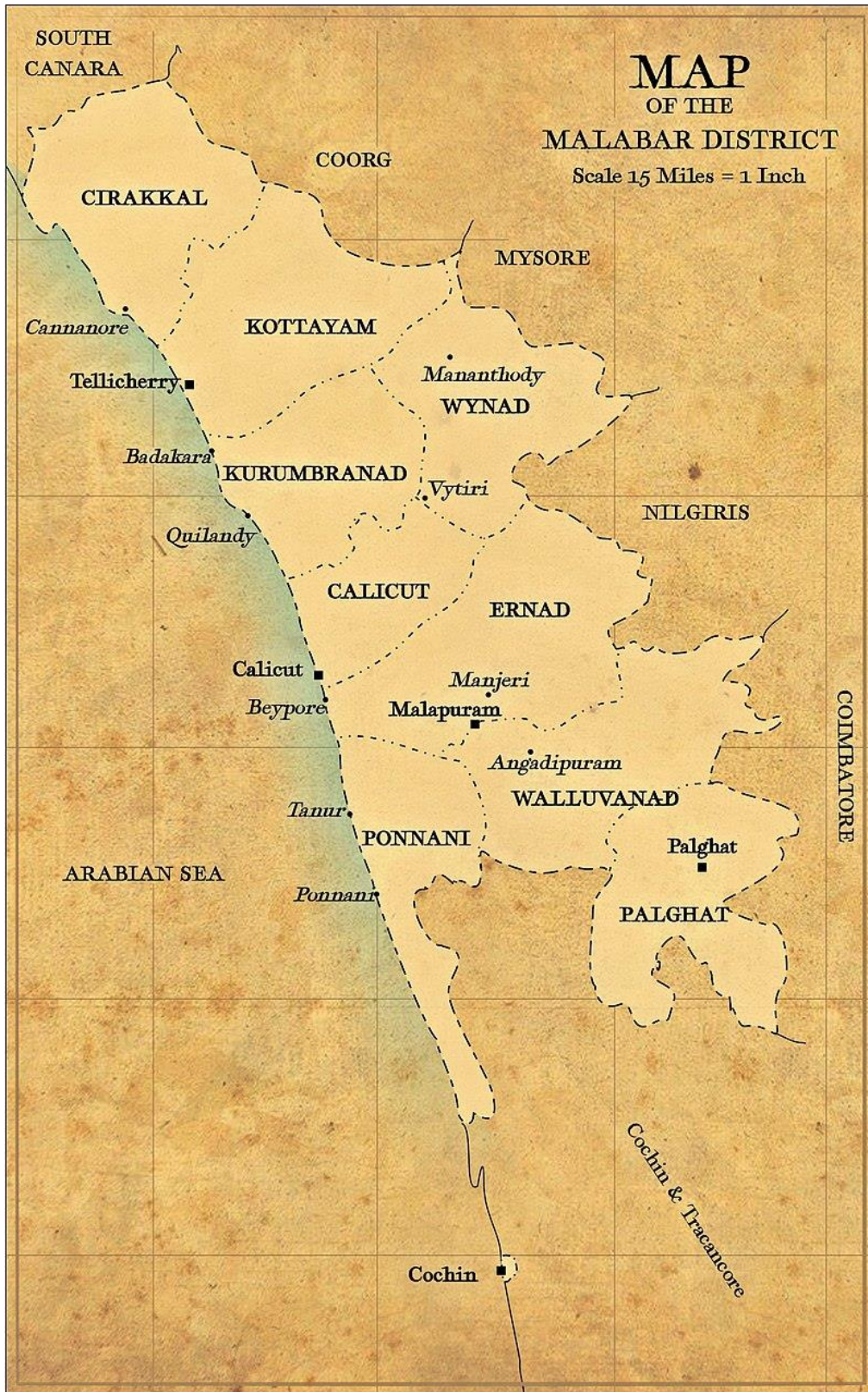
# Maps

## Madras Presidency



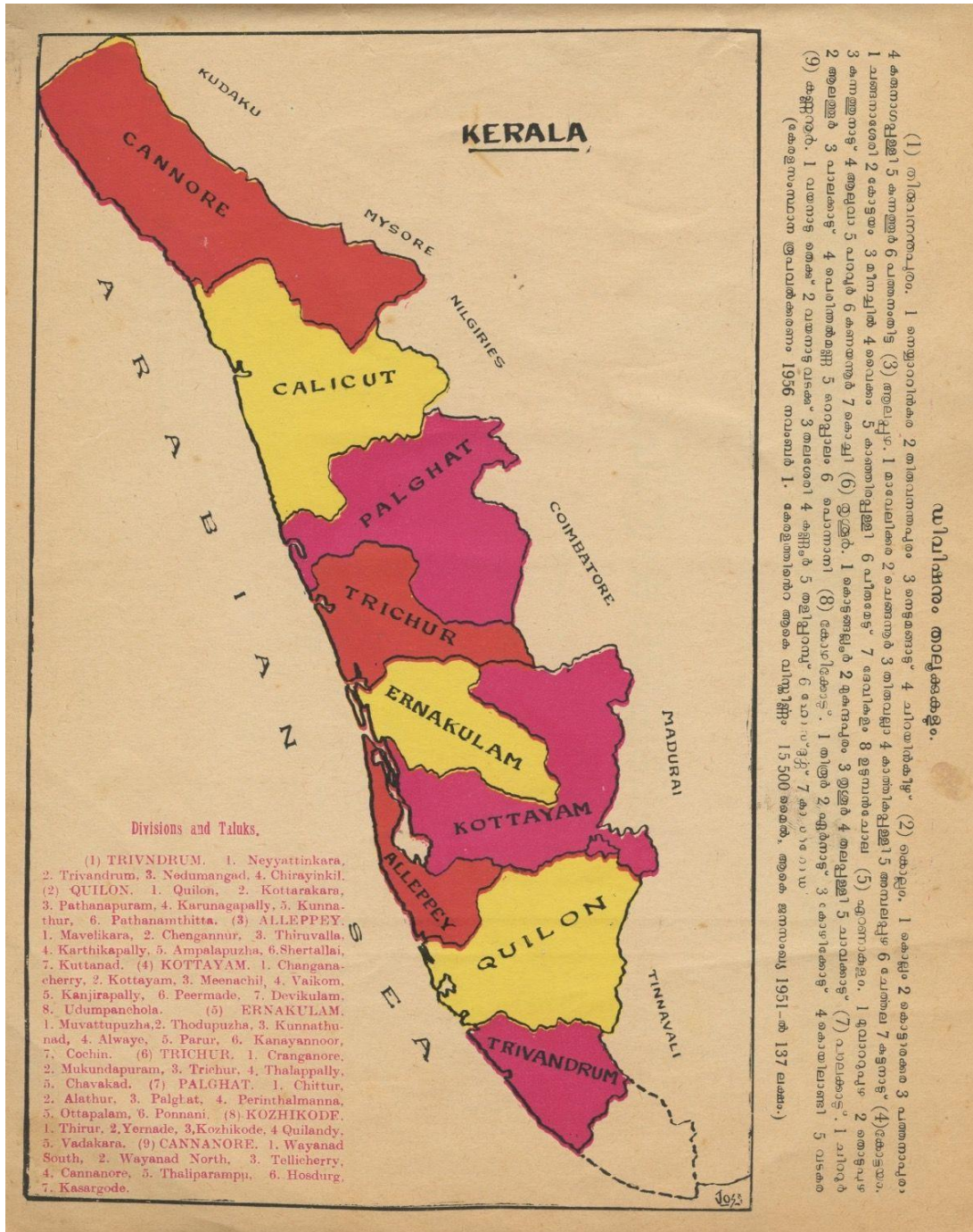


# Malabar District





# Kerala in 1956



**ഡിവിഷനും താലൂക്കുകളും.**

(1) ത്രിശൂലനഗരം. 1 നെയ്യാറ്റിൻകര 2 ത്രിശൂലനഗരം 3 നേടുമംഗലം 4 ചിറയിൻകീഴ് (2) കൂവിലൂർ. 1 കൊല്ലം 2 കൊട്ടാരക്കര 3 പത്തനംതിട്ട 4 കുന്നംപുഴ 5 കുന്നംപുഴ 6 ചേരമംഗലം 7 കണ്ണൂർ (4) കോട്ടയം. 1 പത്തനംതിട്ട 2 കോട്ടയം 3 മേനച്ചിൽ 4 വെളിക്കോട് 5 കോട്ടയം 6 കോട്ടയം 7 കോട്ടയം (5) എറണാകുളം. 1 മുട്ടാട്ടുപുഴ 2 മൂവാറ്റുപുഴ 3 കുന്നത്തുനാട് 4 തൃശ്ശൂർ 5 വാവൂർ 6 കുന്നത്തുനാട് 7 കൊച്ചി (6) തൃശൂർ. 1 കൊടുങ്ങല്ലൂർ 2 മൂവാറ്റുപുഴ 3 തൃശൂർ 4 തലശ്ശേരി 5 ചാവക്കാട് (7) അലപ്പുഴ. 1 ചിറ്റൂർ 2 തലശ്ശേരി 3 പാലക്കാട് 4 വെളിക്കോട്ട 5 തൃശ്ശൂർ 6 പൊന്നാനി (8) കോഴിക്കോട്. 1 തിരുവർ 2 യേറനാട് 3 കോഴിക്കോട് 4 കൊച്ചി 5 വെളിക്കോട് 6 വയനാട് വടക്ക് 7 വയനാട് വടക്ക് 8 തലശ്ശേരി 9 കണ്ണൂർ 10 തലശ്ശേരി 11 തലശ്ശേരി 12 തലശ്ശേരി 13 തലശ്ശേരി 14 തലശ്ശേരി 15 തലശ്ശേരി (9) കണ്ണൂർ. 1 വയനാട് വടക്ക് 2 വയനാട് വടക്ക് 3 തലശ്ശേരി 4 കണ്ണൂർ 5 തലശ്ശേരി 6 തലശ്ശേരി 7 കണ്ണൂർ 8 തലശ്ശേരി 9 തലശ്ശേരി 10 തലശ്ശേരി 11 തലശ്ശേരി 12 തലശ്ശേരി 13 തലശ്ശേരി 14 തലശ്ശേരി 15 തലശ്ശേരി (കേരളസംസ്ഥാന രൂപവത്കരണം 1956 നവംബർ 1. കേരളത്തിന്റെ ആകെ വിസ്തൃതി 15,500 ച.മൈ. ആകെ ജനസംഖ്യ 1951-ൽ 137 ലക്ഷം.)













# Appendix II

## Famine Situation in Madras













## Appendix IV

### CPI Formation

NEW AGE August 30, 1970 Page Four

# CPM Distorts History About Formation Of CP Of India

By S. V. GHATE

My attention has been drawn to a review by M. Basavapunniah in CPM paper *People's Democracy* of a book written by Muzaffar Ahmad—*Myself and the Communist Party of India*.

MUZAFFAR himself claims that it is not a history of the CPI but only his "remembrance" in which he has "collected plenty of data upon which future historians may draw." I do not think future historians will find any useful data here, since the whole book abounds in Muzaffar Ahmad's prejudices and fragments of his imagination.

