



LEFT IDEOLOGICAL INTERVENTION IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SCENARIO OF MODERN KERALA

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Abstract:- With the coming of the Socialists and the Communists, a separate social formation took place in Kerala after the formation of Kerala State. Like the Indian National Congress Party, the Communist Party also played a vital role in the new social formation and they enriched Kerala society with their own culture.

After the suspension of Civil Disobedience Movement, the peasants and workers of Malabar organised themselves as groups. It was mainly due to the economic depression, the sudden fall in prices and the enhanced levy of land revenue. A meeting held at Calicut on 5th November 1933, they were decided to organise the 'Kerala Karshaka Sangha' in every village to safe guard the interest of peasants and bring their hardships to the notice of the government. E.M.Sankaran Namboodiripad, who was in prison due to the Civil Disobedience Movement, had influenced the revolutionary ideas from the Bengal revolutionaries and the Lahore conspiracy case prisoners. After his release in August 1933, he took active leadership among the peasants of Malabar and became a prominent member of Valluvanadu Taluk Tax Payers Association. When the latter body became defunct on the Governments grant of a partial remission, he organised the Kerala Peasants Association under his own presidency in March 1934¹.

On 12th May 1934 the Congress men of Kerala met at Calicut to survey the political situation in India. They desired to give shape to a new political programme for the Congress. They adopted a resolution initiated by Chandroth Kunhirmann Nair, to the effect that the Congress should accept the economic policy suggested by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Also they adopted socialist principles as an important item in its constructive programme. Then those Congress men who were interested in socialism met together in the Town Hall, Calicut under the presidency of K.Kelappan. It was then resolved to form the Kerala Congress Socialist Party, the membership of which was restricted to Congress men. The party work within the Congress and persuade it to adopt socialist principles and to organise

peasants and workers on those line. A committee was formed for this purpose with C.K Govindan Nair as president, P.Krishna Pillai as secretary and E.M Sankaran Nambudiripad, P.krishna Panikkar, K.P Gopalan, H.Manjunatha Rao and P.Kumaran as members. E,M Sankaran Nambudiripad attended All India Socialist Conference as a delegate from Kerala which held in May 1934².

The All India Congress working Committee which held in Bombay on 18th June 1934 welcomed the rise of a new political party with in the Congress. They talked about the confiscation of private property without compensation and of the imperative need for class struggle. The socialists looked upon economic freedom as their goal and political struggle as their method. Their programme was to utilize the Congress for the benefit of Lahore organisation. They wanted to capture power within the Congress and abstain in majority for those with socialist's outlook, in the elections to the various Congress bodies. Gandhiji stated that, 'though the members of that party were of course selfless and noble, there were fundamental difference between their outlook and his; if they were ever to capture power in the Congress he, for one, could not remain in it any longer, for it was impossible for him to continue in that great organisation and at the same time carry on the agitation against the socialistic programme³.

C.K Govindan Nair resigned the presidentship as well as membership of the socialist party on 12th September 1934. The election to the various Congress bodies was held in August 1934 and the socialists tried to capture the strategic seats of power. The socialist party also came to have a newly elected committee with E.M Sankaran Namboodiripad as president and Krishna Pillai as secretary, in October 1934⁴.

The socialist conference was held at Banaras on 1st October 1934 condemned the parliamentary activities of the Congress as inadequate to achieve independence. Then the first Kerala Congress Socialist Party Conference was held at Calicut under the presidentship of H.D Raja on 13th October 1934. The Congress leadership was vehemently criticised and the opinion expressed that, only a constitution based on socialistic principles would serve the interest of the masses. This new political party was deadly against capitalism, colonialism and imperialism⁵.

The series of labour strikes in Feroke, Calicut, Pinarayi and Pappinisseri in Malabar in the early month of 1935 were utilised by the socialist leaders in Kerala to tighten their grip over the workers and organise them through the observance of Labour Protest Day, huge labour rallies, study classes etc. Labour in mills and factories came to have separate unions and labour unrest became a normal feature of industrial life in several places. They organised the peasants also and held an 'Agriculturists Conference' in April at Shoranur⁶.

The Congress Socialists in Kerala organised study classes to give political education to the masses. E.M.Sankaran Nambudiripad toured the different parts of Malabar and successfully organised Taluk Congress Socialist Parties at five centres. In December 1936, action was taken by the Government against A.K.Gopalan in connection with the allegedly 'seditious' speeches delivered by him. But the then Congress President Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was not hostile to socialist ideas and they hoped that under his leadership they would

be able to free not only the country from foreign yoke but also the peasants and workers from capitalist exploitation and economic misery⁷.

The leftist elements represented by the Congress Socialist group in the Congress organisation emerged as the Communist Party of Malabar in 1939. When the Second World War broke out in 1939 the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee under Communist leadership took an unequivocal stand in favour of a mass struggle to overthrow the British rule. After 1941 the Leftists left the Congress and joined the rank of the Communist Party⁸.