It contains a lot of nonsense with no data, except uncorroborated police records from which he has drawn profusely to malign well-known individuals held in esteem by our people, as agents of British imperialism. There is only one person who is above all this—that is Muzaffar himself. Of course, he does not quote the same police records how he blabbed about Nalini Gupta as soon as he was arrested in 1923, without even being intimidated.

Here now I confine myself only to the review and the statement made by Basavapunniah about the foundation of the CPI. He has stated that Muzaffar Ahmad "strongly refutes the date of the Kanpur Bolshevik Conference—the year 1923—which is accepted by the "Dangeite" Party as the foundation date of the CPI on the basis of the erroneous information supplied by S. A. Dange and S. V. Ghate."

The question of the date of the foundation of the Party came up because of an enquiry from the Communist Party of Indonesia. At that time different dates were being mentioned as the foundation dates of the CPI.

For instance H. T. Ranadive had separated himself from the CPI, which he had joined, I think, in 1923, and in 1921

founded a splitaway party known as the Workers' Party of India—or was it the Bolshevik Party of India? Since he is a specialist in spitting, he only can tell us!

There was also an impression that had gone round that the CPI was formed in 1933. There is still another view that it was founded in 1936 at a conference held in Bombay that year. Until then there was very little information about the CPI that was founded in Tashkent in 1920.

#### UNANIMOUS DECISION

So in order to put an end to this confusion the Party Secretariat met on August 15, 1959, with Ajay Ghosh, E. T. Ranadive, P. C. Joshi, M. Basavapunniah, Z. A. Ahmad, S. A. Dange and A. K. Gopalan present. The minutes in the hand-writing of Basavapunniah say: "Date of the foundation of the CPI—1923." This seems to have been a unanimous decision. No other date was put forward by any of those present.