The 'Quit India Movement' of 1942 did not produce any serious repercussions in Travancore as most of the Congress leaders were in jail. At the end of the First World War, a violent political upheaval took place in the state under the Communist leadership. In January 1946 Sir C.P Ramaswamy Ayyar, the then Diwan of Travancore, announced his proposal for constitutional reforms which provided for an irremovable executive on the 'American model'. The State Congress rejected the scheme as unacceptable. The slogan '*American model Arabi kadali*' (American model in the Arabian Sea) rent the air everywhere in the state. The Communists organised a violent struggle in their strong holds to put an end to the autocratic rule of the Diwan and achieve responsible government. In October 1946 Punnapra and Vayalar witnessed a violent mass upheaval in which the workers openly challenged the authority of the government and came into violent class with the police and the military. In October 26th the Travancore government declared martial law and the Diwan himself assumed supreme command of the police and military. The Travancore State Forces moved against the Communist Camps at Vayalar⁹. The workers of Vayalar put up a stiff resistance with bamboo spikes, stone and axes; but the police and the military opened fire with machine guns in a deterrent move to crush the insurrection. In the massacre that took place at Vayalar on October 27, 1946 more than 150 persons lost their lives on the spot and many more succumbed to injuries later. In the firing that took place in two other places on the same day 130 people were killed. It is estimated that about a thousand people lost their lives in the Punnapra-Vayalar upheaval. The Communist Party got more popularity among the people and took active leadership in the formation of Kerala State¹⁰.

The modern state of Kerala was formally come into being on 1st November 1956 with governor as the head of the state. The first general elections to the Kerala State Legislature were held in February and March 1957. The Communist Party of India and a few independents supported by it secured 65 of the 126 seats in the Legislature. The President's rule came to an end on 5th April 1957 and a Communist Ministry under the Chief Ministership of E.M.Sankaran Namboothiripad came to power. Some of the legislative measures of the Government evoked opposition in certain quarters and led to an agitation for its overthrow in 1959¹¹. The agitation took such a serious turn that the police had to open fire in four places which killed 15 persons. Towards the end of July the administration of the state had virtually broken down. The Governor of Kerala reported to the President of India that the constitutional administration of the state had collapsed and on 31st July 1959 the President issued a Proclamation taking over the administration of the state under section 356 of the Constitution of India¹².

In February 1960 fresh elections were held to the Kerala State Legislature. There was an electoral alliance between the Congress, Praja Socialist Party and Muslim League against the Communist Party. The triple alliance annexed 95 seats as against 29 seats won by the Communist Party and Independence supported by it. In the wake of the victory of the alliance, with the help of the Congress, the Praja Socialist Party leader Pattom A Thanu Pillai was sworn in on February 22, 1960¹³. But in 1962 September, Pattom A Thanu Pillai was appointed as the Governor of Punjab State and R.Sankar the leader of the Congress Party became the Chief Minister. The Praja Socialist Party eventually left the alliance owing to the differences of opinion with the partner. Muslim League also left the alliance. The Congress ministry under R. Sankar resigned office on 10th September 1964. Some of the rebel Congress leaders formed a new party called the Kerala Congress.

With the fall of the Sankar Ministry Kerala State was again placed under President's Rule. The major political development of the period was the split in the Communist Ministry- the Marxist Communist Party as distinct from the Communist Party of India. Meanwhile, the Praja Socialist Party had merged with the Socialist Party of India and a new party called the Samyukta Socialist Party had also come into existence. In the mid-term election of 1965 all the political parties contested independently of each other without any electoral alliance. Hence none of the parties got a clear majority of seats in the new Legislature. On the report of the Governor, it would not be possible to form any stable ministry in the state. The President of India issued another proclamation on 24th March 1965, dissolving the newly elected Legislative Assembly of the state. The State of Kerala continued to be under President's Rule.

In the general election of 1967 a United Front of seven political parties led by the Communist Party (Marxist) was voted to power with a majority of 117 out of 133 seats in the Kerala Legislative Assembly. The Indian National Congress and the Kerala Congress reduced to the position of small groups in the Legislature. A United Front Ministry headed by E.M. Sankaran Namboodiripad, the leader of the Communist Party (Marxist) assumed office in Kerala on 6th March 1967 and the long period of President's Rule came to an end. The Namboodiripad Ministry, however, fell in October 1969 and a new Non-Marxist Coalition Ministry under the leadership of C.Achutha Menon the Communist Party of India (C.P.I) was sworn in on November 1st, 1969. Thus the Communist Party (Marxist) emerged as the main opposition party in the State Legislative Assembly. On 1st August 1970, the Achutha Menon Ministry resigned following its decision to seek a fresh mandate from the people through a new general election. The State Assembly was dissolved and President's Rule was proclaimed. In the general election held in September 1970, a united front under the joined leadership of the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party of India (C.P.I) won a clear majority. A new Ministry under the leadership of the C.P.I leader C.Achutha Menon assumed office with the support of the Congress Party (4th October 1970). The Congress formally entered the ministry on 5th September 1971. His Ministry continued till the next general election which held in March 1977. In the normal case, the general election should have taken place in Kerala in the latter half of 1976. But due to the Emergency Act proclaimed by the President of India, the general elections due to take place in Kerala in 1976 were postponed. In the general election a new Ministry headed by K.Karunakaran, the leader of the Congress Party assumed office on March 23rd 1977¹⁴.

This political system, that is the Communist Party or the Indian National Congress Party ruled the state till now and render meritorious services for the socio-political enrichment of Modern Kerala.

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