I do not want to insult the intelligence of these gentlemen who I think knew fully well what they were voting for when without a murmur they seem to have accepted the foundation date "erroneously supplied to them by Dange and Ghate" and at that time they were all in the 'Dangeite' Party.

On August 20, 1959 the following was said in a letter sent to the Editor, *Review of Indonesia*, Jakarta:

"The Communist Party of India was founded in the month of December in the year

1920. Even before that there were individual communists and communist groups working in different centres in the country. But it was in December 1925 at a meeting of representatives of these various groups of communists in the country held at Kanpur that the Communist Party of India was formed."

This letter, it may be revealed, was written and signed by H. T. Ranadive on behalf of the C.P.I. Secretariat.

Again in 1960 the Bengal state council wanted to celebrate the 40th anniversary in 1961 based on the publication of a book by Muzaffar Ahmad giving the foundation date of the CPI as October 1920. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, then acting General Secretary, wrote to the West Bengal state council on 10 June 1960 as follows:

"We understand that your state council has adopted a resolution to the effect that in 1961 we should celebrate the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the Party.

"The secretariat discussed the matter and has come to the conclusion that this is a question which cannot be decided by any other organ of the Party except the National Council. It will, therefore, be appropriate to take up the issue in the next meeting of the National Council."

Later, on June 5, 1963, M. N. Govindan Nair issued a statement on behalf of the secretariat, which said:

"We wish to inform all concerned that the Communist Party of India was founded in December 1925 at a conference of communists held in Kanpur. Even prior to this there were some seven communist groups who functioned in several parts of the country and received guidance from the Communist International. But the Party known as the Communist Party of India came to be formed at the above-mentioned conference held in Kanpur in December 1925, which was attended by more than 500 delegates. Prominent among those who attended were: Muzaffar Ahmad from Calcutta; S. V. Ghate, R. S. Nimbkar and J. B. Bagerhatta from Bombay; Abdul Majeed from Lahore and C. K. Iyengar and Singaravelu Chettiar from Madras.

"When the conference met in December 1925, both Comrades S. A. Dange and Shrikut Umami were in jail.

"The Party Executive met on December 25 and elected Comrade S. V. Ghate as one of the General Secretaries." Now about the formation of the Communist Party of India at Tashkent in 1920, Basavapunniah writes that the Party was formed at the initiative of M. N. Roy. But there is no evidence to prove this. On the contrary all the evidence shows that Roy was opposed to its formation. He wrote in his Memoirs:

"There was no sense in a few emigrant individuals

calling themselves the Communist Party... knowing fully well that it would be a nominal thing, although it could function as the nucleus of a real Communist Party to be organised eventually." He also says: "I had not spoken to them (Muhajirs) at all of communism."

However, the CPI that was formed in Tashkent on October 17, 1920 had seven members—M. N. Roy, Evelyn Roy, Abani Mukherjee, Rosa Pittingot, Mohd Ali, Mohd Shaq and M.P.H.T. Acharya. Later Abdul Sehral, Masud Ali Shah and Akbar Shah also joined it. The secretary was Mohd Shaq. This information is given by Dr Devendra Kausik in his article "About the Founding of the CPI at Tashkent" in *Ness Age* (Monthly) of October 1964.

Some of the Muhajirs who having been dissatisfied with the deposition of the Sultan of Turkey—who was the Caliph of all Muslims, and wanted the re-establishment of the Caliphate—left the country. Some of them after great hardships trekked to the Soviet Union. They wanted to fight under the banner of Kemal Pasha—and a few of them joined the CPI in Tashkent later.

No wonder Roy was not keen to found the CPI with such elements. But Muzaffar Ahmad seemed to hold different views, being himself of pan-Islamic sympathies. Dr Kausik writes in his above-mentioned article:

"To demonstrate the fitness of the Muhajirs to be the founding fathers, Muzaffar Ahmad talks loudly of 'Islamic democracy' and an innate feeling of 'international fraternity' in the Muslim mind."

#### DID NOT REPRESENT INDIA

It has also to be noted that though they applied for affiliation to the Comintern, the Tashkent Party did not represent India in any Congress.

Muzaffar Ahmad's contention that the party that was formed at Tashkent was the real Communist Party of India has no parallel in world history. It is true that time and again active socialists and working class leaders were forced to emigrate. This happened especially in tsarist Russia. But they did not work in isolation. They maintained closest links with the living movement inside Russia, advised the practical leaders and produced and smuggled into the country party journals etc. Moreover they did not form any parties outside the "foreign bureaus" of the various trends.

In the case of those who formed the Tashkent Party the situation was quite different. Almost all of them had no record of socialist or working class activity when in India. They had no connection with any group or trend in the country and represented no one. They did nothing to further the movement at home.

For some reason or other

Muzaffar Ahmad wants to twist facts to serve his curious logic. M. N. Roy says in his Memoirs: "I did not claim to represent anybody but myself." This was logical since he says further: "I did not approve of the formation of the emigrant Communist Party, and I did not believe that it had any right to speak on behalf of the workers of India, not to mention the Indian people as a whole."

But Muzaffar says: "All this claim of his is just self-glorification... Roy had to found the Communist Party in Tashkent, otherwise, what could have been his locus standi there? Whom did he represent?"

By the same logic it may be asked whom did the non-Russian delegates at the First and Second congresses represent? It is well-known that there were no communist parties in existence then anywhere in the world—therefore they represented small scattered groups and sometimes only themselves! It is not a secret that in those early days there was a lot of laxness in these matters.

It is also strange that Muzaffar who was at that time an agent of M. N. Roy and was keeping him informed of all that was happening in the country, was not told by Roy about the formation of the Party in Tashkent in 1920!

It is also significant that the Vanguard published in 1923 as the organ of the CPI has mentioned Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, where the Party did not formally exist.

It is not my purpose to denigrate the foundation of the Tashkent Party. It is a very important event in the history of our party, just as the various communist and socialist groups formed in England, France or Germany in later years with contacts with the local parties there.

It is also true that the best elements of the Tashkent Party came to India and some of them even joined us in the formation of our Party at Kanpur and later worked in it.

All the same it has to be admitted that if there is any real genuine Indian party, it is the party that was built at Kanpur in 1923.

While the Tashkent Party was formed by people who had not done any work among the masses in India nor had any links with them, the Kanpur Party was a real child of the Indian working class. Those who had been thrown up by the gigantic working class struggles and strikes of the postwar years in the twenties and those who had intellectually come over to socialism due to the demoralisation following the great betrayal at Chauri Chaura—these were the people who founded the Communist Party of India, the only party of the working class and toiling millions of our country.

It is curious, but understandable, that having split the parent body in our country, Muzaffar Ahmad and his friends in the CPM should look for their "founding fathers" in faraway Tashkent! It may also be because they do not want to have any connection with the Party formed in India, want to erase this history from their memory. But to their Dangephobia. But such things have not ever succeeded in history.

#### LATEST SOVIET BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

	Pages	Rs.
The Poor Lad and the Cruel Princess	24	0.80
The Straw Bull Calf	24	0.70
The Fisherman and the Goldfish, A. Pushkin	16	0.45
Animal Babies, A. Laptiev	16	0.70
Jolly Bares, Gergel Mikhailov	118	3.50
Cars Going Everywhere, V. Dundin	24	1.00
The Horned Lamb, Sh. Beyshenaliev	24	0.80
Pottery Designs	16	0.50
Kirilo Kozhunyaka	16	0.60
Locomotives	24	0.70

Postage extra: Order with

PEOPLE'S PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT. LTD., 5, Band Jhansi Road, (Show Room: 2, Marina Arcade) New Delhi; PPI BOOK STALL, 100-B, Khetwadi Main Road, Bombay 4; Relief Road, Ahmedabad; MANIHA GRANTHALAYA, 4/3-B, Bankin Chatterjee Street, Calcutta; NATIONAL BOOK AGENCY 12, Bankin Chatterjee Street, Calcutta; NCBH (P) LTD., 6/30, Mount Road, Madras; Madurai; Coimbatore; Tiruchirappalli; Tanjore; PRAHATH BOOK HOUSE, Trivandrum; Ernakulam; Alleppey; Calicut; Cannanore; VISALAANDHIRA PUBLISHING HOUSE, Elluru Road Centre, Vijayawada; VISALAANDHIRA BOOK HOUSE, Sultan Bazar, Hyderabad; PEOPLE'S BOOK HOUSE, Opp. B. N. College, Patna; Hazratganj Road, Ranchi; NAVAKARNATAKA PUBLICATIONS, Bangalore 9; CHETANA BOOK CENTRE, Hazratganj, Lucknow; NABAJUGA GRANTHALAYA, Bajrakhat Road, Cuttack 1; KITAB GHAR, Chaura Rasta, Jaipur.

AIMARK



# Appendix V

## Failure of Health Machinery



## Appendix VI

### First Communist Ministry 1957



## Selected Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### **A. Official Documents and Letters**

Cholera Inspection Report of W.V Perumal, A.D.P.H.(B) Dated-28-06-1943,  
Regional Archives, Kozhikode (Herein after RAK)

Confidential Report on Dysentery Investigation-D.O.No.1327-Epi-53-1,  
Office of the Director of Public Health, Madras Dated 02-09-1953,  
RAK.

G.O.Home (MS) No.4654, Dated 24th October 1941, Tamil Nadu State  
Archives, Chennai.

K.P. Gopalan, MLA, Q.No.354, Legislative Assembly Secretariat, Madras  
Legislative Assembly, Dated 17-02-1953, RAK.

Letter from A.K. Gopalan,M.P., to Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Union Minister  
of Health Dated 03-08-1953, RAK.

Letter from Director of Public Health, Madras to Secretary to Govt, Health  
Dept. Madras, Dated 07-03-1953, RAK.

Letter from Director of Public Health, Madras to Secretary to Govt,  
Education and Public Health Dept. Madras, Dated 25-6-1943, RAK.

Letter From R.Prasad, I.C.S, Collector of Madras to the Secretary, Board of  
Revenue, Madras, Dated 27-08-1955, RAK.

Political Theses of CPI adopted at the Second Party Congress, February to  
March, 1948, Calcutta, JNU, New Delhi.

Report of the Municipal Health Officer, Cannanore to the Commissioner,  
Cannanore Municipality, Dated 07-12-1943, RAK.

Review Report of Director Of Public Health On Cholera Epidemic In Calicut  
Municipality, 22-07-1943, RAK.

## **B. Published Reports**

1951 Census Hand Book: Malabar District, Govt. Press, Madras, 1953.

1961 Census Handbook 2, Kerala State, District Census, Kozhikode, 1965

Buchanan, Francis, *A Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore,  
Canara and Malabar*, Vo1.2, Delhi, 1988

CPIM Central Committee Document “On Approach to Mass Organisations”  
(Adopted By The Central Committee At Its October 29-31, 2004  
Meeting).

District Census Handbook, 2001, Kasaragod, Part XII-A & B, Series-33.

Innes, C. A., *Malabar Gazetteers*, Trivandrum, 1997

Logan William, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. I, II, Madras, 1887.

Major Walker, *Report on the Land Tenures of Malabar*, Madras, 1802

Statistical Report on General Election, 1957 to the Legislative Assembly of  
Kerala, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

Statistical Report on General Election, 1960 to the Legislative Assembly of  
Kerala, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

Statistical Report on General Election, 1965 to the Legislative Assembly of  
Kerala Election Commission of India, New Delhi

Ward and Conner, *A Descriptive Memoir of Malabar*, Collectorate Press,  
Madras, 1826.

### C. News Papers

<i>Deshabhimani,</i>	dated 23-05-1943
” ”	06-06-1943
” ”	23-02-1945
” ”	24-02-1945
” ”	04-03-1945
” ”	08-04-1945
” ”	21-04-1945
” ”	27-04-1945
” ”	31-04-1945
” ”	19-05-1945
” ”	10-06-1945
” ”	29-03-1947
” ”	01-05-1947
” ”	13-05-1947
” ”	16-05-1947
” ”	31-05-1947
” ”	28-06-1947
” ”	08-08-1952
” ”	14-08-1952
” ”	10-01-1953
” ”	14-01-1953
” ”	17-01-1953
” ”	20-01-1953
” ”	24-01-1953
” ”	28-01-1953
” ”	07-04-1953
” ”	09-04-1953
” ”	02-06-1953

” ”	04-06-1953
” ”	14-06-1953
” ”	16-06-1953
” ”	17-06-1953
” ”	21-06-1953
” ”	25-06-1953
” ”	30-06-1953
” ”	08-10-1953
” ”	01-02-1955
” ”	02-02-1955
” ”	06-02-1955
” ”	14-02-1955
” ”	22-02-1955
” ”	23-02-1955
” ”	26-02-1955
” ”	17-12-1955
” ”	21-02-1957
” ”	06-04-1957
” ”	07-04-1957
<i>Mathrubhumi</i>	dated, 10-10-1943
” ”	21-03-1957
” ”	10-10-1943
” ”	01-05-1947
<i>New Age,</i>	dated, 30-08-1970
<i>Prabhatham,</i>	dated, 17-04-1939
<i>The Hindu,</i>	dated, 28-06-1943
” ”	20-07-1943
” ”	02-08-1943
” ”	27-07-1943



*The Indian Express*, dated, 26-07-1943

” ” 27-07-1943

” ” 01-08-1943

*The New York Times*, dated. 04-02-1960

#### **D. Autobiographies and Memoirs**

Cherukadu., *Jeevithapatha*, Current Books, Trissur, 2006.

Devayani, K., *Chorayum Kanneerum Nananja Vazhikal*, Samatha- A Collective for Gender Justice, Thrissur, 2010.

Gopalan, A.K., *Ente Jeevitha Kadha*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2013.

Hamsa, T.K., *Njan Engane Communistayi*, , Chinta, Thiruvananthapuram, 2011

Krishna Iyer, V. R., *Wandering in Many Worlds: An Autobiography* Pearson, 2009.

Kunhappa, C.H., *Smaranakal Mathram*, Mathrubhumi, Kozhikode, 1981.

Kunjananthan Nair., Berlin., *Olicamarakal Parayathathu*, Mathrubhumi, Kozhikode, 2012

Madhavan, K., *Oru Gandhiyan Communistinte Ormakal*, Prabhath Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 2010

Mundassery, Joseph., *Kozhinja Elakal*, Current Books; Thrissur, 2017

Nair V.A. Kesavan., *Irumbazhikkullil*, Mathrubhumi, Calicut, 1954

Nair, P.Narayanan., *Aranootandiloode*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, 1973

Nambiar, K.G., *Ormakurippukal*, Image Publishers, Kozhikode, 2013.

Namboodirippad, E.M.S., *Aatmakatha*, Trivandrum: Chintha. 1995

Nayanar, E.K., *My Struggles, An Autobiography*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1982.

Panikkotty, M.K., *Amruthasmaranakal*, Poorna Publication, Calicut, 2005.

Sankaran Moyarath., *Athmakatha*, Sahithya Pravarthaka Cooperative Society, Kottayam, 2021

Thikkodian., *Arangu Kanatha Nadan*, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 2016

Memoirs of M.Kumaran Master (Unpublished)

### **E. Interviews**

Aboobakker Kallingal., Vatakara, 06-11-21

Amma Ummeri., Mukkam, 19-04-2021.

Atthikka Krishnan., Thillankeri, 21-09-2021

C. Balan., Thillankeri, 21-09-2021

C.Bhaskaran., Mattannur 21-09-2021

Gopala Krishnan B.K., Kasargod, 01-06-2021.

Gopalan, A.K., Balusseri, 20-2-2021

Gopalan.K., Maniyoor, 25-12-2021

Govindan.K., Chorode , 21-04-2019

K. Bhaskaran., Vaniamkulam, 01-12-2021

K. C. Unnikrishnan., Koonathara, 01-12-2021

K.B.Balakrishnan., Peruvaampa, 29-11-21

K.Kunhiraman., Memunda, 08-03-2021

Kanhirathingal Moidheen., Vazhakkadu, 27-12-2020

Kodoor Balan., Kariyad, 29-11-2021  
Krishnan., Thillankeri, 21-09-2021  
Kurup Raghava., Thiruvallloor, 26-3-2021  
Kutty Mariya., Ponnani, 27-04-2019  
Kutty, T.V.Abdurahman., Ponnani, 28-05-2022  
M.K.Krishnan., Memunda, 08-04-2021  
Marar K.K., Thalasseri, 30-11-2021  
Master Vamanan., Vatakara, 10-12-2021  
Naduvathur Chonandiyil Deviamma., Koyilandi, 28-12-2022  
Nair Kareeth Narayanan., Mattannur , 15-03-2021  
Nair Kolattil Raghavan., Kozhikode 25-11-2021  
Nambiar K.Gopalan., Thillankeri, 28-09-2021  
Nambiar T.V. Balakrishnan., Vatakara, 08-02-2020  
Nani, Muttungal., Vatakara, 07-04-2021  
Narayani M., Panikkotti, 12.05.2018  
O.P. Mani., Chemmarathoor, 02-01-2019  
P.P.Shaju., Onchiyam, 22-04-2018  
Panikkar Bhaskaran., Vatakara ,05-05-2021  
Panikkotti M.K., Panikotti, 12-05-2018  
Rasheedali Alangathil., Chaliyar, Malappuram 19-05-2021  
Shailaja Teacher.K.K., Mattannur, 21-09-2021  
T.K. Kumaran., Onchiyam, 09-02-2021  
V.K.Balan Master., Panikkotti, 23-12-2021  
V.P.Balan., Onchiyam, 09-02-2021  
Varier Unnikrishna., Valliyooravu, 27-12-2022

## **F. Novels**

Damodaran, K., *Pattabakki*, Current Books, Thrissur, 1938

Kakkanadan., *Vasoori*, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1968

Nair M.T.Vasudevan., *Asuravithu*, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1962

Pillai Thakazhi Sivasankara, *Thottiyude Makan*, D.C. Books, 1947

Pottekkat S.K., *Oru Desathinte Katha*, D.C. Books, 1971

## **Secondary sources**

### **A. English Books**

Adhikari, R. (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Party of India*. Vol.I, II; ABC, New Delhi, 1982.

B. Brilliant, Lawrence. *The Management of Smallpox Eradication in India*, The University of Michigan Press, United States of America, 1985 .

Balakrishnan, E. *A History of Communist Movement in Kerala*, Kurukshehra Prakashan, Eranakulam 1998

Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *From Plassey to Partition and After*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2009

Chandra, Bipan. *History of Modern India*, Orient Blackswan, Delhi 2009.

Desai, A.R. *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Sage, India, 1948.

Dhanagare, D.N. *Peasant Movements in India 1920-1950*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994.

Dutt, R. Palme. *India Today*, Peoples Publishing House, Bombay, 1949

- Fic, Victor M. *Peaceful Transition to Communism in India: Strategy of the Communist Party*, Nachiketa Publications, Bombay, 1969.
- Fic, Victor M., *Kerala: Yenan of India*, Nachiketa Publications, Bombay, 1970.
- Georges, Kristoffel Lieten. *The First Communist Ministry in Kerala 1957-59*, K.P. Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, 1982.
- Ghosh Ajoy, *Towards a Mass Communist Party*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1958.
- Gopalan, A.K. *In the Cause of the People*, Sangam Books, Madras 1976.
- Joeph, Sebastian. *On Present(in/)g Histories*, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 2017.
- Joseph, S.C. *Kerala: The Communist State*, The Madras Premier CO, Madras, 1959
- Joshi P.C. and Damodaran K. (ed.), *Marx Comes to India*, Manohar Publishers, Delhi, 1975
- Karat, Brinda. *100 Year of Formation Booklet*, C.P.I.M Publication 2019
- Kunhikrishnan, V.V. *Tenancy Legislation in Malabar (1880-1970)*, Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 1993
- Kurup, K.K.N. *Agrarian Struggles in Kerala*, CBH Publications, Nagercoil, 1989
- Kurup, K.K.N. *Kayyur Riot; A Terrorist Episode in the Nationalist Movement in Kerala*, Sandhya Publications, Calicut 1978
- Kusuman, K.K., *The Extremist Movement in Kerala*, Chaithram Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 1977

- Marx Karl and Engels Frederick, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, February 1848, (Translated: Samuel Moore in Cooperation with Frederick Engels, 1888)
- Menon, A Sreedhara. *A Survey of Kerala history*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2007.
- Menon, A Sreedhara. *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, Sterling
- Menon, Dilip M. *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India. Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994
- Mirsky, M. *How Plague, Small Pox and Cholera were Stamped Out in the USSR*, Soviet Nadu Granthasala, Madrass, 1975.
- Nair, R Ramakrishnan. *How Communists came into Power in Kerala?* Kerala Academy of Political Science, Thiruvananthapuram, 1965.
- Namboothirippad, E.M.S. *Kerala, Society and Politics: An Historical Survey*, National Book Centre, 1984.
- Namboothirippad, E.M.S. *Kerala, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1968.
- Namboothirippad, E.M.S. *Reminiscences of an Indian Communist*, National Book Centre, New Delhi, 1987.
- Namboothirippad, E.M.S. *The Communist Party in Kerala*, National Book Centre, New Delhi, 1994.
- Namboothirippad, E.M.S. *The Front Line Years*, LeftWord Books, New Delhi, 2009
- Nossiter, T.J. *Communism in Kerala: A study of Political Adaptation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1982.

- Panikkar, K.N. *Against Lord and State: Religion and peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921*, OUP, 1992.
- Panikkar, K.N. *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1995.
- Panikkar, P.G.K. and C.R. Soman. *Health Status of Kerala*, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1984
- Pillai, T.K.V. *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol.3., Government of Travancore, Trivandrum, 1940
- Radhakrishnan, P. *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1989.
- Raghavan, M. *State Failure and Human Miseries, A Study with Special Focus on Famines in British Malabar*, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2016
- Ravindran, T.K. *Institutions and Movements in Kerala History*, Chaithram Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 1978.
- Rodionov, Pyotr. *What Is Democratic Centralism?*, (Translated From the Russian by Nikolai Lenov), Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1988,
- Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India 1885-1947*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1989.
- Tharoor, Shashi. *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2016.
- Thiruvananthapuram, 1989
- V, Jyothirmani. *The Servants of India Society in Kerala*, Malabar Institute for Research and Development, Vatakara, 2015.
- Woodcock, George. *Kerala a Portrait of the Malabar Coast*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1967

## **B. Malayalam Books**

- Aandalaattu, *Mahacharithamala, Biographies of A.K.Gopalan, P.Krishna Pillai, K.Damodaran*, Kairali Childrens Book Trust, Kottayam, 1984.
- Andalat. *Sakhakale Munnottu*, Vol.1, Chintha , Thiruvananthapuram, 1978.
- Andalat. *Charithrathil Vilayam Prapicha Vikarangal*, Sahithya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2015.
- Andalat. *Keralahile Thozhilali Vargathinte Piravi*, Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1984.
- Andalat. *Vegam Pora*, Vol.1, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram,1978.
- Balakrishnan, K. *Padikkunnu*, Insight Publica, Kozhikode, 2022.
- Balakrishnan, P.K. *Jati Vyavasthayum Kerala Charithravum*, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1997.
- Balaram, N.E. *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam*, Vol.1, Prabhath Book House,Thiruvananthapuram, 1990.
- Bharateeyan, Vishnu. *Adimakalengine Udamakalayi*, Kanav Books, Kannur, 1980.
- Bhaskaran, C. *Communist Prasthanam Indiyil*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2007.
- Bhaskaran, C. *Indian Communist Prasthanam Adyapathikar*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2002.
- Ganesh, K.N. et. al. (ed.) *Keralathile Communist Partyude Charithram 1940-1952*, II Part & III Part,Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 2020.
- Ganesh, K.N. *Keralathinte Innalekal*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, 2018



- Gopalakrishnan, P.K. *Keralathinte Samskarika Charithram*, State Institute of Languages, Thiruvananthapuram. 1974
- Gopalan, A.K. *Manninu Vendi*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 1975
- Jayarajan, P. *Kannur Jilla Communist Party Charithram*, Vol.II, Pattiam Gopalan Smaraka Patana Gaveshana Kendram, Kannur, 2013.
- K. Balakrishnan, *Chadayan Poraliyum Theraliyum*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000.
- Kappan, Fr.Sebastian. *Marxian Darsanathinu Oramukham*, Sahithya Pravarthaka Co-Operative Society, Kottayam, 2012.
- Karat, Prakash. *Malabarile Karshika Bandhangal: Oru Patanam*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2005.
- Kaviyoor Rajagopalan, *Moyyarath Sankaran*. Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2012.p.107
- Krishnan, T.V. *Kerala's First Communist, Life of Sakhavu Krishna Pillai*, Communist Party Publication, 1971.
- Kunhikrishnan, V.V. *Keraleeyanum Karshaka Prasthanavum*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 1996
- Kunhiramn, K.V. *Evarkkum Priyapetta Keluettan*. Purogamana Prasadana Samiti, Calicut, 1991.
- Kunjiraman, Payyannoor. *A.V.Kunjambu*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015.
- Kunjiraman, Payyannoor. *Party Piranna Vazhikal*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2021.
- Kurup, K.K.N. *K.A.Keraleeyan*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015
- Kurup, K.K.N. *Keralathile Karshika Kalapangal*, Mathrubhumi, Kozhikode, 2008.

- Kurup, K.K.N. *William Logan-Malabarile Karshika Bandhangalil oru Patanam*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 2011.
- Kurup, M.N. *Kunhambuvinte Katha*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 1982
- Lal Praveen(ed.), *Azheekoden Raghavan:Oru Ormappusthakam*, Neelambari, Calicut, 2012
- Lineesh, M. (ed.), *Kadathanadan Samskarikatha: Charithravum Varthamanavum*, Mokeri Government College, Calicut, 2017.
- Manmadan, M.P. *Kelappan*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 1984.
- Mohan, Ram. *Indian Communism*, Pusthaka Prasadhaka Sangham, Panthalam, 1987.
- Nair, G.D. *C.Kannan*, Chintha , Thiruvananthapuram, 2016
- Nair, G.D. *C.H.Kanaran Jeevithavum Samaravum*, Progress Publication, Calicut, 2015.
- Nair, Panmana Ramachandran. (ed.), *Nataka Padanangal*, P.K Parameswaran Nair Memorial Trust, Trivandrum
- Nambiar, P.K. (ed.), *Keralathile Adhyapaka Prasthanam*, Thiruvananthapuram,1982.
- Namboothirippad, E.M.S. *Communist Party Keralathil*, Vol. I, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 1986
- Namboothirippad, E.M.S. *Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi*, Chintha, Thiruvanthapuram, 1981.
- Nayanar, E.K. *Purogamana Sahithya Prasthanathinte Valarcha*, Vidhyarthimithram, Kottayam, 1978
- Nayanar, E.K. *Olivukala Smrithikal*, Chintha Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1995

- P.K. Baiju(ed.), *Nayanar: Oru Ormapusthakam*, Neelambari, Kozhikode.
- Panayal, P.V.K. (ed.), *Cherukad Oru Ormappusthakam*, Neelambari, Kohikosw, 2012.
- Panikkar, K.N. *Pradesam, Rashtram, Lokam: Kadathanadinte Sahithya Parambaryam*, Kadathanad Janasamskara Padanakendram, Vatakara, 2007
- Parameswaran, M.P. *Vairudhyathmaka Bhouthikavadam*, Mythri Books, Thiruvananthapuram, 2017.
- Parekkunnel, A. *Lenin Mahathwavum Lalithyavum*, Prabath Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 1984.
- Pillai, A.K. *Congressum Keralavum*, Prabath Edition, Thiruvanthapuram, 1986.
- Pillai, P Govinda. (ed.), *E M Sinte Sampoorana Krithikal*, Vol.1, Vol.III, Vol. IX, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999
- Pillai, P Krishna, *Swatandrya Samaravum Vargasmaravum, Theranjedutha Lekhanangal*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram, 2006.
- Pillai, P Krishna. *Adimathathinethire*, Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram.
- Pottekkat, S.K. et. al., *Mohamed Abdurahiman*, MA Sahib Memorial Committee, Calicut, 1978.
- Radhakrishnan, R. *Keralathile Sthreesakthicharithram*, Maluben Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 2016.
- Raghavan, Puthuppally. *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram*, Kerala Sahithya Academy, Trichur, 1986
- Rajan, E. *Cominternum Indian Communist Partiyum*, (Malayalam translation of Sobhanlal Datta Gupta's Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919-1943), Prabhatham, Thiruvananthapuram, 2010

Ramakrishnan, T.P. (ed.), *Kozhikode Jilla Communist Party Charitram*, II Part, Kelu Ettan Padana Gaveshana Kendram, Kozhikode, 2011.

Rasheed, M. K. *Damodaran*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 1982.

Shaju, P.P. *Padanilangalil Poruthi Veenavar*, Chintha, Thiruvanthapuram, 2012

Sujith, P.K. (ed.), *Samara Mukhangalil Priyasakhakkal*, Lipi Publications, Kozhikode, 2012.

Surjith, Harkishan Sing. et al. *Indiayile Communist Prasthanam Oru Charithram*, Vol.1 , (Malayalam translation by C.M. Abdul Rahman) Chintha, Thiruvananthapuram , 2005.

Vaidyar, M Kunhikannan. *Thiruvallurinte Vamozhi Charithram*, Gandhi Darshan Samithi & Library Samithi, Thiruvallur, 2016.

### **C.Novels**

Kumaran U.K. *Thakshankunnu Swaroopam*, Sahithya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam 2012.

Madhavan N.S. *Lanthenbetheriyile Luthiniyakal*, D.C. Books, Kottayam , 2022

Vijayan O.V. *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1969.

### **D. Souvenirs**

A.K.G *Noottandinte Orma, Irupathi Ancham Charama Varshika Smaranika*, Kannur, 2002.

*Alfa Smaranika*, Payyannur, 2012

*C.H.Nte Lokam, C.H.KanaranJanmashadabdhiSmaranika*, Keluettan Padana Gaveshana Kendram, Kozhikode, 2011.

*Cheruthazham- Charithravaum Samskaravum, Cheruthazham Grama Panchayath , 2010*

*Communist Party, Pinarayi-Parapram Sammelanam, Varshikaghosham Souvenir, 2005.*

*Halla Bol Souvenir, Koyilandy, 2018*

*Kanalppaadukal Oru Desathinte Innalekal, CPIM Thiruvambady Area Committee Souvenir, 2011.*

*Kandakkai, Platinum Jubilee Smaranika, Sakhavu Krishna Pillai Smaraka Vayanasala,Thaliparamba 2007.*

*Karivellorinte Innalekal, Pradheshika Charithram, Peralam Grama Panchayath, Karivelloor, 2010.*

*Karivellur Struggle 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir, Kannur, 2006.*

*Kayyur Rakthasakshi Smaranika, Chintha Publishing Company, Kochi, 1999.*

*Keluettan Smaranika, Keluettan Padana Gaveshana Kendram, Kozhikode, 2017.*

*Kodakkat(1939- 2004), Souvenir, 2004.*

*Pazhsssi-Thillankeri-Payam Samarangal, Smaranika, Kuthuparamba, 2011.*

*Spark, All India Beedi Workers Federation(CITU) 8<sup>th</sup> National Conference Souvenir, Kannur, 2022.*

*Sakhavu U.kunhiraman Smaranika, Perambra.*

*Vayanattile Karshaka Prasthanam: Charithravum Varthamanavum Souvenir, Sulthan Batheri, 2011.*

*Velam Pothujana Vayanasala Suvarnna JubileeSouvenir, Velam, 1984.*

*Sakhavu C.P.Balan Vaidhyar Smaranika*, Kannur, 2013

*Onchiyam Smaranika*, Kozhikode, 1998

*N.C.Shekhar Smaranika*, N.C.Shekhar Foundation Cooperative Press,  
Kannur, 2012.

*Malabar Mahotsava Souvenir*, Kozhikode, 1994.

*Vatakara Range Chetth Thozhilali Union, Platinum Jubilee Smaranika*,  
Vatakara, 1995

### **E. Articles and Working Papers**

A, Mohamed. *Leftist Movements and the Mappila Muslims*, Indian History  
Congress, Vol. 71, 2010-2011.

Ahmed, Bashiruddin. *Communist and Congress Prospects in Kerala*, Asian  
Survey, Vol. 6, No. 7, 1966.

Arnold, David. *Cholera and Colonialism in British India, Past & Present*,  
No. 113, Oxford University Press, November 1986.

Colwell, Rita R. *Global Climate and Infectious Disease: The Cholera  
Paradigm*, American Association for the Advancement of Science  
New Series, Vol. 274, No. 5295, December. 20, 1996

Desai, Manali. *Party Formation, Political Power, and the Capacity for  
Reform: Comparing Left Parties in Kerala and West Bengal, India:*  
Social Forces, Vol. 80, No. 1, September 2001

Engels, Friedrich. *Condition of the Working Class in England*, Panther  
Edition, 1969

Guharoy, Roy. et. al., *Small Pox; Clinical Features, Prevention and  
Management*, Annals of Pharmacotherapy, Vol. 38, March 2004.

- Habermas, Jurgen. et.al. *The Public Sphere: An Encyclopaedia*, New German Critique, No. 3, 1974
- Hartmann, Horst. *Changing Political Behaviour in Kerala*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 3, No. 1/2, January, 1968
- Isaac, T. M. Thomas. *The National Movement and the Communist Party in Kerala*, Source: Social Scientist, Vol. 14, No. 8/9, 1986.
- Jeffrey, Robin. *Matriliny, Marxism, and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940*, The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 38, No. 1, November 1978
- Jeffrey, Robin. *Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers, and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800–2009*, The Journal of Asian Studies Vol. 68, No. 2 (May) 2009
- Jeffrey, Robin. *Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers, and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800-2009*, The Journal of Asian Studies Vol.
- K, Aneesh. *Literature and Social Mobilisation: Reading Kerala Renaissance*, Indian History Congress, Vol. 75, 2014
- Karat Prakash, *The Peasant Movement in Malabar, 1934-40*, Social Scientist, Vol. 5, No. 2, September 1976.
- Krishnaji, N. *Kerala Milestones: On the Parliamentary Road to Socialism*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 42, No. 23, 2007
- Kunhikrishnan, V. V. *Waste Land Cultivation and Peasant Agitation In Malabar (1940-1950)*, Indian History Congress, Vol. 44, 1983.
- Kurup, K. K. N. *Peasantry and the Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Kerala*, Social Scientist, Vol. 16, No. 9, 1988.

- Lahariya, Chandrakant. *A Brief History of Vaccines & Vaccination in India*, Indian Journal of Medical Research. Vol. 139(4): April 2014.
- Masani, M.R. *The Communist Party in India*, Pacific Affairs, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Mar., 1951), University of British Columbia.
- Mohamed, T.A. *Leftist Movements and the Mappila Muslims*, Indian History Congress, Vol. 71 (2010-2011).
- Nizami, Taufiq Ahmad. *Marxism and the Communist Party of India*, The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 29, No. 2, April-June 1968 .
- P, Priya. *The Question of Nationalism and Internationalism: A Page from the History of Communist Movement in Kerala*, Indian History Congress, Vol. 76, 2015
- Rajgopalan, K. R. *Elections in Kerala -A Factual Study*, The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1960.
- Ramkumar, R. *Aspects of the Peasant Movement in Malabar, An Interview With E. K. Nayanar*, Review Of Agrarian Studies, (The Journal Of The Foundation For Agrarian Studies) Vol.4, No.2, July-December, 2014.
- Schoenfeld, Benjamin N. *Kerala in Crisis*, Pacific Affairs, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1959
- Sivadasan, P. *The Dawn of Marxism and Politicization of the Masses in Kerala- 1912-1920*, Kerala Studies, Vol. 33, 2006
- Sreevidya,V. *Peasant Struggles in North Malabar: Women's Perspective*, Indian History Congress, Vol.62, 2001



## **F. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis**

D.P. Godwin Samraj, “*Socio-Economic Reconstruction of Kerala under the First Communist Government*, Department of History, University of Calicut, 2011.

K, Vijayan. *Peasant Movements in North Malabar 1948-52:A Case Study of Nelleduppu Samarangal*, Kannur University, 2018.

Mundon Asokan, *Renaissance and Social Change in Malabar-A Study with Special Reference to Ananda Samajam, Siddha Samajam and Atma Vidya Sangham*, Department of History, University of Calicut, 2003.

R, Vineeth. *International Communism and Communist Movement in Kerala - 1919 to 1964*, Department of History, University of Calicut.

Salim, P.M. *The First Popular Government in Kerala and Liberation Struggle-1957-59 : A Historical Study*, Department of History, University of Calicut, 2013.

Zacaria, T. V. *Interface Between Environmental and Trade Union Movements in Kerala*, University of Mysore, 2012

## **G. Gazetteers**

Cherian, P.J. *Perspectives on Kerala History*, Kerala State Gazetteer, Vol.II, Part II, Kerala Gazetteers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999.

Nair, Adoor K.K. Ramachandran. *Kerala District Gazetteers, Malappuram*, Kerala Gazetteers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1986.

Kareem, C.K. *Kerala District Gazetteers, Palghat*, Kerala Gazetteers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1976.

Kareem, C.K *Kerala District Gazetteers, Cannanore, Kerala Gazetteers*,  
Trivandrum, 1972.

## **H. Newspapers and Weeklies**

*Deshabhimani Weekly*, dated 19-08-1973

*Kalakaumudhi Weekly*, dated 03-04-2022

Deccan Chronicle, dated 10-01-2018

*Deshabhimani*, dated 01-01-2018

*Deshabhimani*, dated 02-05-2019

*Deshabhimani*, dated 10-01-2015

*Deshabhimani*, dated 18-12-2014

*Desabhimani*, dated 11-04- 2020

*Frontline Magazine*, dated 18-06-2004

*Hindustan Times*, dated 02-11-2009

*Madhyamam*, dated 01-08-2022

*The Economic Times*, dated 30-04-2023

*The Hindu*, dated 27-06-2019

## **I. Web Sites**

<https://ccnmtl.columbia.edu>,

<http://www.cds.ac.in> › krpcds › report › anandi

<https://www.assembly.tn.gov.in> › Review\_1-52-57

<https://www.manoramaonline.com/district-news/palakkad/2022/05/18/palakkad-ksktu-strikes.html>

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>

<https://archives.mathrubhumi.com>

<https://archives.mathrubhumi.com/kannur/kazhcha/1.1026674>

<http://ras.org.in> ›